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Memories

Introduzione

Questo numero si apre con i ricordi di due figure centrali dell'americanistica italiana di recente scomparse, Biancamaria Tedeschini Lalli e Maurizio Vaudagna, da parte di alcune delle persone che meglio le hanno conosciute. La Redazione si unisce al loro affettuoso saluto.

MARINA CAMBONI

Biancamaria Tedeschini Lalli: A Beginner

Let me begin with a very personal memory. It was 1972 and I was expecting my first child. I was happy but I wondered if this would not compromise my future in the university, still strongly male-dominated. When, after giving her the news, I manifested my fears, Biancamaria laughed heartily, and told me: “Look at me: I have six children!”

Biancamaria Tedeschini Lalli would become for me more than a “professor” or a guide to research. She would be a path-opening woman. Initiator of American studies in Italy, one of the founders of the American Studies Center and of the Italian Association of North American Studies, founder and first President of the Third University of Rome: Biancamaria showed that with intelligence, generosity, energy, determination, constant work and investment in the future, many difficulties could be overcome. When, in the last part of her life, she agreed to become the President of the Levi Montalcini Foundation, once again demonstrated how much she cared for the education of women.¹

I have been associated with Biancamaria Tedeschini Lalli for 52 years, about the same years I have spent with my husband. Over time, Biancamaria has been a teacher, a research director, a colleague, and, last but not least, a dear friend. I shall concentrate on three nodal and germinative moments and aspects of our relationship to highlight the core of what she gave me in life and left me in inheritance. The first focuses on Professor Biancamaria Tedeschini Lalli, the teacher who in 1968 aroused my interest in American studies; the second on the scholar and introducer to Walt Whitman’s poetry and his search for an “American” language; the third on her participation in the *Networking Women* research project.

Biancamaria Tedeschini Lalli: The Professor

It was the academic year 1968-69. In those fiery days, almost no professor had access to the classrooms of the Faculty of Magistero, in Piazza della Repubblica in Rome. No one, except Professor Biancamaria Tedeschini Lalli. Perhaps, because she was young. Or maybe because, having rebellious children of her own, she knew how to “handle” us students and capture our attention. Or it may have depended on the fresh air we felt entered the classroom when we read works that seemed relevant to our persons, or to our present. So it was that we, mostly young women variously repressed by a patriarchal culture, found liberating the explosive words of Emily Dickinson, or those of Emerson, who urged us to have confidence in ourselves, or Whitman’s personal invitation to celebrate and free ourselves.

But the days came when the struggle hardened, and the doors of the Faculty were definitely barred. Class meetings at that point were moved from the closed classroom to the open air of a bar in front of the Magistero. Then, everything changed. Then, the real educational and mental revolution began. Leaving the professorial chair, Biancamaria became an initiator of readings and a stimulus to critical thinking. She invited everyone to name our favorite American authors and why we liked them, even to suggest our own reading list for the whole class. I chose Allen Ginsberg, who then “howled” in the way I would have liked to, had I been able to gather the inner authorization and courage to rebel against institutions and a culture in which the Latin professor could still write on the blackboard of a classroom full of women students “Here only Troy smokes”.

The small group of students gathered around Biancamaria Tedeschini Lalli that year included, besides me, two other girls who would become Americanists, and whom I would like to remember: Caterina Ricciardi and Fedora Giordano.

1978, 1992, 2023: Germinating Whitman

Language, style, and artistic experimentation were always at the center of Biancamaria’s interest. In 1978 she started a research project on the idea

and practice of an “American language” in Walt Whitman, in which she involved me. That summer, we met in Washington, DC, where we worked on Whitman’s “Language Notebooks” in the Library of Congress Archives. It was a time of extraordinary discoveries and encounters.

The publication of several essays and books and my first lectures at the University of Palermo would be the outcome of those studies. But it was the International Conference held in 1992 at the University of Macerata for the Centennial of the publication of the deathbed edition of *Leaves of Grass* that constituted the connecting event for the future of Italian and transatlantic Whitman studies. The major Italian and international scholars, including the European dean of Whitman studies Roger Asselineau, participated in the Conference. Their contributions are collected in the volume that takes its title from the opening essay by Biancamaria Tedeschini Lalli, *Utopia in The Present Tense: Walt Whitman and the Language of the New World* (1994). Among the US participants was Ed Folsom of the University of Iowa, the Whitman scholar who would later create, along with Kenneth Price of the University of Nebraska, one of the most prestigious literary digital archives, *The Walt Whitman Archive*.² The subsequent collaboration with Folsom and Price led to the idea of including translations of *Leaves of Grass* in several languages in the archive. My student Caterina Bernardini, after a period of training, and while carrying out a joint doctorate with the University of Nebraska, was entrusted with the task of preparing for the archive the first Italian edition, of 1907. The work is still in progress.

In 1997, on the initiative of the French scholar Éric Athenot, and with the participation of Mario Corona and myself, of Ed Folsom, Kenneth Price, Betsy Erkkila, Walter Grünzweig and others, The Transatlantic Walt Whitman Association (TWWA) was founded. A year later the first Walt Whitman weekly Seminar and Symposium were organized in Dortmund. Since then, and with the exception of the two-year interruption due to the Covid pandemic, yearly student Seminars and Symposiums for younger scholars have been held in various universities on both sides of the Atlantic. This year, 2023, the University of Rome “La Sapienza” has hosted them.

2000-2004: Networking Women

In 2000 we were awarded a national grant for the research project *Networking Women: Subjects, Places, Links Europe-America. Towards a Rewriting of Cultural History, 1890-1939* (2000-2004). This time, I was responsible for the whole project, which involved six Italian and three foreign universities, while Biancamaria coordinated the large Roman group and its website.

To re-examine the turn-of-the-century and modernist cultural history we focused on the complexity of cultural dynamics, and took into consideration personal, emotional, and intellectual affiliations, as well as power relations. We unearthed archival papers, went through letters and manuscripts, leafed through dusty magazines, sometimes feeling that very few scholars or readers had brought to life their pages in the intervening years. We carried our discoveries to our meetings and seminars, as if we had found gold in our treasure hunting, and shared the sheer pleasure of discovery which acted as an energizer in our research work. It was an innovative experience for all of us, but for Biancamaria, then President of the University of Rome Foro Italico, it was like the opening of a path where all her personal and intellectual research interests could converge. We created a website, making our best with what was technically available, and what the pre-Web Internet allowed us to do at the time.

Besides two international conferences and individual books, research results were collected in the two volumes: *Networking Women: Subjects, Places, Links Europe-America. Towards a Re-writing of Cultural History, 1890-1939* (2004); and *Words at War: Parole di guerra e culture di pace nel "primo secolo delle guerre mondiali"* (2005).³

Biancamaria contributed two very accomplished essays, respectively, "A Knot of Salons" and "Americane-europee in due guerre mondiali." The first centers on turn-of-the-century salons in Paris and the group of women who animated some of them, with a particular attention devoted to Gertrude Stein, Natalie Clifford Barney, Marie Laurencin, and Romaine Brooks. Growing out of the first, the second essay focuses on Romaine Brooks's and Natalie Barney's response to the two European wars. Afterwards, she would keep on working on the two women, in particular on Natalie Barney's

unpublished autobiography, and the theoretical problems related to the study of Barney's autobiography and Brooks's self-portraits.

When, in her last years, illness kept her at home, I would visit with her at regular intervals. Those visits were for me a sort of continuation of our personal and research relationship. She would pull out from under a pile of papers her xerox copy of Barney's manuscript autobiography, select a few art books with reproductions of Brooks's paintings, and comment on them. She would ask my opinion about this or that, always thinking that sooner or later she would be able to produce a final essay relating writing to painting, autobiography to self-portrait.

She loved art and music. She spent hours sitting in her drawing room, looking at the many modern art paintings that hung on its walls. They kept her company, she told me. She basked in their colored forms and was happy, happy to spend her remaining days in that world of infinite beauty.



Biancamaria Tedeschini Lalli (center) and colleagues
at the AISNA Conference in Sardinia, 1976
(photo by Marina Camboni).

Notes

- ¹ See her speech at the Conference *Prima le mamme e i bambini* (Milan, Nov. 16, 2013): <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4hiEmc0gfe&t=44s>>.
- ² See Marina Camboni (ed.), *Utopia in The Present Tense: Walt Whitman and the Language of the New World*, Roma, Il Calamo, 1994; and the *Walt Whitman Archive*, <<https://whitmanarchive.org/>>.
- ³ Marina Camboni (ed.), *Networking Women: Subjects, Places, Links Europe-America. Towards a Re-writing of Cultural History, 1890-1939*, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2004; and Marina Camboni, Gigliola Sacerdoti Mariani and Biancamaria Tedeschini Lalli (a cura di), *Words at War: Parole di guerra e culture di pace nel "primo secolo delle guerre mondiali"*, Firenze, Le Monnier, 2005.

DANIELE FIORENTINO

Biancamaria Tedeschini Lalli

Biancamaria Tedeschini Lalli, Presidente AISNA negli anni Ottanta del secolo scorso, è stata un personaggio pubblico, una studiosa di vaglia e una guida per tante e tanti, non solo nel mondo dell'accademia. Da docente, rettrice, intellettuale e autrice ha lasciato un segno importante nella cultura italiana. Prima donna rettrice in Italia, nel 2000 venne insignita dal Presidente Ciampi del titolo di Grande Ufficiale dell'Ordine al Merito della Repubblica Italiana.

Ma per me Biancamaria è stata molto più di una maestra. Il nostro rapporto umano con una certa continuità è durato più di quarant'anni. La conobbi infatti come rappresentante d'istituto dei genitori quando frequentavo il liceo e la rincontrai ormai laureando a La Sapienza nei primi anni Ottanta, quando lei da poco aveva cominciato a organizzare, con il supporto di un gruppo di colleghe e colleghi, il nuovo Dipartimento di Studi americani. Biancamaria credeva fortemente nella interdisciplinarietà della cultura e degli studi e si interessò ai miei primi passi da storico degli Stati Uniti consigliandomi il percorso da seguire per conseguire una formazione quanto più articolata possibile. Le sue pubblicazioni sul puritanesimo e su Henry David Thoreau e Walt Whitman sono state di grande insegnamento, così come le sue lezioni di dottorato sulla cultura americana. Il progetto di ricerca sulle risorse bibliografiche relative agli studi americani disponibili in Italia che realizzai poi sotto la sua guida e con la collaborazione della dottoressa Maria Destrobel consentì di mettere a disposizione di studiosi e studiose materiali in microfiche allora non facilmente reperibili che oggi meriterebbero di essere digitalizzati.

Fu lei a suggerirmi di fare domanda per una borsa di studio Fulbright, del cui Direttivo era stata membro per oltre dieci anni, e a sostenermi nella decisione di specializzarmi in storia e cultura americana negli Stati Uniti. Fu ancora lei pochi anni dopo a creare e a dirigere il Dottorato in Studi

Americani presso La Sapienza che conseguì in parallelo al Ph.D. negli USA a inizio anni Novanta. Biancamaria aveva un'apertura mentale e una poliedricità rare che applicava anche nel suo metodo scientifico e didattico. Per me è stata un punto di riferimento continuo, quasi materno, e in più di un'occasione ho dovuto misurarmi anche con i suoi ammonimenti. Appena laureato e in attesa di partire per gli Stati Uniti, mi consigliò di seguire il seminario di Letteratura americana del Centro Studi Americani che all'epoca lei coordinava e che poi, diventato Seminario di Studi americani, ho avuto a mia volta il privilegio di guidare per alcuni anni. In quel programma ebbi la conferma che la letteratura poteva essere non solo un piacere e una passione, ma uno strumento essenziale per comprendere la mentalità di un paese, della sua popolazione, delle sue scelte. Come per la Commissione Fulbright Biancamaria è stata un personaggio centrale anche nella vita del Centro Studi Americani a partire dagli anni Sessanta. Quando ne diventai Direttore nel 1995, con il suo sostegno e quello di Cipriana Scelba realizzammo una serie di programmi di altissimo livello con alcuni dei più grandi scrittori e intellettuali americani e italiani. Biancamaria era una presenza e una forza costante che sapeva dirigere, consigliare, guidare con risolutezza e determinazione i suoi allievi e chi lavorava con lei.

C'è un'espressione inglese che a me sembra riassumere nel modo migliore la sua persona e i molteplici aspetti della sua vita: "She was larger than life", e non c'è dubbio che ci mancherà.

CRISTINA GIORCELLI

Biancamaria Tedeschini Lalli: Prima donna Rettore di una Università italiana

Avevo studiato all'Università di Torino con Giorgio Melchiori e mi ero specializzata in Letteratura statunitense al Bryn Mawr College con Hennig Cohen. Al mio ritorno dagli Stati Uniti, tanto bastò a Biancamaria Tedeschini Lalli per chiedermi di restare ad insegnare con lei come sua assistente (all'inizio, volontaria). Questo la dice lunga sulla sua apertura umana e professionale e sulla sua intelligenza organizzativa in un'epoca e secondo un costume che faceva e fa, perlopiù, scegliere agli accademici i "propri" allievi. Negli anni, Biancamaria accolse ancora, come docenti nella nostra disciplina, giovani provenienti da altri Atenei.

Biancamaria, allieva di Mario Praz, era una studiosa impegnata ad esplorare autori basilari e identificativi della letteratura e della cultura statunitense. Apparteneva alla generazione, cioè, per la quale non era il numero delle pagine scritte qua e là a promuovere una carriera, ma l'ampiezza di respiro e la profondità della ricerca, portata avanti al fine di identificarne i valori specifici. E Biancamaria si impegnò su temi ed autori di grande e complesso respiro: dai puritani a Thoreau, da Emily Dickinson a Whitman, a Dos Passos. Tutti scrittori che richiedono di essere studiati con la mente e con l'anima, perché all'indispensabile mente avevano unito anche una grande anima.

Grande sperimentatrice, animata da una inesauribile curiosità, Biancamaria amava lavorare in comunità e ci proponeva spesso progetti innovativi ed estrosi (non tutti sempre realizzabili, a quei tempi e con le risorse allora a disposizione!). Per esempio, fu lei a proporci una ricerca sulla grande artista Gertrude Stein. Nella sua estrema originalità, infatti, questa prosatrice e poeta è ancora oggi una guida e un faro per i poeti contemporanei del suo paese: per esempio, per i $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$

Poets. Nel 1976 pubblicammo il primo volume a lei dedicato in Italia: una raccolta di saggi.

L'apertura mentale, sociale e politica di Biancamaria si manifestò anche in ambito più largamente educativo: come non ricordare i corsi di lingua inglese che, per alcuni anni, organizzò e diresse per la RAI o i corsi di lingua italiana che organizzò e diresse per conto del Ministero degli Esteri in Somalia. Inoltre, fu Biancamaria che introdusse, per prima in Italia, l'insegnamento della Linguistica statunitense, firmando un accordo Fulbright con l'Università di Cornell. Nel 1993 fece nascere, con pochissimi fondi *ad hoc*, l'Università di Roma Tre, grazie alla creatività, all'entusiasmo costruttivo e alla fiducia che, con il suo emersoniano ottimismo, sapeva infondere nei suoi interlocutori (a cominciare dai Ministri per l'Università): era, di fatto e di diritto, una *leader*.

Per non parlare dell'appoggio che immediatamente mi diede, quando – secondo il progetto dell'allora Ministro Antonio Ruberti – nacquero i Dipartimenti come luoghi deputati alla ricerca scientifica. Proposi allora (anche sulla scorta della già fondata rivista trimestrale, *Letterature d'America*), un Dipartimento delle e sulle Americhe che Biancamaria accettò e promosse senza riserve, ben consapevole delle lotte che, con colleghi più tradizionalisti di varie discipline, avremmo dovuto sostenere per realizzarlo. Fu il primo Dipartimento in Italia a studiare le Americhe in un'ottica intercontinentale e interdisciplinare. Due anni dopo Biancamaria propose – e diresse per dieci anni – il corrispettivo Dottorato di ricerca interdisciplinare e intercontinentale in Studi americani, che ha formato tanti insegnanti e docenti universitari che oggi insegnano in molte scuole e in varie sedi universitarie italiane.

Per anni Biancamaria fece parte dei Direttivi della Commissione Fulbright e del Centro di Studi Americani, dove, per un decennio, organizzò l'annuale Seminario in Studi americani (questa volta, nel senso statunitense dell'aggettivo). Dopo Agostino Lombardo, che con Vittorio Gabrieli aveva fatto nascere questi Seminari negli anni Cinquanta, quanti futuri docenti poterono godere di questi incontri che, allora, duravano un mese e vedevano impegnati illustri studiosi dei più rinomati Atenei statunitensi! Tutti coloro che diventarono la seconda generazione di americanisti italiani (me compresa) ebbero l'indiscutibile privilegio di essere scelti e di partecipare

a questi Seminari, allora ancora non praticati, nella loro formula didattica, dalle discipline umanistiche in giro per l'Italia.

Biancamaria aveva il genio delle relazioni pubbliche. La sua casa era un accogliente e sereno luogo di incontri: dalla tavola, alla conversazione, ai progetti. Tra un piatto e l'altro, tra un argomento politico-sociale e l'altro, quante idee cominciarono a prendere forma in casa Tedeschini Lalli! Specie quando c'erano con noi il sempre gentile, partecipe, signorile ed arguto marito, Carlo, e/o almeno alcuni dei suoi vivaci ed intraprendenti figli: Mario, Paola, Laura, Livia, Marta, Emanuele.

Biancamaria sapeva coniugare doti di audacia e di lungimiranza con doti di squisita gentilezza e di affettuosa partecipazione: alla forza intellettuale si coniugava in lei l'affettività materna. Era una persona autenticamente religiosa: aveva una fede profonda (abbiamo discusso anche di questo!) e salda. A me rispondeva, citando San Paolo: "la fede è la certezza di ciò in cui speriamo". E questo, in effetti, è.

Quando, nel 2000, il Presidente Azeglio Ciampi, la nominò Grande Ufficiale della Repubblica, l'onorificenza ci parve giusta e molto ben meritata. Dopo aver "retto", per sei anni, l'Università di Roma Tre, nella sua straordinaria versatilità Biancamaria ha anche retto, per cinque anni, l'ISEF. Insignita di vari premi, va ricordata la sua Presidenza della Fondazione Levi-Montalcini. Le donne che hanno fatto la differenza si richiamano.

Ho lavorato con Biancamaria per quarant'anni; con lei ho portato avanti la mia carriera: dall'assistente volontario, poi ordinario, all'incarico, alla libera docenza, all'ordinariato. Ha sempre creduto in me. E abbiamo anche sempre vivacemente discusso. Su certi argomenti, avevamo idee diverse: *a posteriori*, in alcuni casi ho avuto ragione io, in molti più casi ha avuto ragione lei. Ma l'apprezzamento e l'affetto reciproci non sono venuti mai meno e si sono, per me, sempre contestualmente estesi alla sua famiglia, di cui mi sono sempre sentita parte, anche se in modo inevitabilmente ideale e marginale.

Come ai tempi in cui fu colpita e vinse una grave malattia, quando mi fu comunicata la sua scomparsa, la mia prima reazione fu: "Non è vero! C'è un fraintendimento". Non poteva essere che Biancamaria fosse stata sopraffatta dalla morte. Anche lei!

Un giorno le dissi: “Sono stata con te più a lungo di quanto sia stata con mia mamma”. Era ed è vero: con i sensi di mancanza, di nostalgia e di rimpianto che la sua scomparsa non può non creare in chi l’ha stimata e le ha voluto davvero bene.

ANDREA CAROSSO, SIMONE CINOTTO, FERDINANDO FASCE, CRISTINA IULI, MARCO MARIANO, ELISABETTA VEZZOSI

Maurizio Vaudagna

Maurizio Vaudagna è stato un intellettuale di primissima intelligenza e rigore e persona di grande generosità e umanità. Studioso che guardava sempre al di là delle gerarchie accademiche e dei particolarismi locali, aveva sin dall'inizio improntato il suo lavoro alla dimensione collettiva della ricerca, grazie a una innata capacità di dialogare con tutti in maniera democratica e di mettere in moto intorno a sé energie intellettuali e progettuali plurime. In oltre 35 anni di carriera, aveva costruito un ingente capitale di credibilità tra studiosi e studiose degli Stati Uniti e del rapporto transatlantico sui due lati dell'oceano. Ha insegnato Storia dell'America del Nord e Storia contemporanea in quattro atenei italiani oltre che in importanti università americane quali Cornell e Columbia, lasciando ovunque il segno del suo entusiasmo per la didattica e la formazione di giovani ricercatori e ricercatrici, della grande originalità e profondità nella ricerca e di un raro dinamismo nell'organizzazione culturale.

Laureato con dignità di stampa nel 1974 in Storia Moderna presso la Facoltà di Scienze Politiche dell'Università di Torino con una tesi su *Discussioni e polemiche americane su New Deal e fascismo*, iniziava la carriera di docente come professore associato presso l'Università di Bologna nel 1979, per poi passare, nel 1988, all'Università di Torino. Fu professore ordinario dal 1994, prima all'Università di Bari e poi, dal 1999, all'Università del Piemonte Orientale. I suoi studi sull'America del *New Deal*, di storia delle politiche sociali e della famiglia in prospettiva comparata e ancora di più della circolazione bidirezionale di idee e pratiche del *welfare state* tra Stati Uniti ed Europa lungo tutto il Novecento sono culminati in pubblicazioni che hanno contribuito allo sviluppo della disciplina: da *Corporativismo e New Deal* (1981) a *The New Deal and the American Welfare State: Essays from a Transatlantic Perspective, 1933-1945* (2014), passando

per i volumi curati con Alice Kessler-Harris, *Democracy and Social Rights in the "Two Wests"* (2009) e *Democracy and the Welfare State: The Two Wests in the Age of Austerity* (2017). Vaudagna è stato un protagonista degli studi sull'“americanizzazione” dell'Europa in chiave transatlantica, lavorando sul concetto delle “shifting spheres” tra pubblico/privato in diverse dimensioni applicative, dalla politica all'intimità e all'affettività.

Nel 1992 fondava a Torino il Centro di Studi Americani ed Euroamericani, che volle intitolare all'amico e studioso prematuramente scomparso, Piero Bairati. È nel Centro Bairati che Vaudagna costruì nei decenni il suo lascito intellettuale più duraturo, incentrato, da un lato, sulla definizione di una via “euro-americana” agli *American Studies* e, dall'altro, sulla formazione di un gruppo di americaniste e americanisti che hanno definito la disciplina in Italia tra gli anni Novanta e i Duemila, ponendola in primo piano nel panorama internazionale. Attraverso il Centro Bairati, Vaudagna lavorò attivamente alla costruzione di reti europee in grado di elaborare interpretazioni autonome e interdisciplinari dell'esperienza americana. In questo contesto, fu promotore di iniziative di ricerca e di disseminazione legate all'EAAS (European Association for American Studies) e al Salzburg Seminar. Insieme ad alcuni tra i più importanti americanisti europei della sua generazione – Berndt Ostendorf, Rob Kroes, Heinz Ickstadt, Brian Lee, Peter Ling, Michael Hoenisch, Guenter Lenz, Marc Chenetier, solo per citarne alcuni – avviò uno dei primi network di mobilità Erasmus, delle cui opportunità hanno beneficiato e continuano a beneficiare generazioni di studenti e studentesse e colleghi e colleghe, oltre che importanti iniziative editoriali di rifocalizzazione della nozione di “America” da una prospettiva transatlantica.

Fu in questa dimensione “euro-americana” che Vaudagna – alla guida del Centro Bairati e poi del Centro Interuniversitario di Storia e Politica Euroamericana (CISPEA) – attivò la sua formidabile capacità e instancabile dedizione alla messa in rete delle americaniste e degli americanisti italiani con i più importanti studiosi americani ed europei. Tra le iniziative di organizzazione culturale che hanno segnato questo percorso, vanno ricordate in particolare una serie di fortunate ricerche PRIN (*Public and Private in American History: State, Family, Subjectivity in the Twentieth Century*; *Reinstating Europe in American History in a Global Context*; *Beyond the*

Nation: Pushing the Boundaries of US History from a Transatlantic Perspective) e il progetto europeo *Human Capital and Mobility*, che lo hanno visto collaborare intensamente, oltre che con i già citati studiosi europei, con storici e storiche statunitensi del calibro di Eric Foner, Alice Kessler-Harris, Alan Brinkley, Robert Laurence Moore e Nick Salvatore.

La comunità degli *American Studies* in Italia e in Europa perde uno dei suoi protagonisti più attivi e prolifici dei decenni a cavallo della fine della Guerra fredda. Chi scrive, desidera ringraziarlo per il privilegio unico di essere stati suoi allievi e amici in tutti questi anni. Caro Maurizio: ti salutiamo con la tristezza nel cuore, ma con la gioia di averti avuto nella nostra vita.

Special Section

Posthumanism And Environmental
Poetics In American Literature

MARIA CRISTINA IULI AND PILAR MARTINEZ BENEDÍ

“A Pop Song on the Last Day of Earth”: Post-humanism and Environmental Poetics in American Literature

Rose-colored dresses flutter:
Jellyfish dance along in pairs –
With emerald-colored bags,
Bottles and red bottle-caps.

O the sea never had so much color!

(Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė, Vaiva Grainytė and Lina Lapelytė,
“Chanson of Admiration III,” *Sun & Sea {Marina}*).

We are introducing a collection of essays about post-humanism and environmental poetics in the middle of a summer that has marked a series of planetary records in wildfires, hurricanes, floods, and temperature rise: Canadian forests have been burning since April 2023, Reuter reports, torching 13.7 million hectares so far (“Canada Wildfires”). On the volcanic island of Maui, 111 people were killed and 2000 hectares of forest razed to the ground by a wildfire fanned by gusts of wind blowing from Hurricane Dora 700 miles south of the archipelago (see Doman, Palmer and Brettell). Southern California is currently bracing itself to face the impact of the first ever hurricane expected to hit the West Coast. July 2023 has been reported to be the hottest month in world history.

This sad semantics of records stirs the imagination with apocalyptic visions of death by fire or by water, extreme climate phenomena that in previous epochs of western culture were the domain of Biblical imagination, manifestations of orders of will and scale far beyond the parameters of human conception – let alone experience and intervention.

But in the past few decades, a bitterly ironic, cosmic twist of history has upscaled our experience to the weird concreteness of Biblical doom, leaving us in the middle of what feels like a no-exit *medias res* and still without the cognitive, imaginative, and affective fit to really make sense of what initially individual scientists and, progressively, military and governmental agencies-funded studies predicted: the burning of fossil fuels changes the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to the point of seriously affecting global temperatures which, in turn, cause climate change. And *our*, humanity-inhabited world, ends.

The outcomes have been predicted at least since computer-calculations and data collecting have made the modelling of future scenarios possible, and increasingly accurate projections are available on both mainstream and alternative media. But while we no longer lack scientific studies, reports, and public discussions about climate change, we still struggle to imagine and understand the impact of its consequences on our everyday life. We have come to realize, as Lucia Pietroiusti, curator of the Golden Lion winning 2019 Lithuanian Pavillion in Venice quoted in *exergo*, put it, that this is how the world ends: “like a pop song on the very last day on Earth” (qtd. in Haleperin n. pag.). The sheer scale of the condition we are in makes us feel both discouraged from even starting to think outside our quotidian rituals, suspended as we are between fear and denial – as the moving opera *Sun and Sea (Marina)* clearly emphasizes – and bereft of cognitive tools that help us to make sense of the processes we are undergoing. So we look to novels, poems and other works of the imagination in a desperate search for entirely new constructions, for different vocabularies and scenarios that might lead us out of the semantics of crisis/wreck/extinction to which we have become so accustomed. But how can literature act as an extinguisher for a planet literally on fire?

The massive attention that in the past two decades academic criticism has paid to theorizing and addressing in ecological terms relations between environments and human subjectivity, their manifestations – agency, creativity, intentionality, etc. – and their terms of engagement with non-human life-forms and language have dovetailed with what we can broadly identify as an established academic discourse about post-humanism, inaugurating a productive season of critical discussion about the question of the relation between art, literature and the environment. Beside igniting

a steady process of revision of the epistemic premises on which human claims about the environment are made, this critical engagement has also expanded the academic conversation about the impact of environmental concerns on literary aesthetics and, vice versa, about the influence of art and literature on conventional perceptions and definitions of the environment. As a result, a growing body of literary, artistic, and philosophical works, often characterized by a marked interdisciplinary orientation, has brought into the horizon of academic criticism what Bruno Latour has called “the multiplicity of existents [...] and the multiplicity of ways they have of existing” (36), thus expanding an awareness of connections and interconnection between self and others which also includes non-human others.

The contributors to this Special Issue have thus variously turned to post-humanism to resist the lingering centrality of the human when thinking about, or narrating, the environment. As Seril Oppermann writes, post-humanism and ecocriticism have in common that both “introduce changes in the way materiality, agency, and nature are conceived” (24). In its many manifestations, during the last decades the posthuman turn has indeed helped decenter human subjectivity (conceived as monolithic, discrete, self-sufficient), introducing more porous, interconnected, relational modes of subjectivity and agency that make room for an enlarged sense of kinship and belonging. What Oppermann terms “ecological post-humanism” valorizes “complex environmental relations, [the] perviousness of species boundaries, and social-ecological-scientific networks within which humans and nonhumans, knowledge practices, and material phenomena are deeply enmeshed” (26).

But how can a post-human outlook help to challenge human exceptionalism and reconceptualize subjectivity and agency, in such a way that eco-sensitivity (and eco-poetics) become less a question of human arrogance intent on saving and singing the planet, in a top-down operation, than a kind of perceptual (or bottom-up) inter-species affinity? One way to look at the productive association between post-humanism and eco-criticism is to consider the empathic connections both foster and explore – connections that are inextricably linked to new, or atypical, epistemological conditions. In an article on Richard Powers’s novel *The Echo Maker* (2006), Heather Houser claims that “unraveling the dynamic

interactions between an individual's mind and the world it perceives might revitalize environmental consciousness" (381). By qualifying the interactions between mind and world as dynamic, Houser's words evoke the perviousness of the boundaries between the inside and the outside world, even as they challenge claims to the exceptionality of human perception. Environmentalism or eco-consciousness stems less from a purposeful conceptual program than from a commonality of feeling – a feeling or thinking *with* (rather than *for*) the environment. As Tirza Brüggemann (quoted by Jane Desmond in her essay in this Special Issue) suggests, ecological empathy is not about likeness, but rather about training our senses to perceive and feel otherwise.

Even more radically, decentering “the human” does not mean to aim for transcendence, but to break the philosophical, conceptual, imaginary and epistemological boundaries that have historically kept apart what calls itself “the human” from other forms of life, to paraphrase Derrida's expression. This break is preconditional to seeing ecologically, that is to say – following Gregory Bateson's ideas – to understand relations within (eco)systems as relations among differences of kind between organisms and environments, and to account for such differences *and the difference they make* in determining the operations any given organism performs in its environment.

This shift from thinking of organisms as individuals to thinking of organisms as the evolving outcomes of recursive feedback-looping relations with their environments has two massively important theoretical consequences that we can only mention: 1. it deconstructs the concept of “world” as the unifying substratum of experience for all living and non-living organisms, multiplying instead what we can call “world-experiences” for as many organism-in-environment as there are relations; 2. It provides ground for theorizing the relation between living and non-living systems at different orders of causality and recursion between interpenetrating systems different in kind.

It comes as no surprise, then, that this major conceptual shift was also at the core of James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis's Gaia hypothesis, as Bruce Clarke has recently showed (28), “the most innovative, systemic, cosmic theory of life” (30) buttressing Lovelock's “theories of atmospheric self-regulation with her [Margulis's] knowledge of microbial metabolisms”

(30). By “overturning previous evidence and sedimented habits of geological and biological practice, reconfiguring and reconstituting large portion of normal science, and prompting a thorough reconceptualization of humanity’s place in the world” (31), Gaia cosmic theory of life prompted what philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn in his classic *The Structures of Scientific Revolution* defined a paradigm shift: a radical revision of stabilized protocols of scientific knowledge production, which matters to us at the very least to the extent that it introduced a post-humanist, and *ecological*, relational perspective in the study of earth systems.

But how can literature help us engage ecology, in this time of continuing ecological disasters? By means of what strategies, tropes, constructions and perspectives will it address that thing “massively distributed in time and space relative to humans” (Morton 1) we have tried to domesticate by calling it climate change? How can literature engage the approaching end of *our* world? What is the use of literature in such a fateful present, anticipating an ever more calamitous near future?

In his study of *Anthropocene Fiction*, Adam Trexel suggests that instead

of fiction being read as attempts to seize the arbitrary meaning of climate change, or as literary representations of scientific representations, climate change novels are best understood as a force that interacts with climate change, remaking what we know about the climate and the novel at the same time. (35)

Perhaps this is too much to ask of the novel or of any kind of literary work. Probably, a more affordable task for literary texts, is to emphasize the role of literature as an experimental way of generating knowledge that may better accompany our transition toward the deep adaptation ahead, especially if we agree with Anna Kornbluh’s claim that works of literature

compose ideas in non-propositional fashion [...] through the interrelation of different formal registers: setting resounding plot, point of view reinforcing figure, characterization repeating temporality. Novels implicitly pose the question of how their many pieces fit together, and this fabricated whole is a projection of the integral world they precipitate. (267)

It is on the terrain of this interconnection and of the deep revision it entails of our ways of thinking the role of the literary work in relation to, on the one hand, the philosophical and theoretical, and, on the other, the ecological, that the contributors to this special issue have variously looked at American literature, investigating their creative interventions on how we understand the world around us, our place in it, and the place of the literary in it. The essays here collected exemplify that literary methodologies for addressing the entanglements of non-human species, human experience, Earth, and the acceleration of planetary ecocide rely, in different ways, on the talent of literature for what Kornbluh calls “objectivity”: “a capacity for conceptuality, a faculty for synthesis, which runs perpendicular to, but also parallels, the quantitative or the empirical, the phenomenal and the embodied”: literature’s potential to both instantiate abstract relations among its various components and to ground them in specific environments qualifies it as a technology “capable of thinking, not only of eliciting feeling or immediately expressing the personal or contextual” (236), and therefore crucial to the meaning-making process through which the relation between knowledge, experience, and future-building is shaped and re-shaped outside fixed categories or data representation. This quality, according to Kornbluh, defines the specific “mediacy” of literature as a property of literary language, which exercises it by “soliciting methods attuned to mediation rather than fixated on immediate uptake in affect or data” (236).

Taken collectively, the essays in this Special Issue turn to literary language as a “*poiesis* that reconnects words in [literature] and words outside by framing and exploring [...] relations between mind and environment, perceptions and phenomena as relations of meaning,” as Iuli puts it in her essay. A number of the contributions focus on poetry as an apt vehicle to reconnect mind and environment. Leonor Martínez Serrano investigates the eco-poetry of Robert Hass as a means of *attending* to the more-than-human world (a notion that recurs in several contributions). Drawing on the image of wastelands that powerfully emerges from Hass’s work, Martínez Serrano posits that the environmental crisis (and eco-poetry) calls not for the moral agency of world-changers or problem-solvers, which symbolize the peak of human arrogance, but for the ethical agency of witnessing. From this point of view, Hass’s poetry and his anthropogenic wastelands reveal a deep sense

of engagement with and commitment to the more-than-human world, while also operating as a denunciation of the practices that destroy it.

Cristina Iuli and Jane Desmond likewise focus on poetry. The former examines the relations between poetics and knowledge of life-forms in Katherine Larson's *Radial Symmetry* (2011). Desmond explores the potentialities of poetry as a mode of inter-species empathy, with examples from the American canon in which poetic language seems to bridge the gap between different (human/nonhuman/animal) *sensoria*. Her view that poetry, with its power of condensation, its demanding use of sound, line breaks, diction and metaphor, which affects us on both the linguistic and non-linguistic level of assonance, consonance, and meter, can be an extremely effective and affective way to limn these observations, and thus to create lively multi-species artistic ethnographies, stands at the opposite angle from Iuli's reading of Larson's poetry, whose central claim engages the poetic tradition of "nature" poetry by situating its special, deconstructive relation to poetry in the specific ways poems establish their own singular ways of binding of consciousness and communication. From that vantage point, it is not really the metric or formal scheme that conventionally define poetry, but rather its poietic force, its capacity to bring forth what Anna Kornbluh calls "the composition of new, unusual abstractions; the thickening and calibrating of thinking; the vectoring of our senses beyond the merely sensible" (262).

Owen Harry's essay on Daoism in Ursula Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971) clarifies underexplored links between religious thought and some of the tenets of post-humanism to analyze Le Guin's political stance (and to challenge accusations of "quietism"). His essay resonates with Desmond's reminder that some native theorists, like Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate scholar Kim TallBear and Metis anthropologist and artist Zoe Todd, put pressure on the ethnocentric foundations of post-humanist epistemologies, especially in their framing of a wider kinship-based notion of how humans relate to non-human worlds, and in the attribution of vitality to those worlds. For native cosmologies and epistemologies have always incorporated in their definition of environment a comprehensive view of the relation of species and worlds, one in which there is no special position for the human species. So, to a certain extent, what from a Western and Euro-American point of view appears as a new engagement with the posthumous state of

humanist philosophies, does not really seem to break any new ground to observers coming from other conceptual traditions. On the contrary, it risks reinstating once again a provincial – i.e. white, Eurocentric – perspective under universal claims, as has historically been the case with the Euro-American history of thought.

Daniela Fargione seizes on the long-standing censure of anthropocentrism and the often satirical assessment of human deficiency to sympathize with the nonhuman she sees at work in Coetzee to read Lydia Millet's novel *How the Dead Dream* (2008). Millet's novels, she writes, function as an exploration of realms beyond the human with the intent to promote an affective and empathic engagement with the nonhuman. The ethical and empathic practice that, according to Fargione, Millet explores includes – or requires – paying attention or attending to (to use Anna Tsing's term) the other-than-human. In this sense, Fargione's essay connects to Desmond's interest in the possibility of keeping one's animal eye open. The demand for attentiveness inscribed in the novel, however, does not imply mutuality: we cannot expect our narcissistic (human) needs (such as reciprocity) to be fulfilled by the nonhuman.

Finally, Valentina Romanzi focuses on the materiality of language to analyze and valorize the use of metaphors in Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone's novella *That's How You Lose the Time War* (2019). Exploring the literalization of metaphors into metamorphoses, Romanzi takes these literalized metaphors – veritable building blocks of the narrative – as instrumental to the expression and ontological (re)-definition of the post-human subject.

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LEONOR MARÍA MARTÍNEZ SERRANO

“All Nature Teems with Life”: Anthropogenic Wastelands in Robert Hass’s Ecopoetics

The Privilege of Being

Drawing on Rosi Braidotti’s thinking on the posthuman (*Posthuman*; “Posthuman, All Too Human”), on Karen Barad’s agential realism and Jane Bennett’s lessons about vibrant matter, as well as on Rob Nixon’s and Saskia Sassen’s insights into the perverse logic of capitalism and the slow violence brought about by environmental degradation, this article examines the representation of anthropogenic wastelands in Robert Hass’s acclaimed *Time and Materials: Poems 1997-2005*. “Everywhere the wasteland grows; woe / To him whose wasteland is within” (4), writes the American poet in a piece titled “A Supple Wreath of Myrtle,” where Nietzsche is portrayed musing on the nature of the world in utter solitude. This article argues that the concept of *wasteland* as an image of decadence, crisis and a state of mind marked by exhaustion is present in powerful poems in Hass’s collection, where at least two distinct kinds of wasteland can be discerned. The first type concerns the devastation of spaces, terraforming, overexploitation and the depletion of natural resources in the Anthropocene,¹ which is particularly palpable in the ten-part “State of the Planet.” An ambitious piece originally commissioned by the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory at Columbia University on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary, and partially published for the first time in 2005 in the “Science” section of *The New York Times*, it encapsulates a sort of treatise condensing the story of the Earth from the Big Bang to the present. Yet Hass is prompt to write other ecopoems, not of denunciation but of exultation, which sing of the beauty and vulnerability of the physical world *Homo sapiens* is a *part of*, not

apart from. The second type of wasteland concerns the massive corporeal waste brought about by the devastating wars punctuating the twentieth century, as evidenced by the pieces “A Poem,” “Bush’s War” and “On Visiting the DMZ at Panmunjom: A Haibun.” Both kinds of wasteland, examples of human-induced destruction, often go hand in hand. Behind them is the perverse logic dominant in highly industrialized, capitalist societies, which values capital over human dignity and conceives of the Earth as a portfolio of resources to be plundered by *Homo sapiens*. Linking the fertility of Mother Earth and economics, Hass writes in “Ezra Pound’s Proposition”: “Beauty is sexual, and sexuality / Is the fertility of the earth and the fertility / Of the earth is economics” (*Time and Materials* 81). As a poet, Hass is called on to bear witness to and give an accurate record of his time, one that seems to be intent on destroying the planet to ensure relentless economic growth, narrowly understood as the accumulation of capital at any cost.

This article seeks to demonstrate that Hass’s ecopoetry is aligned with the postulates of posthuman thought and the new materialisms. Intrinsic to the agenda of posthumanism is “a downsizing of human arrogance coupled with the acknowledgment of solidarity with other humans” (Braidotti, *Posthuman* 13) and nonhumans. Amidst the unprecedented climate crisis humanity is faced with, what is needed is an ethics of attending to the more-than-human world, one that comprises the human alongside the nonhuman. What is urgently needed is not a moral agent as world changer or problem solver, but as witness instead (see Heiti). As Mark Strand observes in an interview with creativity theorist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, it is “such a lucky accident, having been born, that we’re almost obliged to pay attention” (231). Humans are literally *of* the world – we belong in the larger mesh of things or web of life: “we’re made of the same stuff that stars are made of, or that floats around in space,” but “we’re combined in such a way that we can describe what it’s like to be alive, to be witnesses. [...] We see and hear and smell other things. Being alive is responding” (231). To exist amidst thing-power is, therefore, to acknowledge that attending is part of our mission on Earth and that we are literally inscribed in the tissue of earth, air, water, and fire. In this regard, Hass’s poetry is earth-poetry, that is, poetry deeply grounded in the physical world and sensitive to the

impact of human action on the planet. In terms of style, it is marked by clarity, simplicity of diction, precise imagery and a deft combination of prose-like blocks and free verse that owes much to his long apprenticeship as a translator of the Japanese haiku masters and Nobel Laureate Czesław Miłosz's poetry. Thematically speaking, he often "inquires into the meaning of history, language and art. Central to his poetics is a romantic-modernist faith in imagination and in the role of art as fundamental to existence and to the self's spiritual redemption" (Patea 195-96). Having been born in San Francisco, his familiar landscapes are those of the northern California coast and the Sierra high country, which he renders vividly in ecopoems that reveal metaphysical depths.

Lucretius on the Dance of Atoms

The ten-part poem titled "State of the Planet" is both a brief history of the Earth and an accomplished tribute to the Roman poet-philosopher Titus Lucretius Carus (ca. 99-ca. 55 BCE), whose thinking was condensed in the philosophical poem *De rerum natura* (ca. 60 BCE). In the face of the awe-inspiring majesty of nature, Lucretius writes his natural philosophy in an accomplished specimen of what could be termed *lyric philosophy*, rich in poetic language and remarkable metaphors.² George Santayana praised Lucretius's poem for "the grandeur and audacity of the intellectual feat" he accomplished: "a naturalistic conception of things," that is, "to cast the eye deliberate round the entire horizon, and to draw mentally the sum of all reality, discovering that reality makes such a sum, and may be called one" (21). Many of "the core arguments" of *De rerum natura* are "among the foundations on which modern life has been constructed" (Greenblatt 338), such as that "[e]verything is made of [eternal] invisible particles" (338) "in motion in an infinite void" (341), that "everything comes into being as a result of a swerve" (343), "that "Nature ceaselessly experiments" (345), that "the universe was not created for or about humans" (346), that "humans are not unique" (348), and that "understanding the nature of things generates deep wonder" (361). Decentering *anthropos* from center

stage, all these arguments are a sobering reminder that humankind is not the measure of all existence.

In Lucretius's mechanistic, non-teleological account of the creation and evolution of life, nature operates according to physical principles and experiments incessantly across eons of time. As a materialist following in the steps of Democritus and his master Epicetetus, Lucretius views the world as a dance of atoms, in terms that anticipate modern physics, Barad's agential realism and Bennett's notion of vibrant matter by more than twenty centuries. In Barad's agential realism, firmly grounded in quantum physics, the universe is a "dynamic process of intra-activity" (396), a site of intra-active agencies where what-is emerges in an ongoing process of shared becoming. In other words, the vitality and the dynamic interconnectedness of an undivided universe are expressive of the "mutual constitution of entangled agencies" (33). According to Bennett, who also senses a form of vitality inherent in reality, (non)human bodies or things have the capacity "to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (viii), for matter is not "raw, brute, or inert" or "passive stuff" (vii). Matter is not simply acted upon, but has the capacity to play a role in the fabric of the universe. In Barad's words,

Eros, desire, life forces run through everything. [...] Matter itself is not a substrate or a medium for the flow of desire. [...] feeling, desiring and experiencing are not singular characteristics or capacities of human consciousness. Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers. (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 59)

Humans' "habit of parsing the world into dull matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, beings)" is "a partition of the sensible" (Bennett vii) that does not do justice to the nature of reality – a vast semiotic-material entanglement of intra-acting agencies with trajectories of their own. Most importantly, conceiving of the nonhuman world as inert matter, argues Bennett, "feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption" (ix), which partly accounts for the current unprecedented environmental crisis. Two thousand years ago, Lucretius was also sensitive to the *eros* of matter – to the fact that matter is alive. In Book II, verses 113-140, of *De rerum natura* he offers a vivid description

of dust particles in motion that he deems a proof of the existence of atoms: "you will see many tiny bodies mingle in many ways all through the empty space right in the light of the rays, and as though in some everlasting strife wage war and battle" (Lucretius 68-69). Lucretius's poem constitutes a powerful subtext in Hass's "State of the Planet." Beneath the mind-boggling multiformity of entities on Earth, there appears to exist a common substratum that can be reduced to a constellation of atoms, which Hass characterizes in his poem as being "electricity having sex / In an infinite variety of permutations, Plato's / Yearning halves of a severed being" (*Time and Materials* 53).

Lucretius's thinking on matter and atomism thus provides the philosophical framework for Hass' investigation into the story of the Earth in "State of the Planet," in much the same way as the framing story of a girl carrying a copy of a book titled *Getting to Know Your Planet* in her rucksack triggers Hass's account of the miracle of life on Earth and denunciation of climate crisis. Upon the publication of the poem in *The New York Times* in 2005, Hass explained that, faced with the invitation by Columbia University to compose a poem on the state of the planet, "he was struck mute by the challenge of writing on so broad a subject. But then he found inspiration in a child walking to school as a storm swept the Berkeley Hills" ("The State of the Planet" n. pag.). Like the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, scrutinizing the planet for more than 50 years, Lucretius and Hass turn to poetry as a mode of knowing that sheds light on the nature of the world and human beings' place in the larger scheme of things. From the outset, section 1 of "State of the Planet" directs readers' attention to the current climate crisis and the havoc caused by *Homo sapiens*. Crutzen and Stoermer emphasize "the central role of mankind in geology and ecology by proposing to use the term 'Anthropocene' for the current geological epoch" in light of the growing "impacts of human activities on earth and atmosphere" (17). The Anthropocene represents thus "a human-dominated geological epoch; [...] a geological *event*: a momentary though possibly momentous blip in the earth's biography" (Bringham 17). What the girl in Hass's work learns from the book she is reading is put in very succinct, at points laconic, terms. She will learn that

... “the troposphere” – has trapped
 Emissions from millions of cars, [...]
 ... and is making a greenhouse
 Of the atmosphere. The book will say that climate
 Is complicated, that we may be doing this.
 (*Time and Materials* 49)

Hass’s ecopoem is overtly marked by a deep sense of engagement and denunciation of practices that are damaging to the more-than-human world. Environmental degradation is a form of slow violence, that is, “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space” (Nixon 2), striking mostly “those people lacking resources” (4) in developing countries of the so-called Global South. At a time of alarming deterioration that is compromising the Earth’s carrying capacity, Nixon claims, it is of the essence that writer-activists make visible such slow violence in works of imaginative literature. As for poetry, different labels such as “green poetry” (Gifford), “environmental poetry” (Scigaj), “ecological poetry” (Gilcrest), “ecopoetry” (Scigaj; Bryson *Ecopoetry* and *The West Side*) and “Anthropocene lyric” (Bristow) have been in use over the last three decades, but the term “ecopoetry” is the most widely used nowadays. “Ecopoetry” literally means *poetry of the oikos* – poetry concerned with the biosphere as the home life has patiently built for itself. Like environment-sensitive writing more generally, ecopoetry is a form of imaginative activism and radical commitment to preserving the integrity of the more-than-human world – an agent of (social) transformation, capable of raising awareness and triggering responsibility. In “State of the Planet,” Hass directs readers’ attention to the havoc caused by anthropogenic action, which has taken humanity to the brink of environmental collapse, in the hope that it might instill in them a sense of the enormity of the situation.

In section 2 of “State of the Planet,” Hass declares that he seeks to compose a kind of poetry that emulates the simplicity of Lucretius’s style and serves as an epistemological tool to make sense of our planet. In a journal entry dated April 2, 1852, H. D. Thoreau wrote: “Man is altogether too much insisted on. The poet says the proper study of mankind is man. I say study to forget all that – take wider views of the universe.

That is the egotism of the race" (369). In such illuminating words, the Transcendentalist poet-philosopher prefigures the Anthropocene and ponders upon the destruction that the "gigantic institution" (382) of humankind causes on Earth. Like Lucretius and Thoreau, Hass belongs to a lineage of poets who respond to the awe-inspiring presence of the Earth by making verbal artifacts of lasting value. What poetry ultimately seems to be is the record of humanity's astonishment in the face of what resists verbalization. Self-centered as we tend to be, we spend most of our time thinking about our petty concerns and "human dramas" (Hass, *Time and Materials* 50). The lyrical voice in Hass's "State of the Planet" is after a kind of poetry that reveals itself to be a form of knowledge of what-is – one that registers the protean exuberance of the world's phenomena and "comprehends[s] the earth / [...] in a style as sober / As the Latin of Lucretius" (50).

In Hass's account, the Roman philosopher, addressing Venus, reported on "the state of things two thousand years ago" in these terms: "'It's your doing that under the wheeling constellations / Of the sky,' he wrote, 'all nature teems with life'" (50). Significantly, whereas Lucretius reports on "the state of things" in *De rerum natura*, Hass reports on "the state of the planet" in his homonymous poem. Though twenty centuries apart, both poems are concerned with origins and the nature of reality. In the incipit of *De rerum natura*, the philosopher invokes Venus, whom he deems the creative power of nature, the principle of fertility and endless regeneration. In Dryden's translation, the opening lines read thus:

Delight of humankind and gods above,
 Parent of Rome, propitious Queen of Love,
 Whose vital power, air, earth, and sea supplies,
 And breeds whate'er is born beneath the rolling skies;
 For every kind, by thy prolific might,
 Springs and beholds the regions of the light.
 (52)

Then the Roman poet-philosopher intones crystal-clear words of *lyric* philosophy:

I will reveal the first-beginnings of things, from which nature creates all things and increases and fosters them, and into which nature too dissolves them again at their perishing: these in rendering our account it is our wont to call matter or the creative bodies of things, and to name them the seeds of things, and again to term them the first-bodies, since from them first all things have their being. (Lucretius 28-29)

In words marked by concision and elegance, Lucretius gives voice to his atomism. In his natural philosophy, the world is a swirl of atoms attracted by the force of *eros* (hence the allusion to Venus, the Roman goddess of love), coalescing into the myriad forms populating the Earth. Significantly, it is love or *eros* – the very term used in Barad’s insight that “[e]ros, desire, life forces run through everything” (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 59) – that animates the entire world. Along similar lines, ecophilosopher David Abram conceives of the world as being populated by agentic, expressive entities that speak languages of their own. All beings and things, he observes, are literally *emworlded* and embodied creatures that have “the ability to communicate something of themselves to other beings” (*Becoming Animal* 172). *Homo sapiens* is not the sole possessor of speech or consciousness, which is “a ubiquitous quality of the world” (37). In other words, the Earth is not inanimate stuff, but rather a whole of wholes and a web of interconnected agencies. In “The State of the Planet,” Hass condenses Lucretius’s core insight into what-is with the greatest linguistic economy as he writes “All nature teems with life” (*Time and Materials* 50), highlighting the livingness of the world and the dance of atoms in all things. Six syllables suffice for the American poet to convey the Roman’s natural philosophy, aligned with the insights of quantum physics.

What Hass offers in section 2 of “State of the Planet” is a most eloquent description of anthropogenic wastelands in the form of a litany of the woes accompanying the Anthropocene. Desertification and terraforming, pollution and overfishing, the construction of gigantic dams on all continents, intensive agriculture and deforestation are just instances of the endless havoc caused by our species. In the beating heart of the poem, Hass writes:

Topsoil: going fast. Rivers: damned and fouled.
Cod: about fished out. Haddock: about fished out.

Pacific salmon nosing against dams from Yokohama
 To Kamchatka to Seattle and Portland,
 [...]
 Most of the ancient groves are gone, sacred to Kuan Yin
 And Artemis, sacred to the gods and goddesses...
 (50)

In *Expulsions* (2014), Sassen has demonstrated that the perverse logic of global capitalism, whose main hallmarks are profit-making, the commodification of the nonhuman world (rendered inert and hence exploitable and expendable) and an utter indifference to human dignity, has resulted in the unfair distribution of the world's wealth and in varied channels of expulsion. Faced with the sheer magnitude of the current environmental degradation, Sassen notes that the damage caused to the biosphere has grown exponentially in the last decades to the extent that it has become "a planetary event that boomerangs back, often hitting sites that had nothing to do with the original destruction" (3-4). Our toxic modes of development have produced unimaginable havoc in the biosphere and led to "the expulsion of bits of the biosphere from their life space" (5), which precarious human communities have suffered the most. Evidence of accelerated environmental degradation is discernible in at least three major areas: land degradation and toxicity, "water scarcities, created by humans, and the increasing number of water bodies that pollution has starved of oxygen" and "the melting of the permafrost, rising temperatures, and massive floods" (151). All the way "from the stratosphere to deep ocean gyres" (209), there is no place on our planet immune to the havoc caused by the myopic conception of progress and material wealth deeply ingrained in the Western mindset. All three areas of environmental degradation are evoked in Hass's poem with astonishing dexterity: land, water and air – the life-sustaining elements central to the biosphere makeup – are compromised by predatory formations and dynamics at work in capitalist societies. Geographically distant places such as Yokohama, Kamchatka, Seattle and Portland are brought together in Hass's poem to emphasize that environmental degradation is simply ubiquitous. As if emulating Lucretius's simplicity, the language deployed by the poet to evoke anthropogenic damage is extremely laconic. It relies on the use of

participles instead of syntactically full sentences – “Topsoil: going fast. Rivers: damned and fouled” – and repetition – “Cod: about fished out. Haddock: about fished out” (*Time and Materials* 50) – to cumulatively build a sense of litany when recording the extinction of specific fish species. Repetition is also discernible in Hass’s concern with deforestation and mourning of the ancient groves “sacred to Kuan Yin / And Artemis, sacred to the gods and goddesses” (*Time and Materials* 50), with references (Kuan Yin and Artemis) denoting cultural syncretism.

Whereas section 3 of “State of the Planet” shows the poetic persona addressing Lucretius to direct the Roman’s and readers’ attention to advances in genetic engineering in words not devoid of humor (“mechanics / In our art of natural philosophy can take the property / Of luminescence from a jellyfish and put it in mice”; 50) section 4 gives a succinct account of the origins of the universe and the formation of the Earth. A rock is not the same as a stone. As Don McKay lucidly notes, “a stone is a rock that’s been put to use” or, to put it differently, “rock is as old as the earth is; stone is as old as humanity” (59). Stone is domesticated rock and betrays human presence, whilst rock gestures towards deep, geological time. In section 4, Hass turns clocks back to muse on the deep past: the Big Bang. Dwelling on how “life came to be” (51), the poet writes on the miracle of life:

Stuff flung off from the sun, the molten core
 Still pouring sometimes rivers of black basalt
 Across the earth from the old fountains of its origin.
 [...]

 The long cooling. There is no silence in the world
 Like the silence of rock from before life was.
 (51)

The alliterative texture of the lines “Stuff flung off from the sun, the molten core / Still pouring sometimes rivers of black basalt” (51) somehow takes readers back to the cradle of life. Notice how the deliberate repetition of such sounds as /s/, /f/ and /b/ creates a mesmerizing effect and evokes the high temperatures and the subsequent cooling of rock in the formation of the cosmos. In the same section, singing of biodiversity and the wonder

of life as it manifests in “a palo verde tree,” in “an insect-eating bird” and in the ancient rock “in a Mexican desert,” Hass juxtaposes human and nonhuman animals, and contrasts “the completely fierce / Alertness of the bird that can't know the amazement / Of its being there” with “a human mind that somewhat does” (51). Nonhuman animals are part and parcel of the larger mesh of things, but, Hass suggests, are not aware of their being so. In contrast, human animals, inquisitive by nature, have the capacity to think about the miracle of their very existence. However, numerous scholars have emphasized that mind is not the sole prerogative of *Homo sapiens*. As early as 1979, Gregory Bateson noted that thinking was not the private possession of human beings but a property of reality and that “the very word ‘animal’ means ‘endowed with mind or spirit (*animus*)’” (5). According to Wendy Wheeler, “‘Mind’ and ‘ideas’ are not properties of humans alone, but are immanent in all living things” (272). For his part, Abram claims that consciousness is not “the special possession of our species,” but “a property of the breathing biosphere”; as a result, human beings are “carnally immersed in an awareness that is not, properly speaking, ours, but is rather the earth’s” (“Afterword” 303).

At any rate, Hass underscores that “It must be a gift of evolution that humans / Can't sustain wonder. We'd never have gotten up / From our knees if we could” (*Time and Materials* 51) – such is the majesty of nature that Lucretius sensed in the more-than-human world centuries ago. What Hass emphasizes in these lines is that wonder cannot be endlessly sustained if our species is to ensure its survival. He suggests that the will of *Homo sapiens* to master and control the nonhuman is deeply wired in the Western *Weltanschauung*. By taking dominion over the Earth and its living creatures, writes Hass, humans soon learned to master the fowl of the air and fashion “little earrings from the feathers,” adorned their faces with “rubbings from the rock,” and “made a spear from the sinewy wood of the tree” (51) – all of which is expressive of humans' capacity for tool-use and mastery over the nonhuman through technology. Hass's poetic agenda embraces some of the main tenets of Braidotti's thinking on the posthuman subject as being “a transversal entity encompassing the human, our genetic neighbours the animals and the earth as a whole” (*Posthuman* 82). In line with Barad's and Bennett's lessons, Braidotti argues that the fact that “all matter is One, intelligent and self-organizing” is a crucial discovery, as it reinstates

democracy across humans' and nonhumans' existence and substantiates what she terms "ontological pacifism," i.e., "trust in our shared intimacy with and knowledge of the world and in our lived experience of it" (21). What emerges out of this mindset is a deep sense of ontological humility – an acknowledgment that humans are a tiny part of the more-than-human world – which is the perfect antidote to capitalist greed, the commodification of the planet and the over-exploitation of natural resources. It is this ontological pacifism that Hass captures in "State of the Planet."

In section 5 of "State of the Planet," Hass keeps on investigating the origins of our shared *oikos*. He looks into the deep past of the Earth by attending to "[l]imestone fossils of Devonian coral" that "bring back the picture of what life / Looked like four hundred millions years ago: a honeycomb with mouths" (*Time and Materials* 52). Section 6 explores the origins of life on Earth, that is, "[c]ells that divided and reproduced" and "DNA, the curled musical ladder of sugars, acids" (52), and conveys the lyrical voice's wonder in the face of the awe-inspiring creativity intrinsic to the life forms populating the biosphere. Life evolved in myriad ways, producing a wide variety of organisms and all kinds of cultural practices. From the first bacterium that "grew green pigment" came "eyes, ears, wings, hands, tongues. / Armadillos, piano tuners, gnats, sonnets, / Military interrogation, the coho salmon..." (52), writes Hass evoking the protean variety of life forms and cultures as living ecosystems. The closing lines of section 6 lay themselves down as a bridge leading to section 7, which celebrates biodiversity and the generous spaciousness of the Earth to accommodate trees, beetles, reptiles, orchids, butterflies, parrots and innumerable other species. In a passage of consummate artistry, Hass sings of the teeming life inhabiting the complex ecosystem of a forest:

The great trees in that forest house ten thousands of kinds
 Of beetle, reptiles no human eyes has [sic] ever seen changing
 Color on the hot, green, hardly changing leaves
 Whenever a faint breeze stirs them.
 (53)

What is particularly moving about this excerpt is that such vegetable and animal exuberance exists irrespective of human beings and that, if left

untouched, it might flourish again. Hass implies that there is still room for *terra incognita* on Earth, despite the impulse of scientific research to categorize all that exists on this planet. What the poet's gaze registers in the forest is a plethora of details that points to a species assemblage and a confederacy of vibrant entities – trees, insects, reptiles, leaves, a faint breeze – intimately bound with each other as part of a vast material-semiotic symposium. They are what Donna Haraway calls “the Chthonic ones,” that is, “they writhe and luxuriate in manifold forms and manifold names in all the airs, waters, and places of earth” (2). With all of them *Homo sapiens* is kin, as Haraway has noted in memorable words: “all earthlings are kin in the deepest sense,” for all earthbound beings “share a common ‘flesh,’ laterally, semiotically, and genealogically” (103). In fact, Haraway prefers to use the term “Chthulucene” (instead of “Anthropocene”), “a compound of two Greek roots (*khthôn* and *kainos*) that together name a kind of timeplace for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth” (2). Incidentally, “Chthulucene” also derives from “The Call of Cthulhu,” one of H. P. Lovecraft's most well-known stories of cosmic horror, originally written in 1926 and first published in the pulp magazine *Weird Tales* in 1928.

Section 9 opens with a eulogy of agriculture in Roman times. Addressing Lucretius once again, Hass reminds us that it was the Romans who “taught the world to love / Vast fields of grain, the power and the order of the green, / Then golden rows of it” (*Time and Materials* 54). The “smiling” fields – the vineyards and olive groves with which the countryside was adorned – were a pleasure to see. But the section closes on a note of pessimism in light of species extinction. Looking at “a flock of buntings in October wind, headed south / Toward winter habitat,” over fields that “[t]heir kind has known and mated in for thirty centuries,” Hass mourns the disappearance of “the long-billed arctic curlews who flew / From Newfoundland to Patagonia in every weather,” last seen “in a Texas marsh in 1964” (55). Once again, anthropogenic action is beneath the alarming decimation and extinction of animal species, including specific bird species like arctic curlews. Finally, section 10 asks “What is to be done with our species?” (55), a species that is part of a civilization that has taken a self-suicidal course. As Bringhurst puts it, “earth's life is much larger than our own lives, but our lives are part of it. If we take that life, we take our own” (12). Everything that lives is

bound to die, true enough: “We know we’re going to die, to be submitted / To that tingling dance of atoms once again” (Hass, *Time and Materials* 55), the very same atoms amorously scrutinized by Lucretius in *De rerum natura*. Our lives might be a dream, says the poet, “even the long story of the earth” (55) recounted in “State of the Planet.” However, that life might be a dream does not cancel the fact that human action has become the most destructive force on Earth: “Boreal forests, mangrove swamps, Tiberian wheatfields / In the summer heat on hillsides south of Rome – all of it / A dream, and we alive somewhere, somehow outside it” (55). As if it were possible not to be *part* of it, within it, *it* being the Earth. As Abram has lucidly observed, after “three and a half centuries spent charting and measuring material nature as though it were a pure exterior, we’ve at last begun to notice that the world we inhabit [...] is alive” (*Becoming Animal* 158).

Lucretius ended *De rerum natura* with a plague, which Hass succinctly mentions in “State of the Planet”: “The bodies heaped in the temple of the gods” (*Time and Materials* 56). The Roman philosopher depicts a wasteland of unburied bodies avoided by birds and beasts: “bodies piled on bodies lay in numbers unburied on the ground” (Lucretius 276). The plague caused utter destruction: “death had filled all the sacred shrines of the gods with lifeless bodies” (278). Unlike his Roman predecessor, Hass brings his poem to an end by sounding a note of optimism: “the earth needs a dream of restoration – / She dances and the birds just keep arriving. / Thousands of them, immense arctic flocks, her teeming life” (*Time and Materials* 56). It is no coincidence that the poem should come full circle by going back to Lucretius’s words about the Earth “teeming with life” first introduced in section 2 of “State of the Planet,” as if to emphasize the miracle of life, perpetually in the making. Capitalism may be intent on destroying the planet, but the beauty of the world still persists.

A Postscript: Corporeal Waste and War Statistics

Lucretius’s *De rerum natura* ends with a plague which brings about death and an unspeakable wasteland. A constellation of three poems in Hass’s *Time and Materials* – “A Poem,” “Bush’s War” and “On Visiting the DMZ

at Panmunjom: A Haibun" – concerns a similar kind of wasteland, that of corporeal waste brought about by twentieth-century wars. Though a war is very different from a plague, both share deep affinities in that they gesture towards bodies as being the locus of existence and in that they generate corporeal wastelands. Thus, the three Hass's poems form a triptych that harks back to the closing lines of Lucretius's poem. The first piece, titled "A Poem," explores the US policy of saturation bombing in the Vietnam War, "a way to defoliate the tropical forests as a way of locating the enemy and to kill the enemy if he happened to be in the way of the concussion bombs or the napalm or the firebombs" (*Time and Materials* 66).

Environmental degradation – the killing of trees in the tropical forests – is parallel to the taking of human lives, with the boundary between ecocide and homicide on a massive scale being increasingly blurred to the point of indistinction, for "the corporeal substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment'" (Alaimo 238). From an ecocritical perspective, there is no point in drawing a clear-cut boundary between the human and the nonhuman, as what both realms share is a vibrant material-semiotic substratum. In fact, the border between the *emworlded*, *embodied* mind and the Earth is conceived as being utterly porous. In this regard, Nancy Tuana has emphasized the permeability "between our flesh and the flesh of the world" (188). Such porosity is dramatically palpable in the effects of toxic chemicals released in wars on the victims' bodies. By drawing readers' attention to the sheer amount of bombs dropped on Vietnamese villagers and the resulting "damage to civilian lives" (*Time and Materials* 66), Hass overtly denounces the havoc and horror caused by the Vietnam War. As the poet explains, "there were more bombs dropped on the villages and forests of South Vietnam than were dropped in all of World War II" (66). Statistics gives a clear idea of the magnitude of corporeal waste caused by the wars punctuating the twentieth century: "In the first twenty years of the twentieth century 90 percent of war deaths were the deaths of combatants. In the last twenty years of the twentieth century 90 percent of war deaths were deaths of civilians" (66).

The Vietnam War is not an isolated example, but rather a paradigmatic one. The twentieth century was peppered with an endless litany of wars in different parts of the globe. In "Bush's War," Hass offers a general overview

of twentieth-century wars and statistics with regards to casualties in a sequence of flashbacks and flashforwards that brings to the fore the colossal monstrosity of human violence released by wars in the recent history of humanity:

Flash: Hiroshima.
 Flash: Auschwitz, Dachau, Thersienstadt,
 [...]

The gulags, seven million in Byelorussia
 And Ukraine.
 [...]

Two million Vietnamese, fifty-thousand
 Of the American young, whole races
 Of tropical birds extinct from saturation bombing)
(Time and Materials 69-70)

The root cause behind all of these wars is, according to Hass, “the rage to hurt mixed up / With self-righteousness” (70-71). The crudity of statistics and of corporeal wastelands stands in stark contrast to the lyricism of certain passages where Hass evokes the more-than-human world in spring in a German city: “The northern spring begins before dawn / In a racket of birdsong, when the *amsels*, / Black European thrushes, shiver the sun up” (68). The poem comes to an end with a quote from “Wandrer’s Nachtlied II,” a piece Goethe wrote on September 6, 1780 on the wall of a wooden cabin where he spent the night, “Warte nur, bald ruhest du auch,” which Hass translates as “Just wait. / You will be quiet soon enough” (71), underscoring the silence of death, the absence of motion which is the mark of the living.

In “On Visiting the DMZ at Panmunjom: A Haibun,” the poet turns his attention to the Korean War. DMZ stands for *demilitarized zone* in military jargon, an area, agreed upon between the parties to an armed conflict, which cannot be occupied or used for military purposes. The DMZ mentioned in the poem’s title is one located in a village just north of the *de facto* border between North and South Korea where the armistice agreement that paused the Korean War was signed in 1953. The blue buildings along the Military Demarcation Line are considered one of

the last vestiges of the Cold War. The *haibun* mentioned in the title is a prosimetric literary form originating in Japan, combining prose and haiku, which informs Hass's poem, an autobiographical account of a journey to Korea that triggers his musings on war. Pondering the staggering figures of casualties in the Korean War – “More than two and half million people died during the Korean War” (*Time and Materials* 82), soldiers and civilians alike – the poet progressively advances towards wordlessness: “There is no evidence that human beings have absorbed these facts, which ought, at least, to provoke some communal sense of shame. It may be the sheer number of bodies that is hard to hold in mind” (82). These words recall an essay titled “Study War No More: Violence, Literature, and Immanuel Kant,” where Hass writes: “War and witness. Human beings seem unable to hold in mind the enormity of their violence or the damage it has done” (131). Our species seems to be the only one that steps time again on the same stone, which is to say that history repeats itself. In the new century and millennium, wars are still being waged in different locations across the globe. Hass's poetic triptych on war is an apt reminder that there is a lot to be learnt: a dose of humility, a new way to relate to the *other*, human and nonhuman alike.

Notes

¹ Proposed in 2000 by Crutzen and Stoermer, the term “Anthropocene” refers to the current geological epoch, when humanity has become the most destructive force on Earth. They date the onset of this new epoch back to the first stages of the Industrial Revolution.

² In a letter addressed to his brother Quintus in early February 54 BCE, Cicero praised Lucretius's poetry: “Lucreti poemata ut scribis ita sunt, multis luminibus ingeni, multae tamen artis” (118). That is: “Lucretius' poetry is as you say – sparkling with natural genius, but plenty of technical skill” (119).

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MARIA CRISTINA IULI

Wanderers on the Way Into the Neighborhood of Being: Katherine Larson's Poetry of Life-forms

*"Being-ness exists in many guises."
"Existence is revealed in many ways."
(Martin Heidegger, *What Is Philosophy?*)*

*"Every natural fact is an emanation,
and that from which it emanates is an emanation also,
and from every emanation is a new emanation."
(Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Method of Nature")*

In this essay I discuss Katherine Larson's poetry collection, *Radial Symmetry* (2011) within the framework of environmental literature, as a work that interrogates the relation between poetics and knowledge of life-forms. The essay is divided into three sections. The first section provides the background for reading Larson's poetry in the context of aesthetics as a domain in which literary and philosophical discourse overlap. The second introduces the problematics of poetic languages vis-à-vis "nature" as "the house of Being" or nature as "standing reserve," by considering Martin Heidegger's reflections on Being, language, and beings in "The Question Concerning Technology" and Emerson's pluralistic, non-representational view of language in *Nature*, which provide a more specific philosophical niche for situating Larson's poetry. The third and final section delivers a close reading of some of Larson's poems meant to exemplify the difference they make in engaging "nature," "life," and "Being" by means of language: whether by taking care of those entities, or by reducing them to "standing reserve".

Aesthetics

A kinship exists between philosophy and poetry, as Heidegger remarked in *What Is Philosophy?* and as Ralph Waldo Emerson worked out in *Nature* (1836) – which Lawrence Buell defined “the first canonical work of US literature to unfold a theory of nature with special reference to poetics” (13).

The literary line that connects the eighteenth-century environmental imagination with contemporary ecological thinking intersects with philosophical inquiries into the nature of human knowledge inaugurated by René Descartes’s *Meditations* and first systematized by Immanuel Kant’s transcendental philosophy, whose differentiated fields of specialized knowledge marked the appearance of *aesthetics* as a “science of forms” within a general theory of knowledge and the emergence of the (white) modernist, humanist subject – even if, rather than the grounding figure of knowledge, such a subject appeared as the effect of a reflective manner of thinking. By thematizing the gap between phenomenon and thing, perceptions and reality, the conceivable and the communicable, aesthetics expressed the attempt of transcendental philosophy to address the failure of human cognition to assimilate the non-human, the radically different, “nature,” by encoding it under the category of the *sublime* in literature and art. While philosophically inaccessible in its in-human inexhaustible multiplicity, nature was thus paradoxically made to re-enter highly specialized forms of communication, such as art and literature, through a variety of tropes for feelings of the inexpressible or ineffable.¹

Tropes, metaphors and other kinds of reference to the “natural” world feature extensively across the entire American lyric tradition and stand out in some of the most abstract works of the great American modernist poets – for example Elizabeth Bishop, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams – as well as in the verses of contemporary poets such as W. S. Merwin, Archibald R. Ammons, Gary Snyder and, as we will see, Katherine Larson. Their works “scale up our imagination of the human” and simultaneously spell out the collapse of concepts of “man” and “nature,” central to “age-old humanistic philosophies” (Chakrabarty 206),

thus inviting re-readings that highlight the alignment of their poetics with current environmentally critical discourse.

Yet, it is not because of their contemplation of non-human life or their self-conscious exposure of the limits of human understanding vis-à-vis what Bruno Latour calls “the multiplicity of existents [...] and the multiplicity of ways they have of existing” (36), that those poems should be called ecological. Even more than in their lyric capacity to convey what David Farrier calls “a sense of geological intimacy” across vastly distant temporalities (127), the deep bond linking these poems to environmental thinking, I contend, is to be found in the specific ways they dramatize the discontinuity between environments and poetic acts and, at the same time, both undo the illusion of an ontologically *given* “environment” ready for the poet, the philosopher or the scientist to address, and bring forth a *poiesis* that reconnects the words in the poem and the worlds outside by framing and exploring – within the terms of the poem and its ways of making sense – relations between mind and environment, perceptions and phenomena as relations of meaning. In so doing, modernist and contemporary poems reveal their deep ecological awareness not when and because they engage thematically with environmental issues “in the world,” but when and because they frame singular, specific relations between worlds and words and investigate and exemplify by the same act their own capacity to create meaning and knowledge unconventionally. In this respect, and because both create relations of knowledge, we can agree with Emerson and Heidegger that poetry affirms its ecological quality through its kinship to philosophy.

My use of the expression “ecological awareness” follows Timothy Morton’s definition, in turn inspired by Gregory Bateson’s conception of ecology as “a new way of thinking about ideas and about those aggregates of ideas which I call ‘minds [...] extending from natural evolutionary forms to human cultural behaviors’” (xv). Like Bateson’s system(s) of relations, Morton’s ecological view implies a “detailed and increasing sense, in science and outside of it, of the innumerable interrelationships among lifeforms and between life and non-life” (*Hyperobjects* 128). This definition matters precisely because it underscores how the inexhaustibility of interrelations among life-forms is always contingent with living and non-living aggregates and with our ways of making them through our “filtering” media, and

how our mundane attempts to describe them are doomed to misfire, if the aim is to capture “the environment” (and, by extension, “the world” or “nature,” or “reality”) as a “solid, veridical” entity independent “of the writing process itself” (Morton, *Ecology* 30). Therefore, Morton suggests an ecology “without nature.” Once “nature,” “the environment” and “the world” are refuted as the unifying empirical objects or the ideal concepts of universal experience, the theoretical problem becomes how to integrate the multiplicities of “worlds” and observations of such worlds into something called knowledge. This has been the quintessential problem of modern poetry in the line inaugurated by Romanticism, sharply referenced by Emerson’s observation: “The method of nature: who could ever analyze it? [...] The wholeness we admire in the order of the world, is the result of infinite distribution” (“Method” 119). But what does it mean to put the exploration of the relation between mind and environment at the center of the poetic work? How is the multiplicity of experiences and worlds both implied and silenced by the poetic form? What ecology is enacted by poems in their observations of “natural facts”?

An enlightening example of the labor required to accomplish the paradoxical effort of keeping the overwhelming complexity of the environment unknowably teeming while unifying it in the poetic act, of binding some form of human understanding to world-making is precisely Marianne Moore’s distinction between the states of “unconfusion” and “confusion” that the mind submits to its own proof – rather than to any proof of nature – in the poem “The Mind is an Enchanting Thing,” or in the long poem “The Octopus,” where “pseudopodia” – itself a designation deriving from Moore’s training in biology – *seemingly* organizes a poem *seemingly* about Mount Tacoma, where knowledge of environmental ecologies – while painstakingly detailed – is always already an effect of self-referential mental processes. But perhaps the most telling definition of Moore’s un-naturalized poetics is given by Moore herself in the three remaining lines of the final version of “Poetry,” after her relentless process of revision: “I too dislike it. / Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in / It, after all, a place for the genuine” (36) – where for “the genuine” we should not read a reference to an unspoiled, immediate, pure embodied experience taking place in an unfathomable environment

outside the poem and represented by it, but rather, if a five decades history of revisions means anything, the poem's own self-referential production of "the genuine" as an act of extreme poetic compression.²

Just to give another example: William Carlos Williams's poems often run against his professed realism of the *thing*, a realism paradoxically acquired only through the exact organization of images brought forth by a poetic vision that foregrounds the mental geometry of "the thing itself." The poetic attempt to present "the rose," for instance, in the poem so entitled, starts with a declaration about the self-referential organization of the poem: while the flower is obsolete, each petal ends "in / an edge" that "cuts without cutting / meets – nothing – renews itself in metal or porcelain" (44). The difference between how the rose is perceived and how it is communicated, expressed in the emphasized deconstruction of the metaphorical language of poetry, marks the anti-realism of Williams's poetics, reveals the asymmetry between the rose as a natural fact (whatever that may be) and the rose as a trope, and elects that asymmetry as its focus: "to engage roses becomes a geometry."³

This preoccupation about the nature of the relation between mind and reality is also central to Wallace Stevens's poetry, escalating in his late works – as Cary Wolfe has brilliantly detailed in his study on Stevens which also expounds a theory of *Ecological Poetics*. As Wolfe points out, for instance, "The Idea of Order at Key West" stages the first order observations of the irreducible gap between the perception of the song of the woman singing "the world in which *she* sang" and our awareness that "there never was a world *for* her / Except the one she sang and singing, made" (Wolfe, *Ecological Poetics* 47).

Poetry such as Moore's, Williams's and Stevens's stays clear of what Morton calls "ecomimesis:" a rhetorical strategy that encapsulates the desire "to go beyond the aesthetic dimension altogether, [...] to go beyond art" in order to "evoke a sense of the reality of nature" (Morton, *Ecology* 31). Both strategy and desire for "reality" are grounded in the presumption of correspondence between "representation" and "truth," in turn dependent on the philosophically pre-modern presumption of language transparency, and completely oblivious to the idea that words have meaning only by reference to other words. But the philosophical determinism ingrained in

realist and idealist theories, as Carsten Strathausen sharply puts it, reads aesthetic works as epiphenomena of scientific theories, missing the point of the specificities of how knowledge production is historically contingent and embedded in particular media. Such determinism as gets manifested in neo-Darwinist critical projects, Strathausen argues, “fails or refuses to acknowledge the fact that the concepts we use co-determine the objects we analyze,” and that “there is no scientific cure for the paradoxical relation between concept and object born of modern science and philosophy, because this paradox grows at its very root: ‘Logos is paradox’” (15).

In going “beyond the real and the ideal” (Poole 13) and in binding worlds to poetic acts, abstract, ecological poetry thus shares with twentieth-century anti-representational philosophies a skeptical attitude towards the Cartesian idea that the world exists as a knowable, discrete object that can be represented by the philosopher’s, the poet’s, or the scientist’s language. This enquiring mode does not aim to represent and classify, but lingers in the hiatus between language and life, allowing the “Being of being” to emerge and manifest itself (Heidegger, *What Is Philosophy?*).

Problems

The poetics of American biologist-poet Katherine Larson stands in relation, on the one hand, to the long trajectory of ecological poetics that extends from Romantic anglophone traditions to contemporary poetry, and, on the other, to the equally long critique of biologism, scientific determinism and other forms of reductionism that Emerson in *Nature* articulated against attempts to represent, classify and reduce environmental complexity – instead of being open to the ways in which what he calls *spirit* gets manifested in nature. This line of thinking reconnects Emerson to Larson via the literary tradition, but also Larson to anti-representational philosophy via Heidegger’s philosophical reflections on the relation between humanism and technology formulated in the famous 1947 “Letter on Humanism,” and in the later essay “The Question Concerning Technology.”⁴

Identifying in the distinction between subject and object the foundation of the grammar of western metaphysics (or humanism), and

finding it entirely responsible for the “homelessness” of modern man and the forgetting of Being, in his “Letter on Humanism” Heidegger charges Western philosophy with substituting essence (which we may rename essentialism) for the truth of Being, and calls for a liberation of language from the grammar of humanism and for a return to the core of thinking, which he posits as the truth of Being, the authentic dimension of what Being means. The language Heidegger uses to make the point is dense, but worth quoting at length for our argument:

Much bemoaned of late, and much too lately, the downfall of language is, however, not the ground for, but already a consequence of, the state of affairs in which language under the dominance of the modern metaphysics of subjectivity almost irremediably falls out of its element. Language still denies us its essence: that it is the house of the truth of Being. Instead, language surrenders itself to our mere willing and trafficking as an instrument of domination over beings. Beings themselves appear as actualities in the interaction of cause and effect. We encounter beings as actualities in a calculative businesslike way, but also scientifically and by way of philosophy, with explanations and proofs. (222-23)

The scandal of metaphysics, Heidegger suggests, is that it produces humanism as a structure of domination by constituting (programming, one may say) through the syntax of subject and object and cause and effect, the failure of language to function in the service of the truth of Being, leading man [sic] to forget Being and to falsely abide by the multiplicity of other beings by a relation that is both inauthentic (because it originates in the forgetting of Being) and violent, because it is actualized as “our [i.e. human] mere willing and trafficking as an instrument of domination” (223).⁵ It does not matter that language and the creator-to-creature relation may be put to good use: it is the use itself that is problematic because it reproduces an instrumental, non-authentic relation to language and Being.

By making the essence of language unavailable to *man*, the fallen state of language casts man into the state of actuality among actualities, both exposing humans to the risk of losing admission to “the house of Being” that is language, and eroding all their claims to knowledge: “We encounter beings as actualities in a calculative businesslike way, but also scientifically and by way of philosophy, with explanations and proofs”

(223). Exposing a thesis that will take a further twist in “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger eventually hints at a possibility for man to move out of his fallen state by looking to philosophy and to poetry as two distinct kinds of poiesis in the service of authentic language because both are moved by poetic creation. As he put it in *What Is Philosophy?*, between philosophy and poetry “there exists a secret kinship because in the service of language both intercede on behalf of language and give lavishly of themselves” (90).

It is in their efforts in the service of “language” as “the house of Being” – of an openness to receiving and unveiling the many ways in which “Existence is revealed” and the “many guises” in which “Being-ness exists” – that philosophy and poetry may bring man nearer not to Being, but to “*the neighborhood of Being*” to the “clearing” where man’s original task, which is to guard the truth of Being, may be performed (234, 237).

This concern for “the many guises in which Being exists” found one of its most telling images in North American literature in Emerson’s “transparent eyeball,” which seems to resolve through an image of absolute immanence the problem of the integration of the multiple impressions “generated by multiple natural objects” (Emerson, *Nature* 9), and the contradictions of being creator and creature, of observing nature while being part of nature. Recent readers of Emerson – including Stanley Cavell, Lee Brown, Branka Arsić, Cary Wolfe, and Ryan White – have discussed the significance of Emerson’s transparent eyeball metaphor not so much as the index of a transcendence gained by the poetic vision, or by the projection of a continuity between mind and nature, but rather as the possibility opened to thinking by Emerson’s awareness of the necessary partiality and contingency of all observation.⁶ Precisely as a device that allows for the contingent integration of the universe’s complexity within an organic perspective, the transparent eyeball suggests the non-immediacy of the poetic vision and its correlation to a world that it engenders and incorporates by the same act in its specific medium.

Emerson’s poetic vision unifies only contingently and paradoxically what constitutionally defies unity. Hence, Emerson’s poet is neither phenomenally continuous to a nature that pervades him, nor does it represent nature outside him. Rather, he suggests, nature is too complex for the poet to trace down – let alone to represent, in its simultaneously

infinite, inexhaustible possibilities. Nature surfaces in the adjustment of the world to the concept and not the other way around – as the epigraph from Plotinus in the 1836 edition frames it: “an image or imitation of wisdom, the last thing of the soul; Nature being a thing which doth only do, but not know” (*Nature* 1836, 0); it gets shaped for human apprehension and understanding through what Heidegger calls *Gestell*. *Gestell*, or enframing, is “the destining of technology” (“Technology” 331), an “ordering”, an imposition, a non-originary way of structuring thinking that orders nature and the human’s relation to itself and to nature outside the thinking of Being. It is responsible for preemptively foreclosing the possibility “that man might be admitted more and sooner [...] to that which is unconcealed [...] in order that he might experience as his essence the requisite belonging to revealing” (331).⁷ Enframing remains within the mold of metaphysics, completely absorbed in beings (things, creatures, objects), and in logical, rational concepts; oblivious to Being and to the thinking of Being.

Gestell/enframing is the logical matrix on which humanist ontological and epistemological claims depend. As a relation that orders nature – and man – as “standing reserve” or “resource” by authorizing a thinking that produces “use” as a destiny, *Gestell* is the essence of modern technology, and as such, it brings forth a world by revealing nature as the chief storehouse of the standing energy reserve (324). Heidegger sees it as the danger intrinsic to technology for man’s progress toward the truth of Being, because it institutes an inauthentic relation of man with himself and with nature (see Wolfe, *Before the Law*). This inauthenticity averts man from his proper task: to take care of the truth of Being and to reveal the truth of the world, whose undetermined destiny “is heralded in poetry, without yet becoming manifest as the history of Being” (Heidegger, “Letter” 242).

Both Emerson and Heidegger condemn improper (i.e.: inauthentic) ways of addressing nature, distinguishing between undetermined nature and nature as the standing reserve of energy available for instrumental use. This difference recalls the Emersonian distinction between wood and wooden objects in *Nature*: “It is this which distinguishes the stick of timber of the wood-cutter, from the tree of the poet” (9). It is also the distinction Heidegger makes between man and human resources. Both thinkers warn against the manipulation and systematization of the natural world

performed by the scientist, himself a byproduct in the chain of “trafficking with Being” (Heidegger, “Letter” 223).

Following this reasoning, we may say that by acting under the determination of science and calculation, woodcutter and scientist alike act as the owners of the world, and become the willing or unaware instruments of the reduction of nature to standing reserve. Even language – which for Heidegger is the house of Being – is determined by such “destiny.” If, for Heidegger, man “is not the lord of beings” but “the Shepherd of Being” (“Letter” 245) distinguished from other creatures and things by the task of guarding Being and attending to its truth through the special – authentic – relation he is supposed to have with language, then how is man to fulfill this task?

To Emerson, a way out of instrumental reason toward authenticity appears in the capacity of the poetic sentiment to attend to that “property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet,” as he puts it in the “Language” section of *Nature* (21).⁸ Similarly, in “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger suggests that “the saving power” may be glimpsed in what is poetic in every art or, in other words, “in every revealing of essential unfolding into the beautiful” (“Technology” 340). However, unveiling is neither immediate nor “naturally” available, and can be thought of only when the question of technology – that is, of the relation between knowledge and reason which is the epistemological condition of truth – is addressed in the arts. As he put it, “only if reflection upon art, for its part, does not shut its eyes to the constellation of truth in relation to which we are *questioning*” (340). Poetic thinking, an original thinking that in Heidegger’s words “has no result. Has no effects,” exists authentically only in the words of poetry, in a “saying [...] higher than the validity of the sciences, because it is freer. For it lets Being – be” (“Letter” 259).

Radial Symmetry

It is in the philosophical passage opened by Emerson and taken up by Heidegger, in which philosophy and poetry share a secret language that “lets Being be,” that we can best situate the work of Katherine Larson.⁹ Molecular biologist, field ecologist, and contemporary poet, Larson has

published in several specialized journals. Her first collection, *Radial Symmetry*, was published in 2011 after she was selected by Louise Glück as the winner of the Yale Series of Younger Poets. The collection is organized in four sections, showcasing Larson's poetic evolution across fifteen years of writing and three continents of fieldwork as a marine molecular biologist. Section three stands out as a unit entirely dedicated to the longest poem in the collection, "Ghost Nets," written in 2009 for a collaborative project on the ecologies of the Sea of Cortez developed with visual artist Heather Greene, and inspired by the observation of the impact of gill nets on the marine ecosystem of the Californian Gulf area.¹⁰

In her foreword to the collection, Louise Glück singles out the poem as "a kind of dreamlike diary of being," where "the precision and variety of Larson's impressions, their layered abundance, correspond to the gleanings of some very lucky (and actual) nets," highlighting an exactness in the presentation of observed lifeforms that applies to the entire collection; Glück also points out that the title makes of the poem a protest by implication: "an informed defense of unprotected life in the face of casually pervasive human destructiveness" (xiv). Glück's idea of unprotected life being guarded by poetry echoes Heidegger's view of poetry as the language that guards the truth of Being. However, her political reading of Larson's poetics is rather overstated. While life forms figure prominently in Larson's poetry, particularly as contingent configurations of the shifting, changing network of relations the poetic act generates and brings together with exactitude, they are never subsumed under a generic concept of "life," as something already given that must be protected as such because endowed with positive value. For this reason, pace Glück, the multiplicity of unstable life-aggregates in Larson's poetry is less a symbol of political resistance to ecocide than an attempt to creatively press language into unexpected configurations of imagined ecologies – if we understand ecologies to mean, with Gregory Bateson, systems of relations. In other words, if Larson's poetry guards the truth of Being, it is not primarily by virtue of "the thing said," but because of "the quality of the saying."

The title of the collection, *Radial Symmetry*, points to the self-referential process by means of which, as systems of reference, taxonomies mean in relation to their internal logic: "radial symmetry" is the metaphor for a form of symmetry proper to animals such as starfish, which display identical

parts arranged in a circular fashion around a central axis. The title also evokes the biological process of self-organization by means of which some marine organisms such as starfish, corals, and jellyfish may start life with bilateral symmetry, but develop a different type of symmetry as adults. The lack of correspondence between starfish classified as bilaterally symmetrical and their adult forms, which are radially symmetrical, suggests, first of all (as the scientist most cited by Heidegger, Jacob Von Uexküll, insisted in his studies on perception and functionality in living things; see Sagan), that different forms of marine organisms have different ecological habitats as specific environments to which each animal establishes a corresponding relation. In this respect, radial symmetries exemplify Morton's claim that "there is no nature" in general terms, but only lifeforms – with the rejoinder that lifeforms are no "raw data" (to use, again, Gregory Bateson's expression); that the world of any organism – including us – is always already structured, and that its structuring is self-referential, exclusive, blind, and "observable" (we can say, perceivable) only by second-order "observations," that is to say, at a higher level of abstraction from the place/time of its happening, and can be communicated only through notational systems governed by different temporalities and locations from those established at a biological level (the living of the living organism) and at the level of consciousness (perceptions, awareness).¹¹ For poetry this is good news, because it brings back language as the conceptual filter that binds communication and consciousness in forms through which the poet creates her symmetries (Larson), geometries (Williams) or ideas of order (Stevens) in a language that aims to not be predetermined by "trafficking with beings," and that for this reason we may call ecological.

If we read Larson's poetry with this observation in mind, we see why the perspective framed by Emerson's and Heidegger's questions is helpful in focusing on the formal processes and the poetic forms through which we approach phenomena. Attending to the shifting morphologies of "unprotected life," Larson's lyrics enact the tensions between – in Heidegger's metaphor – an original thinking that "reaches no result and has no effects" ("Letter" 259), and a language that *destines* morphological multiplicity and diversity to become standing reserve. At a crucial stage in the history of our and other species, when "what saves us" seems utterly

out of reach, hidden by the technology and by inauthentic language that segments the environment into “things,” Larson’s lines let us see what our thinking habits and our inauthentic language would blind us to: “Hybrid forms, shiny parabolas everywhere” (“Coriolis” 37).

By centering the extraordinary polymorphic force of nature and our ways of observing it, Larson approaches the mysterious manifestations of life forms tentatively, with the humility of a biologist and the grace of a poet, suggesting through unusual syntax, unexpected parallelisms and striking images, hidden relationships, resonances, and overlappings between forms: living systems and symbolic systems are engaged, forced at times, into relations first invisible, then imaginable and finally structured through/in the formal organization of the poem. As she writes in the central section of “Almost A Figure”:

I was in Belfast, you were hospitalized and
 tested. I kept dreaming of doctors with enormous hands
 abusing flowers.
 And of a sericulture room, dimly lit

where the single
 long filaments of silkworms
 were drawn from empty cocoons
 by machines –

*My entomology professor once said:
 On the cephalothorax of the brown recluse
 there is a pattern like a violin.*

Forgive me this old habit. It is dangerous to make suffering beautiful.
 (23; italics in the original)

The marvelous appearance of living forms (the brown recluse stands out first, and then, in backward reading, the silkworms, the abused flowers, the enormous hands, the hospitalized body) is not delivered as shapeless recipient of “life,” but always in the plural manifestations of living

architectures' formal elegance. There is no nature degree zero in the precise naming of multiple life forms that inhabit this poem, only forms inspiring more forms and lyrical metamorphoses set out in order to make the invisible visible through the poem's organization of images, analogies, quotations, and contrasts. The poem risks a free fall into stereotype ("to make suffering beautiful"), into the language of the inauthentic ("This old habit"). Yet, by juxtaposing different enframings of life forms – in poetry, medicalization, the silk industry and, in the final stanza, sculpture – it thematizes observation as the medium that makes visible the multiplication of "the world" into mutually irreducible system/environment relations, while also inviting comparisons of the different ways distinct media have of establishing self-referential relations with those lifeforms.

In diagnosis, the patient's body is recoded by medical signs and associated to the inauthentic language of science, but also to poetry (Akhmatova is summoned in the first line of the poem), to art (the violin), and to industrial, extractive relations of dominion: caterpillars spin silk filaments only to be boiled into dead matter before completing their life-cycle. Poesis brings forth poetry and silk, but each process of emergence implies a singular relation to language, thinking, and value: poetry may only keep us wandering closer to "the clearing of Being," but there is no doubt that capital accumulation encounters beings only as "actualities in a calculative businesslike way" (Heidegger, "Technology" 223) as objects of dominion. The silkworm, as Ingrid Diran's re-reading of Marx's alienation put it, is used in Marx "as an entirely material figure for life under real subsumption [...]. Silkworms are that unfortunate species in which life-activity has so long coincided with labor-power as to be naturalized as value, although this valorization has come at the expense, precisely, of the silkworm's life cycle" (21). The forking paths are symbolized by the violin's unconventional association to the image of "free," useless, un-destined, brown recluse vis-à-vis the image of a cocoon emptied out of the caterpillar "whose living phase-change has been subordinate to a phase-change of value," and literally turned into "standing reserve" (21) by and for the silk market. In the same vein, Larson contrasts the abusing hands of doctors in the hospital scene with "*clay arms and hands of women*" (21; italics in the original) displayed in the artist's window in the last stanza.

By acknowledging how life is structured by different knowledges, Larson brings forth a poetics that addresses Being by generating non-functional, non-instrumental, non-destined relationships of knowledge that are un-*productive*, lead to no “end” and thrive in deconstructing identities, bringing the conventional back into the play of relations that may generate surprising and hybrid forms. This mode of composition encases a theory of knowledge in which different codes impinge on each other and get remixed in poems that – as Glück points out – are often organized as dreamscapes affording a transient unity of vision. As Larson put it in an interview:

you have poems in the book that have aquatic entomology and then ancient Egyptian burial rites. You know, and it's like, so what is the common ground? How can you write your way into a place where these things come into relation? I feel like when these disparate things are forced into relation, which they are in a poem, and a poem is kind of one of the only places that this kind of thing can happen where you can move so associatively instead of so logically or so rationally in some ways, really surprising things end up happening. (Donovan n. pag.)

There is nothing revolutionary in these words, which return us to the scene of surrealism and other modernist avant-garde practices. Yet, what is crucial for poetry as a medium for thinking ecologically is Larson's effort to theorize relations as central to a formal exploration of environments, and poetry as a unique niche where singular, undetermined, non-logical relations of knowledge are possible. Following Diran's framing of Marx's theory of value as “a paradigm of transmutability” whereby “to become valuable, life and non-life must become signs of their exchangeability, and thereby undergo an algebraic or semiological reduction” (10), we can see poetry as a strategy of resistance to precisely the semiological reduction of life and non-life to value, to valuable life.

This is what Larson underlines in her 2013 sonnet, “Coriolis,” that takes its title from the inertial or “fictitious” force that acts on rotating objects. The poem blurs the difference between one lifeform and the other, their inside/outside distinctions while also suspending implied parasite/host attributions by making it impossible at first reading to tell, for instance,

which is the host and which the parasite: fungus or cacti? Is the poem addressing sick cacti that folded fungus inside, or are fungus hosting sick cacti? Much depends on how we read each single word in the first line, whether as a sequence of images, or semantically, and even in the second option, “shrouds,” suspended as it is between the first and the second verse, is ambiguously positioned as a noun or a verb. This suspension of meaning is kept until the stanza turns into analogy with the covered furniture in seasonally vacated houses, but the ambiguity never entirely disappears, both because of the semantic association between “shroud” and “mystery,” and because of the process of covering over and/or stripping off, protecting and eroding, growing and decaying affects, like rotating winds, all “discrete lifeforms, non-life, and their relationships” (*Hyperobjects* 128) – to use Morton’s definition.

The alliterative structure, dominated by hissing sounds, evokes the instability of life conditions under the dominance of eroding winds, implied in the reference to Coriolis, and installs transience – semantically, physically, and structurally – in the poem as a principle affecting all embodied life forms. Coriolis, a fictitious force not unlike poetry, turns out to be the poem’s structuring principle, destabilizing an order of signification that the poem evokes as the promise of scientific knowledge only to overturn it in the final couplet. The poetic voice simultaneously addresses itself – the subject of enunciation and its indeterminate interlocutors – and its implied recipients with a “you,” the two united by their belonging to the human species. An epistemological unhinging opens the poem to the possibility of unusual morphologies now observed in their biological and rhetorical polyvalence, as if by two modes of observation activated at the same moment:

Sick cacti folded inside fungus shrouds
like a summer house in winter
when the furniture is hushed in cloth.

Roof with its shingles stripped off, porcelain
with its century rinsed in snowmelt.

Even the spoons collect their light like sleep.

This is not your house, not your bowl
of disarticulated crinoid stems, not the green
phosphorescence of terrarium moss
so spring it hurts your eyes.

These are not your woods, not your striped
tree snails, not your oxygen whose
eddies drift so fluently between the lungs
of certain molluscs, man.

Hybrid forms, shiny parabolas everywhere.
This is not your earth.
("Coriolis" 37)

The biblical tone of the injunction: "this is not your earth" de-idealizes the human subject, progressively marginalizing it, if not pushing it altogether out of the signifying system established by the poem against the enframing of the human as the symbol of self-assumed sovereignty produced by metaphysics and magnified by the Old Testament. The uttering "you" that questions and knows is ousted from its epicentrality in the poem by a centrifugal sequence of negative affirmations ("This is not your house / These are not your woods / This is not your earth"), apparently generated by a higher – subjectless – instance which exposes its inconsistency. The subject is de-formed as a mis-knowing subject, confusing his world for the world: "These are not your woods, nor your striped / tree snails, nor your oxygen whose / eddies drift so fluently between her lungs / of certain molluscs, man."

In the poem "Statuary" radial symmetry is a metaphor for yet another variation on the theme, the endless permutation of inside and outside, the self-referential transformation of species and their embodied enaction. Species are seen as biologic machines processing their outside as their own inside, thus suggesting unexpected similarities between lifeforms – and between Being and beings – that defy instrumentality:

but the earthworms
 seem to think it all right
 they move forward
 and let the world pass
 through them they eat
 and eat at it, content to connect
 everything through
 the individual links
 of their purple bodies to stay
 one place would be death.
 (*Radial Symmetry* 3)

Larson's poesis suggests that to observe is not to represent. It centers a relation with an environment and the thinking of thinking that couples the mind and the body, language and consciousness as the main filter of our access to the world's excessive complexity: "Between worlds we pass through and that pass through us" binding possibilities into forms "is the mind" (3). This is the point of "Metamorphosis," which juxtaposes the abstraction of "life, life, life" with the multiple, transient and singular life forms defying any night in which all living forms are black:

We dredge the stream with soup strainers
 and separate dragonfly and damselfly nymphs –
 their eyes like inky bulbs, jaws snapping
 at the light as if the world was full of
 tiny traps, each hairpin mechanism
 tripped for transformation. Such a ricochet

 of appetites insisting *life, life, life* against
 the watery dark, the tuberous reeds.
 (57)

Under the poet's care, the multiplicity of living forms, examples of empirical life vis-à-vis "the world" resists the de-differentiation of life and alerts to a strategy of knowing afforded by poesis: "the integrity of impression made by manifold natural objects"; when we speak of nature in this manner, Emerson declares, "we have a distinct but most poetical

sense in the mind" (*Nature* 9). This is the poetic constitution of life forms, attained when the mind selects what it can see from the multiplicity of life forms it must not be able to see and yet continue to contemplate blindly. It also means resisting the reduction of the labor of life to commodity.

In "Crypsis and Mimicry," the science lesson is pressured by the creation of poetry, revealed as an alternative metaphor for all knowledge that, in the impossibility of a point-for-point correspondence between the complexity of environments and the complexity of systems, must proceed blindly. As Larson put it in an interview, in science you "have hypothesis, observation, and testing, and it sort of proceeds in that manner. But [...] your field of knowledge is fragmentary and you get to the place where you can't exactly see beyond that horizon, you have to rely in some ways on intuition to get to that new place, and [...] analogy and metaphor" (Donovan n. pag.).

I used to believe that science was only concerned
 With certainty. Later, I recognized its mystery.
 There isn't language for it –
 The way I can see you when you are shining.
 Our roots crypsis, our wings mimicry.
 (*Radial Symmetry* 12)

Not seeing/seeing/not to be seen are temporary shifts in the conditions of lifeforms and their environments, as the difference between crypsis (hiding in the background) and mimicry (imitating another species behavior) foregrounds. As Larson puts it: "this sort of gap sometimes that happens where you can perceive something completely differently, you know? And if you can embody that, if you can create a structure for that in a poem – this sort of living perception – that's really what keeps me going" (Johnson n. pag.).

Claiming the status of poetry as the place where the invisible complexity of life can be revealed is a way of taking care of and guarding Being, a way of wandering in its neighborhood by abiding in poetic language. Thus, it seems appropriate to entrust the words of the poet as the epigon of our reflection: "Writing offers a tremendous sense of freedom – the freedom to engage, to invent, to shape, to approach, to imbue. At this point in

my life, it's really no longer a choice. It's impossible for me to think of being without it" (Johnson n. pag.).

Notes

¹ Timothy Morton and Cary Wolfe have both addressed the question of the romantic trope of the "ineffable" in poetry. Morton aligns his elaboration with the aesthetic dis-course of Object Oriented Ontology, while Wolfe develops a pragmatist theory rooted in second order cybernetics, social systems theory and evolutionary biology.

² For an extensive discussion of Moore's poems see Costello; Erickson; Nardi.

³ On Williams's poetics, particularly from a post-humanist and formal point of view, see Payne, especially the first chapter.

⁴ For a critical history of the essay, see Rabinach.

⁵ When used in this text, the masculine, gendered, universalized term "man" (instead of human) is a reference to Heidegger's original and it means "human."

⁶ Stanley Cavell inaugurated a renewed reading of Emerson away from both Romantic idealism and skepticism in *In Quest for the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (1994) and in *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes* (2003). For what concerns this essay, I am indebted to the re-reading of Cavell from the perspective of Nikhlas Luhmann's social systems theory inaugurated by Cary Wolfe. See Wolfe "The Eye" and *Ecological Poetics*, and White.

⁷ For a thorough discussion of Heidegger's "gestell" in relation to biopolitical thinking, see Campbell, especially ch. 2. On Derrida's deconstruction of Heidegger in a posthu-manist frame, see Wolfe *Before the Law*.

⁸ Except where otherwise indicated, the quotations from Emerson's *Nature* are from the Library of America edition of *Essays and Lectures*.

⁹ On Heidegger reader of Emerson via Nietzsche, see Cavell "Aversive Thinking"; Zavat-ta.

¹⁰ See the project description and visual archive at the Heather Green *Ghost Net Project* website.

¹¹ I have discussed the relation system/environment in social systems theory ad second order cybernetics inspired by the biology of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela elsewhere, and refer readers to those discussions ("What Meaning" and "Osservare il Pos-tumanesimo"). My understanding of these processes owes plenty to Cary Wolfe's teach-ings and theoretical elaborations of those theories.

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JANE DESMOND

Poetry, Animals, and the Imaginative Ethnographies of Creaturely Lives

The pesky fly, the stolid donkey grazing in a field, a lowing cow, the turnstile effect of rushing whirlpools, striving salmon swimming upstream, a gentle breeze whispering against our eardrums, the nanosecond, the deep time of millennia, the light years of transit of a dim star's midnight glow finally reaching our gaze –

For two decades now we have been stretching our academic work in the humanities to embrace the intellectual challenge of conceiving our objects of study more expansively – as humans as part of vibrant, more-than-human worlds – and terming this work the “Animal Turn,” “Post-Humanism,” or the “New Materialism,” among other names. Each of these takes a different route towards the questions of decentering “the human” as our locus of value, and each approach (whether anchored in such disciplines as literature, humanistic social sciences, science and technology studies, feminist studies, post-colonial studies, ethnic studies, or cultural geography) foregrounds its own stakes, modes, and objects of analysis. Each offers analytical and political affordances – highlights some issues while backgrounding others. But, taken together we can see a striving to conceive of relations that place human experience and cultural production in larger relational frames, all the way up to the emerging field of “planetary studies.”¹

In this article, working from an anthropological point of view of the more-than-human, I bring into conversation the notion of social science's multi-species ethnography and literary studies – especially an examination of poetic forms. I am interested above all in what poetry can do – that is, its *cultural work* – as a mode of helping us articulate human relations with non-human animals, and how it might engage not only our creative imaginations but our potential for empathy.

I focus on the capacity of creative writing to offer us so many viewpoints

about how to be in the world and how to encounter it, name it, imagine our futures and reimagine our pasts. Recent studies have argued that literature can actually improve our capacity to experience empathy – a much needed capacity in times of cultural conflict sharpened by economic pressures (see Chiaet; Kaplan). Unlike non-fiction, which pretends to simply render that which is supposed to be “true,” creative work embraces the inability to know, the multi-perspectival nature of knowledge, and the multiple and even contradictory meanings that accrue to any act of representation – whether verbal or visual, performative, or material. Embracing complexity and connotation, literature demands a deeply engaged interpretive act from ourselves as co-creators, not simply as textual consumers.

This multiplicity offers us the opportunity to imagine differently and in so doing can potentially be liberatory. It can chart new paths to the unknowable, like the lives of beings physically quite different from ourselves – like fungi and biomes, lichens, mountains and comets, root systems and trees, and that category of living beings we designate as “animals.” As anthropologist Anna Tsing notes, “[m]aking worlds is not limited to humans” (22). However, becoming aware of those multiple ways of making worlds requires attending to beings and phenomena beyond the human, what Tsing terms developing the “arts of noticing”: “Twentieth-century scholarship, advancing the modern human conceit, conspired against our ability to notice the divergent, layered and conjoined projects that make up worlds” (22), she says. Working against an ahistorical notion of “natural history,” Tsing argues that “[n]onhuman ways of being, like human ones, shift historically. [...] ways of being are emergent effects of encounters” (23). To see these other lifeworlds, she suggests, we have to learn to “look around, not just ahead” (22) – in other words, we must work to notice. In this one phrase she subtly references not only our own front-facing binocular vision and our visual-centric way of encountering the world, but also invites us to see the lives going on around us – including those animal lives with different visual and sensorial systems.

Of course, who and what falls in and out in this category of “animal” is culturally and historically specific, as an entire strand of work in human-animal studies demonstrates. “Animalization” – an association of certain populations, like the enslaved, or females, with animals, as a

denigrated category somehow “below” the human – is a concept with long roots in European cosmologies. It underwrote concepts of “civilization” and “barbarity,” providing a rationale for colonization from the fifteenth century onward. Its legacies continue to provide substrata for violence and disenfranchisement, as recent works in literary studies by Zikkiyah Iman Jackson and Alexander Weheliye have argued.

And within the “animals” category, species differentiation is mapped onto culturally specific valuation. Consider attitudes toward insects, the most prevalent animals on the planet, yet largely ignored – most often seen as pests not pets. Mark Twain, a particular focus of nineteenth-century American literary studies, deserves an appearance here. Shelley Fisher Fishkin has gathered a treasure trove of Twain’s writings about animals in *Mark Twain’s Book of Animals*. Sometimes of course, as we see in children’s stories and fairy tales, the animal is a stand-in for the human, enabling some things to be said metaphorically that might not be sayable directly. As Fishkin notes: “Twain found that making fun of animals for qualities that showed them as all too human could be a useful strategy for mounting genial critiques of human behavior” (8). And he was often critical of human cruelty towards animals, including publicly rejecting vivisection. Yet at other times we get the feeling that Twain is really homing in on his relationship with a particular species of animal, offering that relationship as a broader sketch of human relations with the “natural” world, a distinction between the natural and the cultural that only humans make of course, and then only some of the time. Of all the species that Twain wrote about, the common house fly seemed actually to vex him most. In his 1906 essay “The House Fly,” noting that over time humans have established dominion over the lion, the tiger, the hippopotamus, the bear, the whale, and so on, Twain remarks: “There isn’t a single species that can survive if man sets himself the task of exterminating it, the house fly always excepted”; nature, he writes, “cannot construct a monster on so colossal a scale that man can’t find a way to exterminate it. [...] Nature cannot contrive a creature of the microscopicallest infinitesimality and hide it where man cannot find it – find it and kill it;” only the fly can escape, it seems to Twain, and thus begins the battle of wits, technology and kinesthetics as he describes flies sneaking into airtight screens, outdancing slapping towels aimed at them

and skittling off, smiling, in Twain's words, "that cold and offensive smile which is sacred to the fly, and man is conquered and gives up the contest" (182-83).

The playful attribution of the smile to the fly may be fanciful, but it begins to imbue this enemy of humans with a sense of personality. Finally, this passage continues until Twain describes drowning flies in a washbowl, pushing each under the water to drown it with his fingertip, and then marveling as they escape and traipse up the side of the bowl, surging onward toward freedom only to be pushed back underwater by Twain again. In this mini-narrative of torture, escape, and ultimate triumph, Twain recognizes his own moral quandary of killing a being so determined to live, no matter how noxious the animal seems and how injurious to human pride. Finally, he writes, "the pathetic spectacle gave me pain," and he sent the flies, exhibiting "pitiful signs of exhaustion and despair" (184), down to their ultimate demise.

There are so many ways to read this essay – as a critique of bumbling humans outsmarted by a creature with a brain the size of a grape pit, or as a backhanded acknowledgment of the co-extensive lives of beings so unlike us yet enmeshed literally in our worlds, buzzing around our bedroom pillows on sultry nights or getting caught up in the butter at our picnics outdoors. Yet, we could also read this short essay as a sort of, at times, playful "multi-species ethnography": a record and analysis of relations across the species barrier, of lives lived at least in parallel and often in concert, and oh so closely observed, even in jest.

Even Langston Hughes, although he did not write about animals as often as Twain, gives us a glimpse of what attending to lives other than our own might be – about the empathic power of creative writing to render a more than human world. Consider this passage from a short piece penned during World War 2, February 3, 1945, printed in the African American newspaper *The Chicago Defender*, and titled "The Animals Must Wonder." Noting that newspaper men report from the front that farm animals run crazed through the streets he writes:

Animals, of course, do not know the difference between Nazis and Allies. To a gentle old plow horse deserted by his fleeing owners in the Aachen sector of the Western Front, the guns of both sides must sound like the very roar of hell

itself. To a herd of sheep whose pasture is suddenly invaded by flame-throwing tanks, it must seem as if the world has gone mad. [...] To suddenly be deserted in an empty house on a day when the very air explodes like thunder, [...] left-lonesome cats and dogs and birds in cages must think the end of time has come. (134-45)

These animals, literally caught in the crossfire of human fear and aggression, are unlikely to have any concept of an “end of time,” as that temporality is a human trope, but incomprehension and terror as their daily lives are literally pounded to shreds in front of their eyes is surely not far off the mark. To recognize the impact of our war-making on animals is one small act of the larger challenge of rewriting history with a multi-species eye, as historians like Erica Fudge have suggested.

Multi-species Ethnography

Over the last decade or so, in anthropology we have seen calls for “multi-species ethnography” as a new methodology, a way of adapting that defining stock-in-trade of cultural anthropology – ethnography – to the reconceived notion of who is an agential subject. Traditionally of course, ethnographic studies of groups or communities, whether medical workers or artists, rural communities, working class neighborhoods, or urban elites, have tried to capture something of the ways in which contemporary communities create their worlds, ascribe meaning, and apportion access to goods and power. What happens though when we widen that definition of a community to include both human and non-human entities?

Building on the work of theorists like Eben Kirksey and Stefan Helmreich in their 2010 article, “The Emergence of Multi-species Ethnography,” Thom Van Dooren and Deborah Bird Rose invite us to consider the challenges and possibilities of creating “lively ethnographies,” of storying worlds beyond the human; to do so, they argue, “demands an attentiveness to the ways in which others make and live their worlds, it demands ethnography” (91); such writing can be a form of witness, they

assert, and rest on a sense of responsiveness and responsibility, to “seize our relational imagination” (91).

The notions of responsiveness, a mutually effective and affective relationality, and on-going becomings between the human and more-than-human, echoes across several disciplines, discourses, and communities from the New Materialism to Indigenous Studies. Jane Bennet, for instance, urges us to understand the world as filled with “vibrant matter,” so that we do not simply see the world as a backdrop for human action. Indigenous theorists, like Sisseton Wahpeton, Oyate scholar Kim TallBear and Metis anthropologist and artist Zoe Todd, have noted that a wider kinship-based notion of how humans relate to the non-human world, and the attribution of vitality to those worlds, is also a long-standing part of some native cosmologies and epistemologies. The “new materialism” is not really so new, they assert, except that it is now located in Euro-American derived epistemologies.

While these larger discussions of the “more than human” often include plants, lichen, the weather, geology, and so on, for those of us in “animal studies” or “human-animal studies” this notion of seriously engaging the lives of the more than human means focusing on the category of “animal” and how humans define themselves with, against, and in relation to non-human animals. Langston Hughes and Mark Twain use narrative forms like the essay. But here I want to focus more specifically on poetry to argue that, with its power of condensation, its demanding use of sound, line breaks, diction and metaphor, which affect us on both the linguistic and non-linguistic level of assonance, consonance, and meter, it can be an extremely effective and affective way to limn these observations and to create lively multi-species artistic ethnographies.

At the heart of this discussion lie questions of the power (and limits) of representation and articulation, which I will return to at the end of the article. But for now let me underline two points. First, this article focuses solely on forms of verbal representation, and within that delves most deeply into poetic forms to think through what poetry might offer as a mode of connection and empathy across human and non-human animals. Other art forms, like dance, visual arts, and music each offer their own possibilities and limitations (see Desmond “Moving Across”). Secondly, I

start from the presumption that all human created forms of representation are necessarily, by definition, anthropocentric, in the specific sense that they can only articulate our responses to the world as we encounter it as historically and culturally situated humans. Imagination is the tool that enables us to attempt a bridge across species-specific world creations. This attempted bridging is always an in-process practice, always imperfect and incomplete, and necessarily so.

However, I argue here that *poetic forms* may be especially powerful modes of imagining other-species-worldings. First, because such works can evoke empathic responses, as noted above, but secondly because the specific work demanded of the reader of poetry, with its gaps, links, sonic emphases, and suspended line breaks that call the mind to creative work, may be especially powerful as a mode of provoking not only attention but empathy and connection across species lines. While other literary forms such as the essay or novel also call on the reader's imaginative skills, they typically provide more guideposts in terms of description, narrative structure, contextualization, and explications.

Why Focus on Poetry?

Poet, teacher, and critic James Logenbach, discussing lyric poetry, calls this “not extractable knowledge, but what feels like a form of thinking that transpires in the time it takes to read the poem” (153). In other words, for the reader, encountering poetry is a highly demanding performative act. Of course, this performative engagement – the reader's response which both completes and enlivens the text (see Tompkins) – is the case for all forms of artistic representation whose multiple meanings are activated when they meet their audiences. But with poetry this engagement of active construction and connection by the reader is highlighted as a core part of the encounter. It is in fact a structural demand and a valued aesthetic technique. When less is given on the page, more is required by the reader to “fill in the gaps” suggested by sound, metaphor, the conceptual gulf of line breaks and symbolism. If this is so, then we might also say that the work that poetry requires of us has the potential political power to render

cross-species connections as something urgent – as worth bringing into the public realm. That is, a poetry of animals is also potentially a politics of multi-species relations.

Poet and teacher Mary Oliver thrusts us towards just such an understanding of the emotional power of poetry (and its resultant political power), when she concludes her book on how to write poems, *A Poetry Handbook*, by saying that poetry “has a purpose other than itself. [...] poems are not words, after all, but fires for the cold, ropes let down to the lost, something as necessary as bread in the pocket of the hungry” (122). Just as the reader must create and recreate an imagined cross-species relation, we are called upon to articulate the role of those relations, their politics, their ethics, in the public sphere.

Yet, surprisingly, poetry has, as yet, received little attention in animal studies published in English, and most of that quite recent – in just the last few years. There are some exceptions. Cary Wolfe endeavors to bring Derridean deconstruction to meet the biological ecology of our time, underlining the role of epistemologies and representation (see *Ecological Poetics*). Onno Oerlemans, noting and agreeing that the conception of “the animal” is at the heart of so much of the social delineation of “the human” and who/what falls within that vaunted category at a specific time and place, and, following Nicole Shukin, as making animals consumable, makes the case for poetry as a genre that, above all, might do the Derridean work of actually coming face-to-face – of charting moments of recognition including those when (like Derrida’s cat) we see the gaze returned (7).

Michael Malay contributes to this idea when he writes that: “we need to examine [...] animals in particular, so as to develop forms of analysis that respect the singularity of their lives as well as the strategies poets have devised to represent them”; but even this is not enough, he says, because “even the most nuanced categories continue to offer *conceptualizations* of the animal. We reify animals in the process of speaking about them, by representing their otherness (a reality that exceeds language) through speech”; but the process can be partly resisted, since to recognize the partialness of our words enables us, as Malay asserts, to treat those words in provisional and ironic terms, that is “to hold our descriptions of animal lives at a wry distance” (27). He continues:

In *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Derrida makes a similar point in his use of “*animot*,” a neologism which literally translates into ani-word. For Derrida, “animot” is a way of insisting that we keep two things in mind when we talk about animals: first that the term “animal” is nothing more than a concept of word (a “*mot*”), and second, that our generalized word for the “animal” subsumes an incredible plethora of beings into a single category (“*animot*” sounds like the plural for animals in French, “*animaux*”) The pun thus calls to mind everything we elide when we deploy the word “animal” [...]. (27; italics in the original).

Derrida’s explication gestures towards the epistemologies that articulate the conceptual and political categories of “the animal” and “the human.” But it falls to other scholars to delineate the historical specificity and material consequences of these epistemologies. Donna Haraway’s critique of Derrida begins to lead us toward a more explicitly culturally and historically anchored analysis, when as she states: “Figures are not representations or didactic illustrations, but rather material-semiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and meanings co-shape one another” (4).

Such knowledge across species is, as I have been arguing, impossible. Yet the incompleteness and inadequateness of methods is a core part of the project of charting the potential of poetic works. The ethnographic practice of close attending to, and of acknowledging, that other world views and structurings exceed our own, whoever that “our” may be, can be a crucial starting point for a poetic practice that struggles with the unknowable of other-species worlds. It can help us use the affordances of a particular artistic form – poetry – in the service of attempting to bridge or at least gesture towards that gap of unknowability across species.

Trans-species Imaginative Translation

This theoretical explication reminds us of what we know so well if we stop to think for a moment – that the worlds animals inhabit are at times so radically different from our own in terms of their own sensoriums as to be nearly incomprehensible. Consider elephants who “hear” sound through

their feet, and hummingbirds who see flowers in the UV range, and spiders who sense prey not through vision but through vibrations on their webs. Even those mammals who may be closer to our own sensoriums live in different worlds – the dog can map their world through smell in a way that leaves us in the dust.

New discoveries about animals' sensoriums and cognition reveal our gulfs of shared worlds, and yet even so, the process of trying to *represent*, as what I would term a process of *transspecies imaginary translation*, can, perhaps, best be served through poetry, with its combination of sounds, rhythm, formal structures providing cohesion to metaphoric and symbolic associations of signifiers and signifieds. This can result in an always imperfect imagined ethnology, buttressed and electrified by the way in which poetry condenses text and simultaneously multiplies meaning through its semiotic complexity. Take, for example, a small poem of acute observation by contemporary regional poet Ann A. Philips. Titled simply "Two Cows," it is from her first chapbook of poems, self-published in 2018, and titled *Keep Your Animal Eye Open*. The ambiguity of the book's title – is the "your" of the title a reference to us, or to the animal? – directs us to the difference between sight and seeing. In each poem, she trains her eyes on the daily lives of animals, directing not only our eyes but more fundamentally our *attention* to lives so unlike our own. By valuing this attention, by elevating it to the genre of poetry, of art, the poet pushes us to become observers finely attuned to the more-than-human world around us. This giving of attention – Tsing's attending to – is, I suggest, a *political* act of valuation and of validation, a politics of seeing. It both recognizes the agential lives of non-human animals, and the differences that separate their worlds from ours. Like Langston Hughes, Philips dignifies the lived experience of farm animals, but unlike him, who wrote about the apocalyptic effects of war, she strives to capture quietude, the usually unremarked, and the truly unremarkable, daily life of interactions between two cows – a duet, a performance of mutual care, an intra-species "friendship," as she calls it, rendered in the public scene of the field:

Between her friend's
Forelegs the dewlap
Lifts and falls

Under her tongue
 Lifts and falls
 The muscled tongue
 Spreading out
 Bringing back

Smells of her friend
 On each spot licking again
 Moving up the chest
 To rub at the skin
 Of the throat
 Her friend standing still
 Now going at the muzzle
 Up the side of the black jaw
 Smoothing leaning in
 Pressing her weight
 With her tongue
 Against the weight of her friend

In their corner of the field
 Her friend lowers
 Her head just a little
 For tongue on fur
 {...}
 Behind the ear
 Up the forehead
 Working the cowlick
 In the center, again,
 {...}
 Turning the heft of their heads
 Black and white
 Down to the grass.
 (n. pag.)

Philips deliberately casts this act of grooming as something passing between “friends,” a term she uses in the very first line, and several times thereafter, to alert us to her categorization of these animals as capable of

forming selective bonds of affection. Through that anthropocentric word choice – “friends” – she articulates, and *claims*, an interior emotional life for animals. This is especially unusual because these animals – cows – are so often undifferentiated – crowded into barns of hundreds, turned into living factories of milk production, identified only by an ear-tag number. Philips, however, contradicts that de-individuation by focusing on a pair of cows, a pair formed by choice, responsive to each other. In the expansive freedom of a field, they choose proximity – and touch.

Consider the kinaesthetics Philips writes about in this observational poem that appears merely to record actions, not to create them. By removing the human observer from the poem (there is no “I” of the human here), and instead recording cows’ actions only – “Her friend lowers her head, just a little, for tongue on fur” – she thrusts us into a world of bovine intimacy which, we are led to believe, exists outside and independent of human affordances.

Phillips thus offers us a creative bovine ethnography – a poetry of an intimate mutuality, harnessing the anthropocentric notion of “friends.” In naming the relationship, the poet moves from detached observer/recorder of animal actions to interpreter of their meaning – rendering the social relation of these two cows legible in terms we can understand, and implicitly positing an interior emotional life for these beings most of us rarely encounter, except in the form of their bodily products: milk and meat.

Phillips draws our attention to farmed animals and narratively places us in their scene as unobserved observers, but we remain outside of their interaction. Yet, even this evocation is substantially different from two other sorts of animal poems in English: the ones that use the animal as symbol, and those that use the animal as metaphor. These approaches utilize the animal as figure, as a means to talk about the human world, and not as entities in their own rights with worlds beyond our sensory or even intellectual comprehension. The majority of poems, I would suggest, “use” animals in this way. For example, Emily Dickinson’s “‘Hope’ Is a Thing with Feathers” is a wonderful poem and part of the Euro-American literary canon, but it is not really about avian lives. Consider this first well-quoted stanza:

Hope is the thing with feathers –
 That perches in the soul –
 And sings the tune without the words –
 And never stops – at all –
 (116)

But other poets focus instead on the moment of eye-to-eye encounter between human and non-human animal. These poets craft an “ethnographic moment,” we might say, that captures the collision between worlds, and the potential outcomes – for both parties – of that multi-species encounter. I want to move into the final part of this article now with a consideration of boundary crossing between humans and non-human animals across the mutually uninhabitable worlds of water and air.

Take for example this relatively short poem by Native American novelist, essayist and poet, Linda Hogan, who is a member of the Chickasaw Nation. “Song for the Turtles in the Gulf” is from her book *Dark. Sweet.: New and Selected Poems* (2014). In his podcast “Poetry Unbound,” Padraig O’Tuama called this poem a praise song that is simultaneously a lament, veering towards a prayer. For many Native American or First Nations communities, turtles hold a special place of honor. While each group’s cosmology is distinctive, turtles are often associated with notions of the origin of the earth, or of North America (called “Turtle Island”). In some tribal communities, the turtle may be associated with highly valued qualities like healing, wisdom, spirituality, and patience, or in others, with long life and fertility, as Akwesasne Mohawk journalist Vincent Schilling has noted. This poem was published just a few years after the British Petroleum Deep Water Horizon massive oil spill in the Louisiana waters in 2010, considered the largest marine oil spill in history, the effects of which have lingered for years. It commemorates loss on multiple levels.

We had been together so very long,
 you willing to swim with me
 just last month, myself merely small
 in the ocean of splendor and light,
 the reflections and distortions of us,
 and now when I see the man from British Petroleum

lift you up dead from the plastic
 bin of death,
 he with a smile, you burned
 and covered with red-black oil, torched
 and pained, all I can think is that I loved your life,
 the very air you exhaled when you rose,
 old great mother, the beautiful swimmer,
 the mosaic growth of shell
 so detailed, no part of you
 simple, meaningless,
 or able to be created
 by any human,
 only destroyed.
 How can they learn
 the secret importance
 of your beaten heart,
 the eyes of another intelligence
 than ours, maybe greater,
 with claws, flippers, plastron.
 Forgive us for being thrown off true,
 forgive our trespasses,
 in the eddies of the water
 where we first walked.
 (348)

Calling us into relation with other living beings, the speaker also acknowledges the specificity of the life lived by turtles as distinct from that of humans – a being who swims in the gulf yet must surface to breathe air, as do we. She makes us consider, too, this specific turtle as a unique sentient being – its life and death – “you / burned and covered with red-black oil, torched / and pained.”

For many Native American or First Nations readers sharing knowledge of Turtle Island, the poem may also read on multiple levels of devastating loss and critique that extends beyond the damage of the Deep Water Horizon disaster and the marine lives it extinguished, into the very trespass of human arrogance onto the sacred – invoked by phrases like

“another intelligence than ours / maybe greater,” and “old great mother,” from whom the speaker in the poem asks forgiveness, deploying the Christian phrase, “for our trespasses.” Unlike the Dickinson poem where the image of the bird (“a thing with feathers”) serves merely as striking metaphor for a human emotion (“perches in the soul”), in Hogan’s poem a shared lived relation with a specific turtle (“you willing to swim with me / just last month”) coexists with the cosmological significance attached to turtles, making them not just a metaphor, but a unique co-presence that simultaneously shimmers with layers of cosmological significance. The poetic condensation of the scene, the acute observations sharply etched, and the rhetorical power of speech genres of prayer all combine to render a tiny ethnographic moment of cross-species encounter that resonates with layer upon layer of meaning.

Writing from a phenomenological perspective, Tirza Bruggemann considers cross-species relations by drawing on an approach rooted in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to argue for poetry’s capacity to elicit empathy across human and non-human animal boundaries. She suggests that “it is not a question of being alike enough to establish empathy. It is rather a question of how to train the senses to be able to see this wholeness. In finding a route to accomplish this, poets can serve as a guide” (13). Here we see echoes of Tsing’s “arts of noticing,” and Van Dooran and Bird’s “storying lives” coming together. The farther from our own physical selves an animal is, the greater the breach to be bridged in generating such empathy. Poetry’s combination of condensation of meaning, where each chosen word carries weight, and expansion (the connotative values of the words selected) can shorten that bridge across species through imaginative engagement.

From amphibians, to reptiles, to fish, some of our leading poets in the USA have drawn our attention across the species line to the non-mammalian, the obviously “other” in physical terms, and to the issues of knowability and unknowability that subtend our attention, in some ways just as an ethnography produced with human collaborators is always incomplete and can only be crafted from the position of the writer/researcher, no matter how carefully s/he tries to understand the lived reality and cultural frameworks of another individual or community. But a fundamental difference in this

multi-species border crossing is that embodied sensoriums are not shared, or only partially so. While Ann Philips's cows are mammals like ourselves, described from a position of the external viewer, Hogan's gulf turtle is a reptile with which the speaker shares the watery swim. Yet fish are different – able to submerge but still inhaling oxygen for life as do we, fish live their lives entirely under water, an environment usually beyond our vision, our hearing, and impossible for us to survive in without mechanical aid – truly an alien world. Yet even this world has been captured in what we might read as an ethnographic encounter in Elizabeth Bishop's well-known 1946 poem, "The Fish." This poem is so popular, so anthologized, that is included in the national exams in Ireland, but I am not pointing to the eloquence of language here, but to the poet's close observation, for while this poem may or may not actually be about a specific fish, the act of close observation tells us of fish-ness in the orb of the eyes and the rake of the scales. It details a piscine body with exceptional detail – a deep ethnographic looking and imagining of a life lived under the sea – a life inscribed on the fish's body, giving it a unique history, and revealed only in the moment of encounter between human and animal.

I caught a tremendous fish
[...]
I looked into his eyes
which were far larger than mine
but shallower, and yellowed,
the irises backed and packed
with tarnished tinfoil
[...]
I admired his sullen face,
the mechanism of his jaw,
and then I saw
that from his lower lip
– if you could call it a lip –
grim, wet, and weaponlike,
hung five old pieces of fish-line,
or four and a wire leader
with the swivel still attached,

with all their five big hooks
 grown firmly in his mouth.
 [...]
 I stared and stared
 and victory filled up
 the little rented boat,
 from the pool of bilge
 where oil had spread a rainbow
 around the rusted engine
 [...]
 the gunnels – until everything
 was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!
 And I let the fish go.
 (Bishop n. pag.)

These two beings come eye to eye, although their eyes are so different, one with binocular vision, staring ahead, and the other with the piscine side-to-side vision of more than 180 degrees, and both with lips that can sense the cutting slice of pain. The human holds the cards, again, as the many hooks in the fish's mouth tell the life history of human encounters, and of winning freedom again and again. We can read this history, this life narrative, off the body of the fish, scarred, and marked, and pierced. The human speaker, assessing one life against another, lets the fish go. This moment of transcendent affect, marked by radiant rainbow colors turning the mundane boat with its spilled oil and creaky oarlocks, into a technicolor hyper-real, marks the empathetic bridging of life-worlds.

We could read this poem in so many ways – for meter, for syntax, for imagery (the hanging strips of skin like peeling wallpaper), or the rhymes “irises backed and packed,” or for sound (the alliterative “t”s of “tarnished tinfoil,” the shouting joy of repetition in “rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!”) – but I read it as an imaginative ethnography, a detailed description of two lives entwined, caught together in fishing line, a slim filament of tensile strength, bringing us eye to eye with the more than human world, if only we take the time to see, and hear, and track the heartbeat of that multi-species entanglement.

The capacity of art and language to exceed the literal empowers us to

render non-human lives we can never know, bodies we can never truly imagine being in, and ways of sensing, tasting, feeling, smelling, and knowing the material world we share that are quite unlike our own. This ultimate unknowability makes all the more urgent what I would call literature's capacity for *imaginative ethnography*.

Closing Remarks

Like other progressive dimensions of cultural studies "animal studies" engages scholars who not only want to understand the world better, but to change it for the better. Sometimes that involves direct action and sometimes that involves longer term changes – like changing the literary canon, or changing what counts as a subject of inquiry, or a framework for analysis. Multi-species ethnography is one such way of working for change by changing a methodology. Another is to try to understand the work that literature or any art form *does* in the world, the subtle ways that representation shapes interpretation and ultimately action in the more than human world (Desmond "Moving Across"). Literary scholar Susan McHugh puts it this way: "Representational forms and the material conditions of species life must be connected" (qtd. in Bartosch 233). But how to do this?

Since meaning is produced in the encounter between the reader and the text, this becomes our next frontier – to understand how literature and the arts more broadly do or can shape perceptions of the more than human world and ultimately acting acting acting on it. There is no simplistic one to one correspondence, of course, but neither is there a total disconnect. Representations help create the horizons of our imaginations and the taken-for-granted ideological presumptions that shape our interpretations, our ethics, and our actions. Taking animals seriously means taking writings about animals seriously, not simply with well-known poets such as Linda Hogan and Elizabeth Bishop, or the perspicacity of regional poets like Ann Philips, but all those children's stories couched in animal characters, animals in cartoons and comic books, in designs on textiles like Winnie the

Pooh pajamas, and even in the market for stuffed animals. And yes, even on those endless numbers of cat videos on *YouTube*.

Roman Bartosch and Dominik Ohrem's edited book *Creaturely Lives* asks us to take up this question of what it means to write creaturely lives, the lives of creatures unlike ourselves. This is a challenge for poets and novelists, for artists and academics. Bartosch urges us to look to the myriad ways that fiction can engage our emotions, not just in the big arcs of literary narration but in small moments of sudden comprehension and affective connection. We see these small moments, like Roland Barthes's *punctum*, studded throughout Bishop's poem. Consider these lines: "While his gills were breathing in / the terrible oxygen". That is, the earth's air that is life-giving for us can mean terrible death for a water-living creature. In that moment of co-presence by the side of the boat one is living and the other is dying. "I thought of the coarse white flesh / packed in like feathers, / the big bones and the little bones", Bishop writes. Here we acknowledge the potential of converting a living being to dead flesh – to food – underlining the oscillation of living and dying, of killing and letting go.

Surely this, like the performance of mutual care captured in Ann Philips's poem about two cows in a field, is "creaturely writing" – writing to render the lives that we can never fully comprehend. These are bodies that both resemble and dis-semble our own: not only eyes and bones and flesh, but also gills and fins and scales. Beings living in mutually incompatible worlds of air and water. Beings entwined in life and death, and as entangled as that fishing line, if only we can learn to render these creaturely encounters – with the passion of Bishop's cry of transcendent acknowledgment when she says "rainbow, rainbow, rainbow."

Notes

¹ See the Planetary Imaginaries Initiative of the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory – University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (<www.criticism.illinois.edu>).

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OWEN HARRY

Daoism and Posthuman Subjectivity in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven*

Whether focusing primarily on the influence of ecological or technological dimensions, posthumanist theorists have been consistently concerned with challenging the liberal humanist conception of the human subject as a bounded and autonomous entity. As evident from Donna Haraway's disruption of the human/nature divide via her provocative "cyborg" concept and from N. Katherine Hayles's argument – against fantasies of disembodiment through digital technologies – for the importance of understanding that humans are embedded in and dependent on a complex material world (5), posthumanists continually emphasize the interconnectedness of human subjects with nonhumans. This article engages with the conception of posthuman subjectivity developed within this tradition by Rosi Braidotti, who, in *Posthuman Knowledge*, characterizes it primarily as dynamic, embodied, and relational (11). With this decentering of the human subject, however, comes the risk of a diminished emphasis on human agency at an especially precarious time of anthropogenic environmental crisis.

Literature here plays a valuable role, modelling alternative imaginings of the human subject and illustrating their consequences for notions of agency. Posthumanists already often turn to American literary texts for such models. Throughout *Vibrant Matter* (2010), Jane Bennett repeatedly highlights the writings of Henry David Thoreau as a major influence on her theorization of matter as an active and affective force (xxiv, 2-3, 45-47), while her follow-up book *Influx and Efflux* (2020) engages extensively with the poetry of Walt Whitman to support her proposition of a "process-oriented self – a model of subjectivity consonant with a world of vibrant matter" (xv). Similarly, recognizing the historical role of literature in forming the traditional liberal humanist concept of the bounded human

subject, Pramod K. Nayar looks to late twentieth century literary texts, including several American works of science fiction, for posthumanist reframings of the human as always co-constituted by nonhumans (2). Both Bennett and Nayar view philosophy and literature as collaborators in revising dominant conceptions of the human such that human subjectivity and agency are better understood in interconnection with human and nonhuman others.

Despite recognizing the significance of American literature for developing the posthumanist project, however, critics have not been receptive to the influential role played by various forms of religious thinking in these texts' experiments in posthuman modes of subjectivity. Alongside Thoreau and Whitman, Bennett highlights American writers Wendell Berry and Barry Lopez as teachers of "how to induce an attentiveness to things and their affects" (xiv), but she pays little attention to their use of the religious imagination in doing so, despite the close attention given to all four of these writers in John Gatta's extensive study of "the religious import of American environmental literature" (6). Likewise, whereas Nayar pays close attention to Octavia E. Butler and Ursula K. Le Guin as "posthumanist authors" (129), Butler's imagined religion "Earthseed" in her Parable series is described only in secular terms as a "philosophy of interconnectedness" (143), while Le Guin's well-known influence from Daoism goes entirely unmentioned.¹ This represents a wider disinterest in religion among posthumanist engagements with American literature, one which is especially perplexing considering the wealth of critical attention given to the value of the religious imagination for post-anthropocentric thinking by scholars outside of literary studies (see Sideris; Keller; Bauman).

In this article, I highlight Ursula K. Le Guin as a prominent exemplar of the confluence of religion, posthumanism, and American literature. I begin by arguing that recent interpretations of Le Guin's work as recognizably posthumanist indicate vital overlaps between posthuman theory and the Daoist thought that has long been understood to animate her writing. Next, I attend to *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971), her most explicitly Daoist novel, to demonstrate how its protagonist George Orr embodies Daoist thinking and in doing so conforms largely to Braidotti's model of posthuman subjectivity. Finally, I will examine Orr's apparent

passivity in light of re-evaluations of the concept of *wuwei* (non-action) by scholars of Daoism, demonstrating how such a reading of Le Guin's novel suggests an alternative conception of human agency that may inform the continued development of the posthumanist project.

Posthumanism and Daoism

With its anthropological interest in cultural diversity and its criticisms of destructive environmental practices, Le Guin's fiction exemplifies Braidotti's definition of posthumanism as the convergence of the anti-humanist "critique of the Humanist ideal of 'Man' as the allegedly universal measure of all things" and the post-anthropocentric opposition to "species hierarchy and anthropocentric exceptionalism" (*Posthuman Knowledge* 2). Interpretations of Le Guin's work in relation to the concerns of posthumanist thought have gained traction in recent years. Nayar, for example, draws attention to how Le Guin's experiments in multispecies identity indicate a "rejection of any kind of autonomous subjectivity" in favor of a species cosmopolitan perspective where "empathy and connection – with all forms of life, the ecosystem and the mineral world – [are seen] as the next (necessary) stage of human evolution" (126). In the introduction to their collection *The Legacies of Ursula K. Le Guin*, Christopher L. Robinson, Sarah Bouttier, and Pierre-Louis Patoine write that "Le Guin's fiction and non-fiction moreover requires us to redefine what it means to be human, by decentering a traditional, potentially racialized and gendered vision of humans and placing them in a continuum involving animals, technology, and more generally the environment" (4). While not explicitly labelling Le Guin as posthumanist, this description of her project adheres closely to Braidotti's combined critique of universalist humanism and anthropocentrism. Neither of these readings of Le Guin, however, consider the role that Daoism plays in her experiments in posthuman subjectivity.

From her *Earthsea* and *Hainish Cycle* stories to her 1997 rendition of the *Tao Te Ching* [pinyin: *Daodejing*] and beyond, Le Guin's writing is dominated by Daoism. The Daoist ideas animating her most renowned novels, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and *The Dispossessed* (1974),

have attracted particular scholarly attention (see Mills; Cogell), but the extent of this influence was recognized even by her earliest critics, as in George Edgar Slusser's statement that Daoism "is and has always been the strongest single force behind her work"; Slusser welcomes her use of Daoism as a timely intervention into science fiction, "a literary genre long dominated by a harshly western vision of evolution and technological progress" (3). In encouraging closer attunement to an order beyond that imposed by humans, Le Guin's Daoist perspective is here suggested to be antithetical to the anthropocentric pursuit of human progress at the expense of environmental degradation.

Persistent associations of Daoist practice with passivity, however, lead some critics to see Le Guin's literary use of Daoism as politically ineffective and even as undermining the otherwise radical potential of her work. Where Dena C. Bain celebrates the "basic mythos underlying each of the novels based on the Quietist philosophy of Lao Tzu's Taoism" (223-24), it is precisely this supposed attitude of withdrawal that Fredric Jameson bemoans in Le Guin's "predilection for quietistic heroes and her valorization of an anti-political, anti-activist stance" (226). The problems of encouraging wholesale passivity are certainly apparent for any activist attempt to translate countercultural values into meaningful political change. This is especially clear in respect to the widespread change in perspective advocated by posthumanists in a contemporary context characterized by social injustice and ecological disaster. Yet, this characterization of Daoism is limited and rooted in popular misconception. Gib Prettyman argues that Jameson is "mistaken to consider [Le Guin's] Daoism an insignificant framework and to assume that it implies only static balance, ahistorical mysticism, and contemplative passivity" (72). Prettyman emphasizes the "real political work" carried out by Le Guin's engagement with Daoism through combating egoism and anthropocentrism (57), thereby suggesting more radical outcomes than a false equivalence with quietism would suggest.

In seeing in Daoist thought only a withdrawal from efforts at social transformation and a normative attempt at reconciliation with a "Nature" understood in terms of stasis or equilibrium, critics tend to overlook the ways in which Le Guin's Daoism might contribute to the posthumanist

project. In fact, much of the confusion around Daoism's emphasis on attunement with nature can be attributed to a mistaken conflation of the Romantic idea of reified "Nature," rightfully critiqued by contemporary ecocritical scholars like Timothy Morton, with the multivalent concept of nature in classical Chinese thought. As Eric S. Nelson explains, the Daoist sense of "nature" should be understood in relation to the concept of *ziran* as processual, self-organizing, and relational, a reality "that is interpreted between the poles of a fluid anarchic chaos and a hierarchically fixed and structured order": an intersecting and informative concept, *wanwu* "refers to the myriad things (non-human as well as human) in their specificity [...], equality and parity, and interconnectedness in an interthingly [...] relational whole" (10). This complex constellation of meanings clearly demonstrates a far less reductive sense of nature than the still-influential Romantic idea of an idealized domain wholly separate from human social activity. In its dynamic and interconnected unfolding, the understanding of "nature" that informs Daoism corresponds more closely with posthumanism's ontology of non-reductive or vital materiality, an ontology that undermines constructions of human subjectivity as isolated from other humans and nonhumans.

In recent years, scholars have begun to advocate greater engagement by posthumanist critics with Daoism. Nathan Eric Dickman finds in Zhuangzi – whose self-titled work, alongside Laozi's *Daodejing*, is one of the key texts of Daoism – a powerful resource for posthumanism's "critique of anthropocentric notions of humanity and subjectivity" (4). Emphasizing the similarities between Braidotti's theorization of the relational, processual posthuman subject and Zhuangzi's critique of anthropocentric conceptions that separate humanity from the rest of nature, Dickman makes the provocative claim that "posthumanism includes a lot that is just Zhuangzi in entrenched Western terminology" (2-3). In addition to Dickman's examples, an indication of the *Zhuangzi's* celebration of processual subjectivity can be found in the following passage:

This human form is merely a circumstance that has been met with, just something stumbled into, but those who have become humans take delight in it nonetheless. Now the human form during its time undergoes ten thousand

transformations, never stopping for an instant – so the joys it brings must be beyond calculation! (56)

Such non-hierarchical descriptions of the human within a dynamic and interpenetrating world demonstrate the strongly post-anthropocentric perspective of Daoist thought that supports Dickman's argument for paying greater attention to religious traditions that offer corroboration to posthumanist theory (6).

The considerable correspondences between Daoist thought and posthumanist theory are elucidated by Sebastian Hsien-hao Liao, who declares that "Daoism has since long ago pronounced the major tenets of posthumanist thinking. It may even help radicalize posthumanism" (64). Liao provides a brief but thorough comparative study, paying particular attention to the resonances of Daoist ideas with the Deleuzian concepts that inform posthumanism. Posthumanist theorists, especially those associated with Braidotti, engage extensively with the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and Liao takes such concepts that relate to ontology, subjectivation, and ethics in turn. Pointing out that it is "almost commonsense that Daoism is a philosophy of immanence which prioritizes difference and becoming" (66), Liao makes connections between the "univocal and immanent" ontology of Deleuzian posthumanism and Daoism's notion of "*qi*... or vital force" which acts as a "common foundation underlying the human subject and all other things" (64; 66). Deleuzian concepts like "body without organs," "rhizomatic flights" and "haeccity," each of which approach an understanding of subjectivity as de-essentialized and processual in connection to the plane of immanence (65), are also likened to Daoist techniques and ideas such as "sitting into oblivion," "roaming joyfully" and the "true man" (or *zhen-ren*) (66-67). The purpose of this comparative work, according to Liao, is to mobilize Daoist thought to contribute to the posthumanist development of a transversal ethics appropriate for our global Anthropocene predicament, that is, "an ethics that can re-align the relationship between the human and the non-human" (64).

Recognizing resonances between Daoism and posthumanism allows us to better understand the value of Le Guin's speculative engagement with

the former. Amy Kit-Size Chan sets a precedent for the present study in using Deleuzian concepts to interpret Le Guin's deployment of Daoism's "yin principle" throughout her novels (126-27). Chan finds a productive consonance between the Daoist *yin* and Deleuze's "body without organs," the latter defined as "a non-formed, non-organized, or destratified body that is in a state of constant flux" as well as "a process that is directed toward a course of continual becoming and not geared towards any teleological point of completion" (132). If "a body is *yang*, and a BwO is *yin*" (135), then Le Guin's use of the *yin* principle – usually associated with the feminine, the dark, and the passive (Baldrian-Hussein 1164) – to portray her characters' attitudes in novels like *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Word for World Is Forest* has relevance for conceptions of subjectivity in terms of processual becoming in relation to others rather than as a simple quietist withdrawal. As noted, critics who affirm the value of Le Guin's fiction for post-anthropocentric thought tend not to address the prominence of Daoism in her work. This reflects the typical neglect of religion in posthumanist readings of American literature. Where Le Guin's writings might seem to offer an accessible route into recognizing the value of the religious imagination for posthumanism, associations made throughout Le Guin scholarship between Daoism and passivity appear to have dissuaded critics from following this line of inquiry. To begin to redress this interpretation, the next section demonstrates how her novel *The Lathe of Heaven* indicates the confluence of Daoist and posthumanist modes of subjectivity.

The Man in the Middle of the Graph

The first of Le Guin's novels to seemingly stand apart from either the fantasy Earthsea Cycle or the future history works set in her Hainish universe, *The Lathe of Heaven* is also the first to take place on Earth, more specifically in Portland, Oregon, in the early twenty-first century. The world of the novel is ravaged by global warming, war, and economic inequality. And yet it is a world that is especially changeable. The primary character, George Orr, discovers that his dreams can transform reality, an ability that Orr finds horrifying since he cannot control the consequences of these changes. After

abusing prescription drugs in an attempt to stop dreaming entirely, he is forced by law to attend therapy sessions with psychiatrist William Haber, who uses a hypnotic technique to guide Orr's "effective dreaming" towards social goods like ending racial inequality and overpopulation. Haber's actions initially appear well meaning but he quickly becomes seduced by the possibilities of this power for perfecting human society. Charlotte Spivack describes *Lathe* as "the most explicitly Taoist work in the Le Guin canon" (60), and the novel's Daoist elements come to the fore in Orr's opposition to the megalomaniac humanism of Haber.

The first description of Orr's character comes from Haber's own initial impression: "Unaggressive, placid, milquetoast, repressed, conventional. The most valuable period of relationship with a patient, Haber often said, is the first ten seconds" (Le Guin, *Lathe* 6). Haber continues to think of Orr in terms of this preliminary diagnosis, oscillating between paternalism and outright contempt. While explaining to Orr the machine-assisted hypnotic procedure that will be used to induce a dreaming state, Haber reflects that "[t]here was an acceptant, passive quality about him that seemed feminine, or even childish. Haber recognized in himself a protective/bullying reaction toward this physically slight and compliant man. To dominate, to patronize him was so easy as to be almost irresistible" (17). By positioning Orr in such terms, Haber reveals his opposing identification as a man of action. Haber is an oneirologist, a dream specialist intent on controlling the irrationality of dreams towards progressive ends. Over time, he proceeds from directing Orr to stop the incessant Portland rain to grander displays of ameliorative power like ending racism through implementing the ideal universalist solution: turning every human's skin the same shade of gray. Near the end of the novel, after the elimination of many more social and environmental issues, Haber exclaims, "Progress, George! We've made more progress in six weeks than humanity made in six hundred thousand years!" (146). At this point, Haber has almost achieved his ultimate aim: to replicate the electrical rhythms of Orr's dreaming brain so that Haber can more efficiently use the power by himself "for the good of all," so that "this world will be like heaven, and men will be like gods!" (138).

The opposition between Orr's and Haber's dispositions acts as the primary structuring principle of Le Guin's novel, as is well noted by critics.

Spivack writes that “George the dreamer is in every way the opposite of Dr. Haber the psychiatric dream specialist. Whereas George is the perfect, passive Taoist hero, Haber is a Faustian figure, driven by a ruthless ambition for power” (61). Jameson, on the other hand, politicizes “the temperamental opposition between the Tao-like passivity of Orr and the obsession of Haber with apparently reforming and ameliorative projects of all kinds,” seeing in this contrast Le Guin’s opposition to the “imperializing liberalism which is the dominant ideology of the United States today” (227). Both critics describe Orr’s resistance to Haber’s will to power as markedly Daoist, an interpretation consistently encouraged by the novel.

Haber himself recognizes Orr as a kind of unknowing Daoist subject: “You’re of a peculiarly passive outlook for a man brought up in the Judaeo-Christian-Rationalist West. A sort of natural Buddhist. Have you studied the Eastern mysticisms, George?’ The last question, with its obvious answer, was an open sneer” (*Lathe* 81). Though displaced here in favor of Buddhism, Daoism is certainly one of the “Eastern mysticisms” to which Haber alludes, and Le Guin’s repeated use of quotations from the *Zhuangzi* as chapter epigraphs only reinforces this association. Haber later quantifies Orr’s composure through the results of various personality tests: “Where there’s an opposed pair, a polarity, you’re in the middle; where there’s a scale, you’re at the balance point... you’re the man in the middle of the graph”; dismissing as mysticism his colleague’s interpretation of these equilibrious results as denoting “a peculiar state of poise, of self-harmony,” Haber uses them to all but deny Orr’s subjecthood: “You cancel out so thoroughly that, in a sense, nothing is left” (137). In the eyes of the zealous Haber, Orr’s passive, Daoist-like being is equivalent to no being at all.

When taken from Orr’s own perspective, a far more positive rendering of his Daoist sensibility emerges:

a sense of well-being came into him, a certainty that things were all right, and that he was in the middle of things. Self is universe. He would not be allowed to be isolated, to be stranded. He was back where he belonged. He felt an equanimity, a perfect certainty as to where he was and where everything else was. This feeling did not come to him as blissful or mystical, but simply as normal. It was the way he generally had felt, except in times of crisis, of agony;

it was the mood of his childhood and all the best and profoundest hours of his boyhood and maturity; it was his natural mode of being. (143)

Orr's sense of serenity comes not from a blissful experience of non-being but from his feeling of being inextricably embedded within the world, and here he differs most from Haber's continued intrusions into a world treated as a separate object to be manipulated. Despite the connotations of "Self is universe" with undifferentiated metaphysical unity, a later passage indicates a more individuated and relational understanding: "I'm a part of [the world]. Not separate from it. I walk on the ground and the ground's walked on by me, I breathe the air and change it, I am entirely interconnected with the world" (155). Orr's recognition of his capacity to meaningfully affect and be affected by the world to which he belongs resonates with Braidotti's definition of posthuman subjectivity as "materially embedded and embodied, differential, affective and relational" (*Posthuman Knowledge* 11). As with Dickman's and Liao's claims about the close similarities between the two modes of thought, Orr's embedded and relational Daoist sensibility lends itself well to a posthumanist reading, especially in relation to their shared resistance to the oppositional logic of universalist humanism represented by the domineering Haber.

As noted earlier, Le Guin's fiction has attracted some attention for its posthumanist themes, though without provoking much extended analysis. Interestingly, Christopher L. Robinson brings attention to parallels between Le Guin's characterization in her short story "Ether, OR" and Braidotti's theorization of nomadic subjectivity in the revised edition of her *Nomadic Subjects* (2011). Robinson highlights Le Guin's experimental use of narrative as a way of counteracting the loss of coherence that is acknowledged by Braidotti to follow from a more dynamic and multifaceted sense of identity (34; 44). Robinson, however, does not engage with Braidotti's later work on the posthuman, which marks a development of her nomadic thought in post-anthropocentric directions in response to the challenges of the Anthropocene. Nor does he attend to the Daoist aspect of Le Guin's fiction. In contrast to the anthropocentrism of Haber – who has inscribed into the foyer of his center of power Alexander Pope's line "THE PROPER STUDY OF MANKIND IS MAN" (*Lathe* 135) – Orr articulates a world of vibrant matter:

“Everything dreams. The play of form, of being, is the dreaming of substance. Rocks have their dreams, and the earth changes... But when the mind becomes conscious, when the rate of evolution speeds up, then you have to be careful. Careful of the world. You must learn the way. You must learn the skills, the art, the limits. A conscious mind must be part of the whole, intentionally and carefully – as the rock is part of the whole unconsciously.” (167)

This description of nonhuman agency and its implications for the art or “way” of human life coheres with Nelson’s definition of Daoist praxis as aspiring towards attunement with a world of myriad, shifting perspectives (55; 66). It aligns with the post-anthropocentric vital materialism characteristic of Braidotti’s posthuman theory. To go beyond simply showing, by way of comparative analysis, how Daoism *reflects* posthumanist thinking in Le Guin’s work, the next section demonstrates how Le Guin’s deployment of Daoism in *The Lathe of Heaven* might also *inflect* the development of posthumanist theory by addressing more fully the problem of passivity in the novel and its implications for posthuman forms of agency.

Wuwei as Posthuman Praxis

The Lathe of Heaven has been criticized for encouraging an ultimately quietist politics, supposedly emphasizing withdrawal rather than activism. As with Jameson’s concerns about Le Guin’s passive heroes, Sean McCann and Michael Szalay charge *Lathe* with privileging “a passive aesthetic sensibility” over “illegitimate effort[s] to transform the world through instrumental means” (445). In fact, they argue, “from Le Guin’s perspective, any concerted and organized form of action commits the cardinal sin of presuming to change the world” (463). McCann and Szalay view Le Guin’s novel as typical of contemporary countercultural and New Left resistance to traditional methods of political organization. After all, “Haber does eliminate the many ills on which he set his sights,” including overpopulation, ecological imbalance, and cancer; in contrast, Orr’s resistance to these outcomes is seen to be “consistent with the widely shared sense that technocratic solutions to social problems were invariably

misguided” (446). Orr is portrayed here as hopelessly naïve in his suspicion of and resistance to societal change. Yet McCann and Szalay conveniently leave out the fact that overpopulation is eliminated through Orr dreaming up a new world in which six billion people had been killed by a plague. Furthermore, in quoting Haber’s list of accomplishments, they use ellipsis to omit his proud statement that he and Orr have “[e]liminated the risk of species deterioration and the fostering of deleterious gene stocks” (Le Guin, *Lathe* 146). Haber, by now essentially ruler of the world, achieves this by commanding that “the incurables, the gene-damaged who degrade the species” (140) be arrested and euthanized, to Orr’s horror. What McCann and Szalay present as Le Guin’s opposition to reformist projects in general is really an opposition to the extension of rational utilitarian thinking to genocide and eugenics.

Still, Orr’s apparent passivity may be read as an overcorrection to Haber’s perverse exercise of power, and in this sense it seems problematic for the posthumanist project. In emphasizing nonhuman agencies, posthuman theory already risks minimizing human agency at a time of environmental crisis when the consequences of human action are crucially important. If Orr’s Daoist subjectivity involves relinquishing agency entirely, then wariness by posthumanists would be justified. It is clear enough why Orr’s embodiment of Daoism may seem to prioritize a retreat into self-care over active engagement with the world. Haber accuses Orr of naivety, asking “isn’t that man’s very purpose on earth – to do things, change things, run things, make a better world?” Orr responds as follows:

“Things don’t have purposes, as if the universe were a machine, where every part has a useful function. What’s the function of a galaxy? I don’t know if our life has a purpose and I don’t see that it matters. What does matter is that we’re a part. Like a thread in a cloth or a grass-blade in a field. It *is* and we *are*. What we do is like wind blowing on the grass.” (81)

Orr’s anti-teleological counterargument is certainly evocative, but the critical charge of quietism – in the sense of an abandonment of the will in favor of mysticism and, consequently, passive withdrawal from worldly affairs – is understandable. Spivack recognizes and celebrates Orr’s attitude as exemplary of “the Taoist ideal of letting things alone,” also described

as “the doctrine of inaction” (6-7), or *wuwei*. Considering posthumanist efforts to avoid diminishing the role of human agency entirely, this popular interpretation of *wuwei* as straightforward “inaction” seems the most significant obstacle to posthumanist engagements with Daoism.

Against this interpretation, the prominent scholar of Daoism James Miller explains that *wuwei* “can be translated literally as non-action, but in fact means ‘action as non-action,’ that is, ‘actions that appear or are felt as almost nothing. [...] All too often this type of action is misunderstood as ‘letting be’ whereas in fact this ‘action as non-action’ is really a form of spiritual technology by means of which humans cultivate their own natures and the nature around them” (171). *Wuwei* is here described in more active terms as a form of responsible action oriented towards the mutual flourishing of humans and nonhumans. This is much like the understanding of *wuwei* advocated by Nelson who, reinterpreting early Daoism in the context of contemporary environmentalism, emphasizes the religion’s potential contribution to activist ways of thinking. Nelson argues that while *wuwei* “has been construed to imply worldly indifference and neutrality, detachment and separation, or a minimalistic relation to the happenings of the world,” the concept “is more appropriately interpreted [...] as non-calculative, non-coercive or non-dominating, responsive action” (12). This form of action, as relational responsiveness oriented towards nourishing the life of the world that shapes human lives (24-25), is based on the understanding that “humans can live in better or worse ways in relation to the nature that they are and the environing nature with which they persistently interact” (31). Defined as “responsive attunement” (12), *wuwei* “is not minimal in the sense of not caring, yet entails a therapeutic minimalism of ‘doing less’ that contests and disrupts the maximalism of relentless aggressive intervention, commodification, and overproduction and consumption characteristic of existing capitalist societies and political economies” (69). In Nelson’s study, we find an interpretation of *wuwei* far removed from interpretations, both admired and derided by Le Guin’s critics, of non-interference or inaction. The relevance of Nelson’s reading for understanding Orr’s Daoist subjectivity – and for thinking about posthuman re-evaluations of agency – is made clearer when keeping in mind Le Guin’s own definition, in a footnote to her version of

the *Daodejing*, of “doing without doing” as “power that is not force” (21), rather than a total relinquishment of power or agency.

Interpreting *wuwei* as “responsive attunement” better characterizes Orr’s comportment than “inaction,” as can be seen in his opposition to Haber’s egotistic worldview. Haber attempts to justify his actions to Orr through a particular kind of process ontology that views the world as separate and without value except for human ends:

“You are afraid of *losing your balance*. But change need not unbalance you; life’s not a static object, after all. It’s a process. There’s no holding still. Intellectually you know that, but emotionally you refuse it. Nothing remains the same from one moment to the next, you can’t step in the same river twice. Life – evolution – the whole universe of space/time, matter/energy – existence itself – is essentially *change*.” (*Lathe* 138)

For Haber, impermanence means that anything goes when it comes to crafting a perfect society. Orr disagrees:

“We’re in the world, not against it. It doesn’t work to try to stand outside things and run them, that way. It just doesn’t work, it goes against life. There is a way but you have to follow it. The world *is*, no matter how we think it ought to be. You have to be with it. You have to let it be.” (139)

McCann and Szalay read this passage as advocating “a therapeutic acceptance of reality itself” which refuses *any* attempt to change the existing world (446). Yet they, like Haber, misinterpret Orr’s notion of being as static rather than recognizing its processual, Daoist sense. As Nelson argues, *wuwei* means “being responsively attuned in interacting with the transformations of the world” (62). Orr shares with Haber a process ontology but differs in that he considers himself to be relational with the world rather than autonomous and transcendent over it. In his deep sense of embeddedness, Orr is not opposed to change itself but rather to attitudes and actions that presume mastery over the rest of the world. Ultimately, the charge of passivity does not hold up given that Orr, though overpowered by Haber, spends the entire narrative refusing to yield to the

latter's demands, until finally taking action – “in the right way at the right time” (172) – to stop Haber dreaming the world out of existence.

The Daoist understanding of responsible action modelled in *Lathe* is highly relevant for posthumanist re-evaluations of human agency in recognition of relationality. Posthumanist critiques of the autonomous agency imagined by liberal humanism invite the charge that they present in its place only a dilution of agency that leads ultimately to inaction. In contrast to associations of Le Guin's characters with passivity of this kind, Le Guin's literary formulation of Daoist subjectivity may be read as complicating this apparently binary opposition of action versus inaction, instead encouraging responsive action within an interconnected web of relations. This alternative reading of *wuwei* therefore offers a Daoist model for posthuman praxis: embodied by Orr, *wuwei* counters the anthropocentric framework of agency that guides Haber's will to power, and in doing so it demonstrates its value as a spiritual technology that encourages a non-coercive and ecologically sensitive relationship with the rest of the world.

Given that Le Guin's speculative fiction already attracts critical attention for its models of posthuman subjectivity, this analysis demonstrates that the Daoist elements of her work deserve greater and more serious attention than they have so far received. More than this, it indicates the need for a more receptive attitude towards religion, when critics of posthumanism engage with American literary texts. Posthumanism aims to reframe subjectivity and agency in alignment with interconnection and away from notions of human exceptionalism that have brought about environmental crisis. In pursuit of this project, models of subjectivity influenced by the heterogeneous and often heterodox strands of religious thought animating much American literature offer powerful resources for combating the anthropocentric hubris epitomized by *The Lathe of Heaven's* arch-humanist William Haber.

Notes

¹ Throughout this article, I transliterate Chinese terms using the pinyin romanization system, rather than the Wade-Giles system which renders Daoism as “Taoism.” Where other scholars use the latter system, I preserve their transliteration.

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DANIELA FARGIONE

Breaking Bread and Sharing Dreams with the Other-than-human: Extinction and Multispecies Community in Lydia Millet's *How the Dead Dream*

*Are we
extinct yet. Who owns
the map. May I
look. Where is my
claim. Is my history
verifiable. Have I
included the memory
of the animals. The animals'
memories. Are they
still here. Are we
alone. {...}*
(Jorie Graham, "Are We")

Animals are like rock stars, they have that charisma.
(Lydia Millet, "Jonathan Lethem and Lydia Millet")

In her introduction to *The Lives of Animals* (2001), the novella written by J.M. Coetzee for the 1997-98 Tanner Lectures at Princeton University, political philosopher Amy Gutmann praises the author's display of a very special "seriousness": "for a certain kind of artist," it is "an imperative uniting the aesthetic and the ethical" (3). Gutmann, in other words, celebrates Coetzee's narrative for its powerful deployment of literary

imagination to investigate complex issues – in this case our perception and treatment of the more-than-human – that require moral investments in the perspective of change and commitment to praxis.

Instead of a traditional philosophical essay, the South African writer opts to read a (meta)fictional piece, where the main character, Elizabeth Costello, is an aging Australian writer whose literary reputation earns her an invitation to give two talks at the fictional Appleton College in Massachusetts. The lecturer can freely choose the topic of her honorary talks and surprisingly decides to rule out literary questions in favor of “a hobbyhorse of hers” (16): a critique of human abuse towards animals and their commodification in postindustrial societies. This merciless cruelty, Costello explains, is made “invisible” by the same convenient blindness experienced by many people living just outside the extermination camps during World War II. In this way, the upsetting analogy between the way humans treat other animals and the Nazis’ treatment of Jews is made even more disturbing by the accusation that humans are all silent bystanders of a mass slaughter that is accepted as commonplace.

Whereas the two fictional unorthodox speeches are perceived as an unwelcome jeremiad against animal eating by the local academic community, Coetzee’s lectures reflect his long-standing censure of anthropocentrism together with his exuberant, often satirical, assessment of human deficiency to sympathize with the nonhuman. In “The Philosophers and the Animals,” Elizabeth Costello identifies Western philosophy as the culprit of this false exceptionalism: the privilege it grants to human mind and body leads to acquitted cruelty towards other animals that are thus perceived as “thinglike” (23), easily put “in confinement” (33) – mainly zoos and laboratories¹ – and condemned to several “forms of punishments (beating, torture, mutilation, execution)” (33). The horror of both the Nazis and the mute bystanders outside the concentration camps consisted in the fact that “they closed their hearts,” where “the heart is the seat of *sympathy*, the faculty that allows us to share at times the being of another” (34). Similarly, it is the lack of compassion that prevents human beings from considering animal rights. Yet, since “there are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination” (35), humans can picture themselves as animal others.

When the following day Elizabeth Costello delivers her second lecture, "The Poets and the Animals," one seat in the seminar room remains empty as a sign of protest: it was supposed to be occupied by a well-respected Jewish poet, who sends a written note instead, where he asks her: "If we refuse to break bread with the executioners of Auschwitz, can we continue to break bread with the slaughterers of animals?" (146). The analogy between the two groups of victims and the concept of "likeness," according to the poet, is misunderstood to the point of blasphemy, "a trick of the words" that he reckons unacceptable. Costello, however, expresses her reluctance in the belief that words and things perfectly coincide when nonhuman animals are involved and offers some examples taken from poetry, where "animals stand for human qualities" (51). Nevertheless, there are some poets such as Ted Hughes who revalue the materiality of nonhuman subjectivity while inviting us to "inhabit" not the animal's mind but rather the animal's body (in this case a jaguar's). In her lecture, Costello emphasizes the high value of such a poetry, one that "does not try to find an idea in the animal [...] but is instead the record of an engagement with him" (51) through "poetic invention," a process that mingles "breath and sense" (51) or, to say it again with Amy Gutmann, the aesthetic and the ethical. Costello/Coetzee's texts do not treat animals as "absent referents" but, rather, employ "a number of strategies for writing in a manner that is neither humanist, nor claims to speak on behalf of animal subjects" (Barrett 126). As a matter of fact, one of the major debates generated by *The Lives of the Animals* is whether it was intended, as Marjorie Garber suggests in her response, to use animals in order to actually talk "about *people*" (75; italics in the original) and "the value of literature" (84). In this sense, the other-than-human matters only insofar as it connotes the human. Coetzee's "seriousness" eventually transpires through an exercise of sympathetic imagination that challenges the anthropocentric stance sustaining the "otherization" of nature, while offering stimulating conceptual grounds for the current debate on the posthuman and its investigation into the blurring of human-nonhuman boundaries.

Ten years after the publication of *The Lives of the Animals*, Lydia Millet wrote *How the Dead Dream* (2008), the first novel of a trilogy² destined to express the same "seriousness" exemplified by Coetzee. In this work, however, the

debate's purview is extended to the point that extinction ceases to be a looming threat and becomes a quizzical everyday business. In this new scenario, Millet's novel, I argue, is a direct reply to Coetzee's invitation to reconsider the place of the human vis-à-vis the other-than-human within the complex framework of posthumanism. This implies a recession of the onto-epistemological and ethical divide among species that saturate popular discourses on extinction. Due to the unprecedented alienness and uncanniness of the universe, this species separation is exacerbated in the Anthropocene, which therefore represents "a new era of solitude" (Rose 10). As a reaction, multispecies scholars encourage us to think of humanity as an "interspecies collaborative project" (11), namely a lively entity in progress that is never alone. But how to narrate these stories of coevolution and cohabitation?

Undoubtedly, Millet's education, her personal interest in wildlife and some deadlock moments in her writing career³ sharpened her perception of how the narratives authored by the natural sciences are now exceeding speculative fiction in scale and scope. She also believes, however, that most of these narratives do not vary substantially in language and mode: echoing Ursula Heise's lamentation for a conventional binary rote that alternates the melancholic mourning paradigm with a homocentric heroic stance,⁴ Millet opts for a different formula. In her case, it is dark irony – at times exaggeration – that prevails.

While both terrestrial and aquatic species are already involved in the sixth mass extinction – what Elizabeth Kolbert calls "an unnatural history" (2014) – the "natural" other keeps being reconfigured together with an ever-widening classification of what is perceived as "human." This question, directly addressed by Stacy Alaimo in her study, *Exposed* (aptly titled "Dwelling in the Dissolve"), guides Millet's works:

What can it mean to be human in this time when the human is something that has become sedimented in the geology of the planet? What forms of ethics and politics arise from the sense of being embedded in, exposed to, and even composed of the very stuff of a rapidly transforming material world? Can exposing human flesh while making space for multispecies liveliness disperse and displace human exceptionalism? (1)

Our perception of this continuous shaping and reshaping of bodies, lives, and collectives in diverse environments has proved to be urgent to investigate the imbrications of multiple ecosystemic networks grappling with the predicament of living (*and* dying) in an increasingly diminished world. Given that living and nonliving beings in their interdependence share the same processes of becoming and un-becoming, it is imperative to recognize the other and respond to the other's call through "intense dramas of encounter" (Rose 12). In this sense, Millet's novels function as an exploration of realms beyond the human in the attempt to promote what Ella Soper calls "a politics of affect – that is a political stance that acknowledges and mobilizes the agentive potential of empathic realization" (747). In order to "live well with others" in the Anthropocene, humans need to learn how to cultivate "attentiveness" (Rose and van Dooren 2017). This is an ethical practice of inclusion built on "multispecies love" (Tsing 2011), a "passionate immersion" (19) in the other-than-human that does not necessarily imply mutuality, since we cannot expect that our narcissistic needs (such as physical contact, communication, recognition, or even affection) can and will be fulfilled by the nonhuman.⁵ In *How the Dead Dream*, this means that the human protagonist needs to learn how to break bread and share dreams with wild beasts: some dead (a coyote), some disappearing (kangaroo rats), some delinquent (a wolf), some waiting (elephants), some absent (a jaguar), some real (a tapir).

In her sixth novel, Lydia Millet narrates the story of T. (Thomas) and his conversion. As a child, he keeps people distant to prevent any physical and emotional contact while devoting himself to money that he accumulates through ruthless schemes and calculations. From his childhood through his college years, he learns the art of entrepreneurship: he earns a little small fortune by trading stocks and building relations among his frats that he would later use for his real estate ventures in Los Angeles. His "golden egg" is the building of retirement communities in the Mojave Desert, but the economic chronicle of T.'s success is abruptly interrupted by a series of unexpected events that shake his devotion to wealth: his gains soon become personal losses that inevitably invert his worldview and from rapacious speculator T. transforms himself into a tender caretaker. The first of these incidents is a roadkill: while driving to Las Vegas, T. hits a coyote and for

the first time in his lifetime he is prey of sudden empathy. As an immediate result of this newly felt emotion, he rescues a dog from the shelter, hosts his mother when his father leaves her, falls in love with a woman who enters his life and unexpectedly dies. Overwhelmed by unprecedented sorrow and unable to mourn, T. finds solace in the physical proximity of caged animals that he visits at night by sneaking into locked zoos. His new morbidity culminates in a journey in Belize after one of his developments is struck by a tropical storm.

T.'s final quest in the jungle is the sight of a jaguar that he will never encounter but that will contribute to his ethical awareness. Coetzee's text highly resonates here: the metaphoric visual representation of nonhuman animals is rejected in favor of a bodily contact with the alien other. As previously stated, Elizabeth Costello emphasizes the power of literature as an exercise of "sympathetic imagination." In Millet's novel, the wild jaguar runs free and refuses to be captured by T.'s gaze; yet, T. can sympathetically imagine the beast until one night, after the tragic death of his guide, he finally shares his space and his dreams with a tapir: "So an animal had come to him, in the end" (*How the Dead Dream* 242). In minutes the two motherless imperiled animals become indistinguishable in their common fate: "They found a way *not* to be" (242; italics mine). T.'s affective growth converges with the acceptance of a cohabitation that requires recognition and love, and finally nullifies human exceptionalism.

Dirty Obsessions

"Animals, framed either individually or as a collective identity, are the others against which humanity measures itself" (Baker 1), but T., the six-year-old protagonist at the beginning of the novel, is not aware of this yet, for the simple reason that animals are not allowed in his existence, not even in their minutest forms. His concept of value hinges on pure materiality.

When we encounter T., he is totally obsessed with money and its many rituals. His bills are hidden under his pillows and his mother, knowing that "currency was sacrosanct" (*How the Dead Dream* 3), would change sheets paying great attention to replace the pile in the exact spot where

she found it lest it provoke a hideous reaction. One time, for example, she forgets the banknotes on a bookshelf, and when T. stumbles into his little creatures “open to the elements” and “naked as babes” he is horrified; coins, on the other hand, are secreted away: “a thick and powerful quarter lodged under his tongue or discrete dimes tucked into the cheek pouches” (3). In both cases, T. feels the compulsive need to keep the valuable objects of his obsession eclipsed, separated, and contained by some sort of protective shell, in this case his own body. His mother’s preoccupation, on the other hand, resides in the risk for T. to come in contact with and be contaminated by bacteria: “Such a dirty habit!” she would complain regularly; “Do you realize how many *strangers* have *touched* those coins? Bacteria!” (3; italics mine).

In the opening pages of *How the Dead Dream*, Millet conflates several pivotal matters that constitute the backbone of her story. Two of these matters seem to be particularly relevant for a discourse on extinction and coexistence with the other-than-human. First of all, the Capital. T.’s selfish ambitions are fueled by material wealth that he accumulates through diverse equivocal activities: from serving as middleman for schoolyard protection rackets to inventing charitable causes for starving children. He also develops a pious ritual of counting his money that he keeps in a small safe in his room: rare dollar bills that he hands in latex gloves and lays out “on a sheet of newspaper spread across his desk, in strict order *from least value to most*” (8; italics mine). The excitement of the whole operation comes in tactile ways; it is the touching of his “naked babes” that makes him reel, while the pornographic fetishization of money offers him total gratification. But growing up, T.’s love becomes more “sophisticated”:

He no longer needed to touch coins or bills; he found his satisfaction in surges of energy, in the stream of contact between machines that processed binary. He learned to like abstract money better than its physical body. The solid house that money built sheltered him and he felt keenly that money was both everything and nothing, at once infinite, open potential and an end in itself. (13)

In one single paragraph, Lydia Millet draws a parable that moves the main character from the (auto)erotic adolescent pleasure of materiality expressed

through “surges of energy” to the more mature understanding of the immaterial flux of capital that protects him as in a shelter and completely satisfies him. Not surprisingly, when he later joins a fraternity, sex is not “a prurient interest” (25) of his and many classmates make allusions to his lack of manhood. His first sexual experience occurs only after leaving college, with “a female neighbor,” an emaciated model, quiet and doe-eyed, who would show up in his apartment “with a bottle of bad wine and a packet of good cocaine” (27), until one day she cuts her veins in her kitchen and is sent to rehab. His first nameless endangered animal companion shares with him some sort of addiction and his bed, but “she made no other demands on him beyond their weekly appointment”; when T. meets her in the hallway, she even refuses to look at him: “she slouched past him with her head down and her doe eyes averted” (27). Eventually, she ends up being locked in a separate protected environment that evokes the same confinement of the zoo cage, a space that T. will later visit to soothe his sorrow.

The second significant matter that Lydia Millet introduces in the first scene of her book is perfectly literal: matter. Millet seems to be musing not only on the mobility and circulation of capital – both increasing during T.’s growth and accruing dirt at each passage from one hand to another – but also on an ecological alterity that sustains the major discourse of the novel: the human/other-than-human compartmentalization and its fictional representations within the horizon of extinction. T.’s “dirty habit” of hosting coins in his mouth obviously repels his mother, and yet dirt “is the literal ground without which there would be no terrestrial life, and which is always shifting and on the move” (Sullivan 516). The “strangers” touching the coins and being responsible for the agglomeration of germs epitomize the same alterity that theorist Jane Bennett recognizes in her bodily “foreigners.” In *Vibrant Matter*, she introduces the notion of the “vital materiality” that speaks for the alien quality of human flesh and bodies, eventually reminding us of the unruly kinship between the human and the nonhuman:

My flesh is populated and constituted by different swarms of foreigners. The crook of my elbow, for example, is “a special ecosystem, a bountiful home to no fewer than six tribes of bacteria” [...]. In a world of vibrant matter, it is thus

not enough to say that we are “embodied.” We are, rather, an array of bodies [...]. (112)

If, as Rachel Carson affirms, “there is [...] an ecology of the world within our bodies” (189), to interrogate these alterities is the first step to understand the co-evolution of natural processes and social predatory practices that invariably victimize the vulnerable. In this sense, the analysis of the relation between the human and the other-than-human cannot transcend dynamics of power relations: the reconfiguration of species boundaries contemplates “questions of violence, suffering, and vulnerability” (Baker 7). Totally ignoring that even bodies are congeries of hybridized life forms, sites of “interconnections, interchanges, and transits” (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 2), T.’s mother is adamant in her species separation and does not permit pets in the house: animals belong “in paintings, stories, even stained-glass windows, but far from her living room” (*How the Dead Dream* 39). It is their stench that particularly repels her, and even when T. turns to his last resort and asks for a “smell-proof” goldfish (that he imagined could “breed and sell”), his request is rejected “on the grounds that they defecated [...]. They *poop* in the *water!*” (39; italics in the original). This time, T.’s witty response to his mother hits where it hurts: “Well, you do too!” (39).

T. gradually recognizes not only the similarities of the different animalities, but also the existence of a messy world that insists on the cohabitation of a multitude of actors. This process would take a long time and several traumatic experiences, but in the last pages of the novel, after T. has finally acquired a new sense of “value” of all living creatures as a consequence of their becoming “very scarce,” he admits that “the market has failed to see the animals for what they were” (238). This failure, Millet insists, is the result of a long process that started in nineteenth-century England:

nature that had been despised and avoided before it was destroyed by cities and farms and pollution became, when there was almost none of it left, the subject of poems and paintings, the highest access to the divine. Now some few persons, he [T.] thought, marginal persons in their marginal groups, knew the value of the animals and their world, and he was one among them. (238)

Lydia Millet's reference to Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* alluding, in turn, to John Berger's "Why Look at Animals?" is quite evident. In his famous essay, Berger critiques the eradication of the nonhuman in modernity, animals' substitutions with signs and metaphors, and the alienation of species as a consequence of industrialization and modern capitalism. Berger argues that animals disappeared from the perimeter of the visible when they were transformed into pets, segregated to the domestic space and reduced to spectacle in zoos ("Why Look at Animals?" 24-25). His ideological discourse concentrates on the concept of "nature as value" that necessarily implies the building of a binary system (man/animal, society/nature, reason/instinct, etc.) that justifies human exceptionalism and colonialism. A similar disposition is at work in *How the Dead Dream*, where the writer's critique is also directed to the settler-colonial and capitalistic paradigms that have dominated Western thought for centuries and the Euro-American context since its founding. The crystallization of a colonial legacy and of Western epistemologies that continue to be rooted in anthropocentrism eventually implies a solitude that Millet recognizes in the American cowboy myth, the epitome of personal freedom, independence, and self-reliance.

The Cowboy Myth: Solitude and Differences

Although T.'s mother is convinced that sucking on nickels and cohabiting with smelly animals are "unhealthy" habits, she also knows that they are not, strictly speaking, "un-American" (Millet, *How the Dead Dream* 4). Indeed, T.'s obsession with money comes from afar and is the result of unconditional admiration for national "authority" (2): the Presidents of the United States whose images stand out on banknotes, successful businessmen such as J. Paul Getty, the Puritans and the first inspiring pioneers soon become his idols. T. studies their words, reads their old texts combing "for signs of this sinful covetousness – a *pornography* of spirit, for nothing was more of a guilty pleasure than the greed of those who believed themselves righteous" (22; italics mine). What these men have in common is the bravery of initiative, the chauvinistic attitude toward progress that

T. admires and emulates: “He clung to a vision of forward motion, the breath of hope that could lift individuals into posterity” (2).

In an essay on the Sonoran Desert, climate change and extinction, Lydia Millet defines this attitude as “the cowboy myth,” a paradigm that thrives on a “romance of independence” (“From This Valley”).⁶ The writer’s evocation of a solitary adventurer crossing and conquering a *terra nullius* calls for a re-consideration of “placeless” national places, assaults on indigenous people, violent encroachments of nonhuman habitats, fortification and purification of the US domestic space. According to Stacy Alaimo, this space has served as “the defining container for the Western ‘human,’ a bounded space, wrought by delusions of safety, fed by consumerism, and fueled by nationalist fantasies” (17-18). Individualism, in other words, equals in/difference. While at college, T. demonstrates that he has plenty of both, and both are the results of some sort of compartmentalization. Despite his fraternity brothers trusting him in his role as a “father their own age” (*How the Dead Dream* 18), they are also aware that he stands apart, looking “to the life beyond, past the confines of the fraternity house [...]. He saw beyond what there was, and in the not-yet-existent imagined a great acceleration” (18), namely, the blooming of a small college town shortly to be invested in by new capital. But here Millet plays with words that will prove prophetic. T.’s proleptic vision of the future prepares the readers for his radical transformation which occurs after moving to California, a place he likes since speculators there “tended to ignore the foreshortened future of the hills, their promise of imminent collapse by mudslide, quake or fire” (28): indifference, in other words, towards a more critical climatic “great acceleration.”⁷

What in fact *makes* a difference in T.’s existence and will eventually bridge his perception of the many life separations is the accident with the coyote in the opening scene of the second chapter. Staying by its side and identifying with the dying animal, T. realizes that it “probably did not want him near; he should back off. Better to die alone if you were an animal like this one, a loner that avoided contact with humans” (37). And while he felt “surges of energy” when exposed to money, now he imagines “what must be a blind surge of the pain as the end closed in,” an end that approaches with distinctive smells: “of asphalt, exhaust, and gasoline, no doubt also

the smell of her own blood, and him, and other smells he could not know himself. The fullness, the terrible sympathy!" (37).⁸ T.'s epiphany resonates with Stacy Alaimo's suspicion that human exceptionalism may possibly be dispersed and displaced by "exposing human flesh while making space for multispecies liveliness" (1).⁹ This is, in fact, the real difference between species that T. recognizes at that very moment: "Animals died by the road and you saw that all the time, everyone did. You saw them lying there, so obvious in their deadness, sad lumps of dirty meat. [...] You saw the red insides all exposed. You thought: that is the difference between them and me. My insides are firmly contained" (*How the Dead Dream* 37). Death acquires relevance by humans' emotional reaction and T. knows that were he to lie on the side of the road, cars would stop and his body would be removed. "It was just a coyote," and yet T. "felt confused" (38), as if his attempt at self-absolution had miserably failed. As in Ted Hughes's poems mentioned in Coetzee's lectures, right when extinction is looming large, Lydia Millet advocates the inhabitation of the animal's flesh and the undertaking of an ethics and politics of exposure that, according to Stacy Alaimo,

may be differential, uneven, or incommensurate; yet to practice exposure entails the intuitive sense or the philosophical conviction that the impermeable Western human subject is no longer tenable. [...] To occupy exposure as insurgent vulnerability is to perform material rather than abstract alliances, and to inhabit a fraught sense of political agency that emerges from the perceived loss of boundaries and sovereignty. (5)

The accident with the coyote derails T. from his commitment of accumulating wealth, although his original dirty obsession is soon replaced by another, even dirtier, fixation: all of a sudden, he feels compelled to be in the presence of nonhumans, especially those at the brink of extinction, "final animals" (Millet, *How the Dead Dream* 197) that crowd zoos and smell of death. This urge is the outcome of a series of mounting losses in T.'s life – his mother's suicide attempt and consequent fast disappearance into dementia, Beth's car accident and death, his father's abandonment after coming out as gay – that first provoke a "numbness that crept up into

him" (54), then "inertia" (101), a sort of melancholic identification with the dead (Bateman 159).

It is at this point of the story that T. visits his Mojave development project for the first time to inquire about a pending lawsuit regarding a community of endangered kangaroo rats. While a biologist explains to him how this species could become extinct because of him, T.'s offer is "mitigation" which materializes through a parcel of land where these critters could be displaced and rebuild nests in "abandoned burrows of pocket gophers" (*How the Dead Dream* 124), far from anybody's sight. T.'s initial "buoyancy" (124) about this solution (which reminds us of the first American pioneers' removal of native populations), abruptly turns into disappointment when he learns that all the pinkies have died in the relocation. With such a reduction in population numbers, inbreeding depression highly jeopardizes the species' long-term survival, and whereas the biologist does not betray any emotion in her voice while giving this information, T. finds "his own throat closing" (125), a reaction that he justifies as an accumulation of grief after Beth's death. T.'s emotional explosion, instead, represents an epiphany that further shakes and problematizes his solid worldview and he cannot deny his misperception: the most irrelevant creatures under human feet (ants, for instance, and kangaroo rats) are the foundation of the "empire" (125) that can finally be seen as imbricated in complex ecosystems that reject compartmentalization: "Empire looked good built against a backdrop of oceans and forests. [...] If the oceans were dead and the forests replaced by pavement even empire would be robbed of its consequence" (135).

The removal of one single element in the supposed perfection of the Great Chain of Being is in fact critical enough to jeopardize entire ecosystems through a domino effect that apparently comes unnoticed – "The field stayed a field, the sky remained blue" (166) – only to realize that "a particular way of existence was gone, a whole volume in the library of being" (166). Millet challenges us to consider what it means to exist in a world that teems with different kinds of life, a vibrant conglomerate of agencies, signs, and meanings that offer multiple narrations, including our own story. Yet, as French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy reminds us, this individual telling their own story is always a "plural being," a "singularité plurielle" (9), since its existence is indissociable from the existence of a

multiplicity. Moreover, far from being fixed and static, this “être avec” (9) is in constant becoming: “to be one,” says Donna Haraway, “is always to become with many” (4), namely within a domain that cannot be purely human because the nonhuman belongs here too.

Learning to recognize “the signs” (*How the Dead Dream* 140) of “the quiet mass disappearance, the inversion of the Ark” (139), and aware of the lack of information in “this matter of mass extinction,” T. resolves to make zoos “his study” (141). The first time he intrudes into such an artificial environment after its opening hours, it is to learn more about “postnatural animals” (Soper 748), i.e. creatures that have been removed from their natural habitats and show signs of aloneness: “not only alone in the cages, often, but alone on earth, vanishing. [...] *Alone*, he thought – a word that came to him more and more, in singsong like a jeer. [...] they were at the forefront of aloneness, like pioneers. They were the ones sent ahead to see how the new world was like” (*How the Dead Dream* 134-35). Everything that he once treasured secretly starts leaking away, as if his very philosophical foundations were creaking: his late-night incursions make of him an illicit intruder who transgresses “spatial as well as symbolical boundaries between culture and nature” (Völker 97).

What T. cannot predict, however, is meeting “another kind of solitude” (*How the Dead Dream* 138), an in/difference of nature that strikes him almost as an “insult” (137). During one of his nocturnal visits, T. strives to catch a glimpse of the rarest animal in the zoo, a Mexican grey wolf that he approaches by climbing a wire fence. In the dark, T.’s imagination is amplified: “he could imagine not only wolves but almost anything, a secret menagerie. He was filled with the rush of this, with the idea of myriad creatures materializing from the blackness” (136) that he can only “sense,” not being able to see them (and, in turn, to be seen by them in a process of mutual recognition). Contrary to his intentions and expectations, when he finally recognizes the shape of the wolf in the dark, he points his flashlight straight towards its eyes and, although “in the wolf’s gaze there was a directness unlike the directness of men,” the animal “went away from him. [...] He would not get closer. The wolf would not allow it” (137). Similarly to the accident with the coyote at the beginning of his conversion, when T. felt bewildered by the depth of emotions springing from the observation

of the dying animal, it is the meeting of the two animals' gazes that elicits new reflections. Again, Millet is here reformulating John Berger's ideas of the modern zoo as a product of colonialism and capitalism, the ultimate "monument of loss" (26). Within this perimeter, the absence of contact with the wildlife – either through mutual gaze or touch – has become more and more disappointing, especially for children, since animals do not interact with them.¹⁰

The following day, while reconsidering the whole episode, T. identifies with "the villain of fairy tales," eventually admitting that "he had fallen into the trap" (138): his desire to touch the wild animal coincided with an implicit desire to domesticate it, and the verb "to domesticate," when referring to the taming of the other-than-human, "signifies both care and control" (Alaimo 19): domestication as/is domination.

T. as a New Pioneer: Learning to Break Bread and Share Dreams

The etymology of the verb "to domesticate" indicates the meaning of "dwelling in a house." Lydia Millet's conflation of the notions of "house" and "oikos," two different domestic spaces, permits her to spawn a discourse on ethics and inhabitation. It is again Stacy Alaimo who reminds us of Gaston Bachelard's contention that "the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace" (6), since the home is "a bounded space, existing to keep the outdoors, outdoors, defining the human as that which is protected within" (20). With the exception of our pets, nonhuman creatures are supposed to sleep outside of the house, separated from the protected, sanitized human place, as T.'s mother insists at the beginning of the novel. Nevertheless, Millet's story has the ambition to introduce animals not just into our domestic spaces, but into our imagination and moral thoughts as well. Gradually, T. indulges in his need to share not only the same physical space with the creatures of the zoo, but also their oneiric time: cohabitation becomes coexistence in the same, most intimate, dimension. As Bateman argues, in a state of slumber, our distinctive identity dissolves to let us be "other people, inhabit other worlds" (156), thus enhancing T.'s surrender to a new and unpredicted closeness with the nonhuman. This takes place,

for example, with some female elephants rescued from a circus and made “resentful” by years of “domination” (Millet, *How the Dead Dream* 198). Confined to cages, unable to walk, suffering from indolence and aching muscles of eating food off the ground, these beasts are mostly catatonic in their long wait: “All of them waited and waited, up until their last day and their last night of sleep. They never gave up waiting, because they had nothing else to do. They waited to go back to the bright land; they waited to go home” (200).

Far from engaging her character in a heroic action of saving the other-than-human, Millet prefers to imagine new alternatives through the erosion of their separation. The very last pages of the novel feature a trip to Belize, where T. hopes to catch a sight of an elusive jaguar. After his development is hit by a hurricane, T. embarks on a boat ride, but his local guide suddenly dies and he is victim of a shipwreck. He has left “all the old geographies” (234) behind him, and while rethinking of his existence, while recognizing that he had been drawn to cities and buildings and institutions, he wonders what would have happened if instead of concentrating on “the lights across the continent” he had imagined “the spaces between them,” where in “the softness of the dark,” space was in fact “the dream of a sleeping leviathan,” a god from which “all the miracles of evolution” (234) flowed. “The miracles,” concludes T. “were the beasts” (235). T. will never find the jaguar, but while sleeping he is finally joined by a young tapir – one of a kind and soon to die off – that lays on him and wakes him up. Both motherless, the two animals now share the same rhythm of their breaths, thinking that they were “not alone anymore. [...] Sleeping here it could feel safe again” (243).

Building on Donna Haraway’s concept of “companion species” – literally species sharing bread (*cum panem*, with bread) – in the last pages of the novel Millet imagines new forms of cohabitation with the other-than-human by resorting to metabiosis, a form of commensalism (*cum mensa*, with table), a symbiotic interspecies relationship where only one life form, in contrast to parasitism, is benefited while the other remains unaffected.¹¹ Whereas the wolf locked in its cage is not willing to share anything with the human, the free tapir, instead, is: “Faced with being the last, faced with being alone” (*How the Dead Dream* 243), they have “one breath,” knowing that “home was flesh, was nearness” (244).

Although creative depictions of our environment may prompt questions and concerns about our planet's multiple crises, we also know, as W.H. Auden once famously wrote, that poetry – in and by itself – “makes nothing happen.” (93) In the perspective of the planet's impending vanishing, Lydia Millet's novel, instead, shows how artistic practice can make *something* happen: the urgency of reading new stories suggests ways of “staying with the trouble,” in Donna Haraway's words, that exceed expectations of reciprocity with other life forms. Without overwhelming her readers with a litany of destruction, the writer finds new forms of breaking bread and sharing dreams with the other-than-human.

Notes

¹ At this point of the book version, Coetzee includes the following note: “John Berger: ‘Nowhere in a zoo can a stranger encounter the look of an animal. At the most, the animal's gaze flickers and passes on. They look sideways. They look blindly beyond. They scan mechanically [...] That look between animal and man, which may have played a crucial role in the development of human society, and with which, in any case, all men had always lived until less than a century ago, has been extinguished’” (*About Looking* 26). I will return to Berger's “animal gaze” later in my article.

² Lydia Millet dedicates the book to the memory of the West African black rhinoceros, which got extinguished in the time that it took her to write it. A shorter version titled “Zoogoing” was later included in the short story collection *I'm with the Bears: Short Stories from a Damaged Planet* (2011). The trilogy also features *Ghost Lights* (2012) and *Magnificence* (2013).

³ In 1991, after dropping out of an MFA program at Arizona University, Lydia Millet moved to Los Angeles, where she took various undesirable jobs in Hollywood, including a position as a copy editor for Larry Flynt Publications, especially magazines for weapons enthusiasts and of mass-produced pornography. “Along the way,” she claims in an interview, “came the LA riots, the Northridge earthquake, several waves of fires, a near-mugging in Venice” (Timberg E.1). She holds a Master's degree in environmental policy from Duke University. Since 1999 she has been an editor at the Center for Biological Diversity.

⁴ Ursula Heise defines “declensionist narratives” those fictional writings stemming from a compelling awareness of climate change challenges and featuring a rhetoric of decline. In most of these narratives – mainly postapocalyptic, dystopic, and toxic – nature's beauty and value pervade the whole discourse. In other words, these human stories of disappearing nonhuman species betray a conservationist stance by deploying either a melancholic mourning sentiment or a heroic saving action to rescue a homogenized nature.

In an interview with René Steinke, Millet argues that her intention, instead, was to write about extinction without seeming “tedious or statistical – gross numbers or historical rates of species lost, versus species living today. There sometimes seems no way to write about it that isn’t journalistic on the one hand or Chicken Little on the other. I wanted to write about that kind of loss *and* about personal loss, somehow write them in parallel so they could infect each other” (n. pag.).

⁵ The best example in Millet’s book is offered by the scene with the caged wolf that I will later analyze. Quoting Werner Herzog, Oliver Völker calls this moment of disillusion the “overwhelming indifference of nature” (97).

⁶ Although Millet states that she “has never been drawn to the cowboy myth,” she admits that she loves “the solitude that the myth evokes [...] as a form of meditative communion between the small self and the limitless universe, the finite and the infinite” (8). A kind of solitude, of course, that does not pertain to T. at the beginning of his adventure.

⁷ I am very grateful to the anonymous reviewer who reminded me that oftentimes indifference towards climate-related disasters may rather be considered as “vested interest”.

⁸ In the novel, the theme of smell recurs in anticipation or as a consequence of a new episode of death and corruption. In chapter 3, for example, Beth, T.’s girlfriend, dies of an undiagnosed cardiac disease while driving the car with T.’s mother. Many critical months later, T. goes back to her apartment where he finds a smelly white tennis sock: “He breathed in the scent. This was what he had left” (101). In the following chapter, on a visit to his rapidly deteriorating mother, he realizes that her mania for cleanliness had been replaced by a general neglect of hygiene and a new unnecessary frugality (146): the smell of rancid food coming from the trashcan is unbearable and representative of the materiality of unplanned and unwelcome affective investments. The coyote, Beth and his mother elicit in T. a compulsion to emotional obligation that will later acquire morbid forms when he starts breaking into zoos, while measuring the value of each death, a process that is similar to his bills’ ordering – “form least value to most” – at the beginning of the novel.

⁹ In the attempt to dismantle dichotomies and binary thought, hierarchies and the unethical humankind’s sovereignty, and by focusing on relationality rather than individualism, materialist feminists such as Stacy Alaimo introduce the concept of “liveliness” to refer to a certain quality of the matter (bodily matter included). This is a “mangled” (Pickering 1995), “enfleshed” (Braidotti 2002), “agential” (Barad 2007), “viscous” (Tuana 2008), “vibrant” (Bennett 2010) animation, intention, and energy of the nonhuman in its multifold entanglement with the human.

¹⁰ The scene of the wolf, in chapter 5, is preceded by a disturbing encounter with a family who wants to take a shot of a bear sleeping in its cage under the sun. While the father is adjusting a lens of his camera, his child keeps throwing litter to the animal in the attempt to wake it up (132-34).

¹¹ The Collins Harper Dictionary provides the following definition: “a mode of living in which one organism is dependent on another for preparation of an environment in which it can live” (<<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/metabiosis>>).

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VALENTINA ROMANZI

Love Is a Thing with Feathers: Posthuman Metamorphoses in *This Is How You Lose the Time War*

Introduction

In 2005, American author Naomi Shihab Nye wrote in her poem “Sifter”:

When our English teacher gave
our first writing invitation of the year,
Become a kitchen implement
in 2 descriptive paragraphs, I did not think
butcher knife or frying pan,
I thought immediately
of soft flour showering through the little holes
of the sifter and the sifter’s pleasing circular
swishing sound, and wrote it down.

{...}

Everyone laughed
and acted but the more we thought about it,
we were all everything in the whole kitchen,
{...}

This, said our teacher, *is the beauty of metaphor.*
It opens doors.

(n. pag.; italics in the original)

This, indeed, is the *power* of metaphor: it builds bridges to realms other than reality. Or, rather, to realities other than ours. In what follows, I wish to explore how metaphor contributes to the expression of the posthuman subject, taking up Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone’s 2019 novella

This Is How You Lose the Time War as a case study. In the text, the pervasive use of metaphor projects the protagonists onto a posthuman dimension, a plane of existence that is not wholly other from what we know and inhabit, but that expands it by embedding materialities and subjectivities often relegated to the margins or discarded as inanimate.

My claim is that metaphor, as a discursive construct, has a material, bodily counterpart in metamorphosis. In other words, the discourse of posthuman subjectivity engages with the possibility of metamorphosis prompted by metaphors. Metamorphosis will yield figurations of subjectivities and spatialities that well surpass the traditional, humanist view of Man and conventional perceptions of the world, giving way to a nexus of subjects and spaces reflecting Braidotti's vision of the posthuman.

As a text of and for the posthuman, *This Is How You Lose the Time War* questions the very concepts of corporeality and spatiality: through an unconventional set of metaphors, the chrono-spatial continuum – the environment in its widest definition – acquires not only materiality but corporeality, and in turn the body itself becomes space, an environment. The result is a protean, posthuman assemblage of body-space-time-otherness-identity-language in which these concepts intermingle, interact, and exchange properties. *This Is How You Lose the Time War* follows chrono-agents Red and Blue as they move “upthread” and “downthread” through the time-space continuum, depicted as a braid of interwoven hair locks, to fight a seemingly endless war between their respective factions, the Agency and Garden. Written in epistolary form, the novella traces the evolution of their relationship from enmity to star-crossed love. Each letter is preceded by a third-person section illustrating Red and Blue's lives as they carry out assignments and find each other's letters, which are then presented to the readers. Blue's sections were written by El-Mohtar, a Canadian poet and short story writer, and Red's by Gladstone, an American science fiction and fantasy writer.

The novella can be read as an example of climate fiction, since it is “deeply engaged with the central conceptual struggles underlying the environmental crisis, and [...] consequently questions the assumptions of human mastery and exceptionality that led to anthropogenic climate change” (Caracciolo et al. 9). In this formulation, cli-fi does not need to be

explicitly about environmental collapse, but it does need to interact with the causes, consequences, and potential solutions to it. It needs to entertain the notion that “the ecological crisis is, at its core, a failure of humanism” (10), something that in philosophy sits squarely within the purview of posthumanism.

In *This Is How You Lose the Time War*, Red and Blue hint at habitat destruction, climate change, and human responsibility for planetary collapse (3). Often tasked with manipulating societies in order to *cause* such destruction, in their letters the protagonists reflect on the delicate balance ensuring the persistence of life, with Red, for instance, musing that it is “so easy to crush a planet that you may overlook the value of a whisper to a snowbank” (13). Despite these occasional references, human responsibility for the demise of whole planets across the many threads of reality never takes center stage, but lingers in the background of the whole narrative. A parallel to our own experience of climate change and the slow unraveling of our habitat, the destruction of the many worlds across the space-time continuum is cast as a hyperobject – i.e., a phenomenon whose effects may be experienced, but whose massive dimensions escape human capacity for definition and containment, whether in space or time (see Morton). Its ghostly presence pervades the story, expressing what Bould has recently theorized as the “Anthropocene Unconscious,” i.e., the silent yet ubiquitous shadow of the human footprint on our planet in contemporary narratives, even when they are not specifically about it.

The treatment of anthropogenic environmental collapse in *This Is How You Lose the Time War* and its depiction of a homoromantic relationship between the two female-identifying protagonists situate it within the contemporary panorama of progressive SF. However, what truly sets the novella apart is its use of language and style. Despite abundant evidence of the opposite, it is still widely believed that most SF works are not worthy of attention regarding stylistic and formal issues, which are “dealt with in a knee-jerk fashion, assumed to be either plain and unexperimental [...] or downright poor: clumsy, intrusive, and unconcerned with literary quality” (Mandala 16). SF’s strength seems to lie in worldbuilding, which surpasses any other element of composition (see Sanders). Yet, form is essential for some of its most authoritative writers. Le Guin, for instance, claimed: “The

style, of course, is the book. If you remove the cake all you have left is a recipe. If you remove style all you have left is a synopsis of the plot” (30). Peter Stockwell echoes this when he argues that we cannot separate content from language, especially when we are carrying out a literary analysis. After all, we cannot escape the boundaries of language, as it is an all-encompassing trait of our species. Through language, we can cognitively and figuratively experiment with the realm of the more-than-human or other-than-human, an environment which might bring us closer to a fuller understanding of both the human and the posthuman as correlated concepts. While ideas of the Posthuman have been advanced through both discursive practices and examples from several kinds of human and non-human aggregates (from medical devices to cyber-life to companion species), few examples of how to bridge the gap between the discursive and the corporeal are available. By focusing on the idea of metaphor-induced metamorphoses, I suggest a way in that direction, showing that literary texts can serve well to imagine the posthuman not only speculatively but also generatively.

Posthumanism

In Rosi Braidotti’s formulation of “critical posthumanism” (*Posthuman* 49),¹ the posthuman subject is understood as a relational configuration – i.e., a construct shaped by the continuous exchange and contact with others, both human and nonhuman. It retains a strong “embodied and embedded” (50) nature, which stresses its ties to the community, and is “nomadic” – i.e., powered by the ethics of becoming. A concept derived from the works of Deleuze and Guattari, to which Braidotti often returns, the nomadic subject relinquishes the unity, stability, and hegemonic positioning of the humanist subject in favor of an ever-shifting subjectivity that nevertheless does not leave its corporeality, its embodiment, behind. For Braidotti, echoing Hayles’ position, the posthuman subject is not a purely conceptual or mental construction; it exists within the world and as part of it, as an element that is interlocked with the many living beings and living *essence* that transveres it – what Braidotti calls *zoe* (60). Braidotti’s view can be supplemented by Stacy Alaimo’s notion of *trans-corporeality*, by which she

means that “all creatures, as embodied beings, are intermeshed with the dynamic, material world, which crosses through them, transforms them, and is transformed by them. [...] The figure/ground relation between the human and the environment dissolves as the outline of the human is traversed by substantial material interchanges” (435). The environment, in Alaimo’s view, acquires the same status as the human. No more mere background to the exceptionalism of the – “transcendent, disembodied” (436) – humanist subject, the world that surrounds us takes center stage. Matter, especially when traversed by *zoe*, reclaims its relevance in determining the metamorphic nature of the posthuman subject through the notion of *becoming*, that is, of entering into contact with other *zoe*-forms in such a way that the human subject will be metamorphosed, turned into something more-than-human not in an evaluative sense (as in *better than the humanist subject* the way that transhumanists wish the Posthuman to be; Ferrando 27-28) but in a quasi-quantitative way, which makes the posthuman subject *polymorphic*, composed of more than one dimension. *Becoming*, as we will also see regarding *This Is How You Lose the Time War*, is a state of being, a process that *in itself* is a feature of the Posthuman subject, and not just a means of achieving a fixed, final result. On the contrary, a full metamorphosis of the human subject is not desirable, as it would only shapeshift one static, rigid subjectivity into another. It is rather in the malleable, ever-shifting process of metamorphosis, which will continuously have to find some fuel to perpetuate change, that the Braidottian posthuman subject is realized.

In 2008, Bruce Clarke linked the posthuman to metamorphosis explicitly, arguing:

Posthuman metamorphs couple the media systems that enact them to the social systems communicating them to the psychic systems of readers or viewers variously comprehending them. The contemporary discourse of the posthuman signifies a post-Darwinian world, where, as [...] Bruno Latour has remarked, “the human form is as unknown to us as the nonhuman. [...] It is better to speak of (*x*)-*morphism* instead of becoming indignant when humans are treated as nonhumans or vice versa.” (3)

Instances of posthuman metamorphosis extend across *This Is How You Lose the Time War*, marking the evolution of Red and Blue's relationship. Such fleeting, challenging shifts find their linguistic expression in and through metaphors, whose literalization brings about the enmeshed, entangled posthuman subject that is always *becoming*.

From Metaphor to Metamorphosis

In his classic essay "Metaphor" – still notable among the trove of studies on the topic² – Max Black explains that substitution-based metaphor (i.e., metaphor understood as replacing one statement with another through analogy) can occur when there is "no literal equivalent, L, available in the language in question" (32). In this specific instance, metaphor is "a species of *catachresis*, [...] the use of a word in some new sense in order to remedy a gap in the vocabulary; catachresis is the putting of new senses into old words. But if a catachresis serves a genuine need, the new sense introduced will quickly become part of the literal sense" (33). However, such literal sense does not derive from a simple, one-to-one relationship of analogy – that is, metaphor does not coincide fully with the literal meaning it is trying to replace or compensate for. Rather, Black argues for interaction-based metaphors, i.e., metaphors whose meaning originates from the *entanglement* of two "systems of commonplaces" (40), whereby the reader will apply some of the features of the "subsidiary subject" to the "primary subject" of the metaphor,³ generating meaning that cannot be fully explained through translation into "plain" literal language. Such intellectual operations on the reader's part demand "simultaneous awareness of both subjects but [are] not reducible to any comparison between the two" (46). The result of metaphor, in other words, is not the arithmetic *sum* of the literal features it extracts from these systems of commonplaces but the *product* of their interaction. Such a view of the generative meaning-making power of metaphor evokes some of the traits of the posthuman, among which inter-relationality plays a fundamental role. Indeed, more than one of Black's observations on metaphor can be applied to the posthuman, as conceptualizing it stretches the boundaries of language: whereas scholars can refer to resources like

the *Posthuman Glossary* to delve into the intricacies of terminology, literary authors must resort to rhetorical strategies to manifest the inexpressible, and metaphor is chief among them.

When metaphor meets the posthuman, language acquires (or, possibly, reacquires) a material dimension. “Man is a wolf,” an example Black uses, becomes literal in *This Is How You Lose the Time War*, as Blue shapeshifts into a monstrous wolf to protect Red from a trap set by Garden (79). In this specific case, and others I will analyze in the next section, the metaphor is literalized, realized concretely. (Wo)man is not only aggressive, wild, dangerous – or any other feature we might infer from connecting man to wolf. Blue *becomes* a wolf and *is* a wolf, not just like one. This metaphor does not play on similarity or substitution, it works on *identity*, through the interaction of states of being, of a metamorphic, polymorphic subjectivity. In other words, when expressing the posthuman, metaphor becomes metamorphosis.

Kai Mikkonen argues that “for a change to be described as a metamorphosis, it requires a presupposition of the original form. Consequently, we may think of the construction of the new form in terms of a metaphor that both replaces and compares one with another and that creates two or more forms into a new, meaningful image” (311). In other words, metamorphosis both encloses the interpretations of metaphor identified by Black, and always implies that something of the original shape is retained. Thus, it is to be understood as an expansion on the original subject, not as its total annihilation through substitution. Similarly, Bruce Clarke states that the “metamorphic imaginary since Darwin has a distinctly evolutionary valence” (2). Darwin’s work attributes to metamorphosis both a natural, i.e., not *supernatural*, status and a progressive one: post-*Origins*, metamorphosis is often read as the next step in the evolutionary ladder, a necessary transformation which intimates “that the essence of the human is to have no essence” (2). This ties post-*Origins* metamorphosis to the posthuman, which starts from the assumption that the humanist subject is but an incomplete, outdated conceptualization that does not express the whole potential of/for humanity. Nevertheless, we cannot have the *post*-human without the human. Some elements will be retained, just as metaphor and metamorphosis demand. Notably, Clarke’s argumentation

that posthuman metamorphosis has an evolutionary valence ties into what Mikkonen, deriving insights from Le Guern and Jakobson, writes about the difference between metaphor and metamorphosis: “metamorphosis paradoxically supposes that it can make metaphors and similes real, that is, analogous with the reference point of a sign, by literally fusing the opposites of a metaphor together to *provide a literary figure with a sense of physicality and time*” (312; emphasis added). In other words, metaphors exist as atemporal figures of speech; when they are placed within space and time, they become metamorphoses. This collapse of the difference between signifier and signified thus leads to the collapse of the difference between the realm of words and the realm of objects (Jakobson, “Statue” 35). The literalized, materialized, temporalized metaphor that is metamorphosis bridges the gap between language and reality.

Thus, language finds itself enmeshed in the posthuman assemblage, becoming one of its fundamental components. The posthuman subject is as much discursive as it is embodied. After all, the human subject has always been a product of language⁴ – or rather, of a linguistic fallacy. In his *Unbecoming Human* (2020), Felice Cimatti draws from Derrida to argue that the humanist ideal of the human, conceptualized as “the living being that is *not* an animal” (1), relies on a word, “animal,” that has no referent in the world: “The animal of which we speak is never the animal as it is in and of itself: the animal is always an ‘*animot*,’ the spoken-of animal, metaphorised and idealized. [...] The animal does not exist” (2). It follows that the relational concept of the human, too, cannot be grounded. Cimatti’s work pushes the human towards *unbecoming* – that is, relinquishing the discursive construct of the human as other than the animal – in order to reappropriate the very animality of the human, of which language is but an expression.⁵ This, he argues, may lead to a newfound communion between human and environment, a return to an understanding of the human as part of the environment and of the environment as part of the human.

If we accept that language is an intrinsic part of being human, then, by extension, metaphor is, too. However, whereas the humanist construct of human and animal masked its purely discursive nature, there is a sort of “sincerity” in the metaphor: it does not try to hide that, in general, it does not have a referent in reality. Metaphors carry no strong claims to a real-

world referent. At times, when used as catachresis, they do serve to make up for a lack of signifier to a new signified, but, in general, metaphors exist within language, as the potential for new referents. If metaphors are a forge wherein to *create* referents, then, they may be also instrumental in inspiring new hybrids, new perspectives, new entanglements, in a way that eschews the normative, mutually exclusive view of human and animal entities produced by humanism. Literalizing a metaphor, turning it into a metamorphosis, means embodying it in a real-world referent, enmeshing it into the chrono-spatial environment. It also means generating links between the many elements that make up the human, some long accepted, others – like animality – rejected. Accepting the human as a discursive construct allows us to move beyond the conceptualization of “man” as the counterpart to the simulacrum “animal” – a conceptualization that, as mentioned above, derives from humanism (Cimatti 1). At the same time, this view allows for a reconceptualization of human subjectivity as the contingent outcome of discursive composites made up of another form of language, not built on dichotomies but on relationality: language that holds infinite generative potential may usher in new subjective formations capable of embodying and expressing non-dichotomous relations between species.

Analysis

As I have argued, metaphor is one of the primary literary devices deployed by authors to express instances of the posthuman, in that it generates a discursive space where the identity of the characters can be fluid, protean, always in a state of *becoming*. In *This Is How You Lose the Time War*, posthuman metamorphoses engender an assemblage of subject-body-space-time-language that blurs the boundaries between matter and environment, making the case for a different understanding of *zoe* in the posthuman age. This happens primarily through the pervasive use of metaphors, which are

deployed to describe settings, actions, characters, impressions, emotions. Following Alaimo (“Transcorporeality”), they break down the figure/ground distinction that normally exists between agents performing tasks and the environments hosting them. Thus, interaction-based metaphors tie space and time to a corporeal dimension, and bodies to a spatial dimension. The environments which Red and Blue cross are often personified, given bodily features and agency, invested with *zoe*: Blue, for instance, “combs or snarls the strands of time’s braid” (El-Mohtar and Gladstone 10) and Red “braids and unbraids history’s hair” (85). As the day breaks, “the horizon blinks, and morning yawns above it” (39). “The volcano [...] vomits rocks into the air” while “the lava [...] spits” (49). In turn, Red and Blue’s (post)human bodies become one with the chrono-spatial continuum. Blue writes: “I feel you, the needle of you, dancing up and downthread with breathtaking abandon. I feel your hand in places I’ve touched” (102), experiencing Red’s presence in time/space as if she were caressing a part of her body. Red, in turn, writes: “I want to be a context for you, and you for me” (130), making herself an environment for their love.

These quick references to the metaphorical use of language already introduce the blurred boundaries between the human and the nonhuman in *This Is How You Lose the Time War*. Such contamination is at its most evident, though, when we focus on the “species” to which Red and Blue belong. Braidotti introduces the act of *becoming* as a triad of processes that can – but not always do – happen simultaneously: becoming-animal, becoming-machine, and becoming-earth (66-67). From the outset, these processes are embodied by the leads of the novella. Red, who belongs to the Agency, is introduced as she roams a barren battlefield:

She holds a corpse that was once a man, her hands gloved in its guts, her fingers clutching its alloy spine. She lets go, and the exoskeleton clatters against rock. Crude technology. Ancient. Bronze to depleted uranium. He never had a chance. That is the point of Red. [...] Her weapons and armor fold into her like roses at dusk. Once flaps of pseudoskin settle and heal and the programmable matter of her clothing knits back together, Red looks, again, something like a woman. (El-Mohtar and Gladstone 2-3)

Red is a mechanical hybrid, whose shape can approximate that of a human female but does not coincide with it. Her appearance can shapeshift easily so that she will blend in or stand out, depending on the necessities of a given mission through space and time. In her first letter to Blue, an answer to a taunt on her enemy's part, she explains that members of the Agency experience life differently from Garden people: "We're not so isolated as you are, not so locked in our own heads. We think in public. Our notions inform one another, correct, expand, reform. Which is why we win" (12). Later, Red explains that Agents exist within the cloud, and inhabit "cyborgian" bodies which are designed or modified rationally in order to suppress physical impulses and needs (61). The description of Red's Commandant reiterates the point:

Usually Commandant operates upthread from some gleaming crystal citadel or other. At times the Agency has called Red to report to a bare platform orbiting an unfamiliar star, forgetting even to produce a humanlike superior she can address. The stars alone listen. Commandant [...] retreated to her pod long ago and now roams time and space as a disembodied mind, wedded to, webbed through, the Agency's great hyperspace machines. She takes form only when she must, and when she does, she chooses any form that lies to hand, or none. [...] Commandant stands before [Red], in the form of a big woman in an army uniform, wearing an apron, with bloody pliers in one hand. She holds them as if she is not used to holding things. (133-34)

Based on the insight Red offers through her letters and description of the nature of the Agency's members, it is possible to argue that they are already expressing several of the features Braidotti associates with the Posthuman subject: relationality, nomadism, inter-connectedness. They are, in a sense, the expected result of the process of *becoming-machine*, as they are represented as hybrid creatures more in touch with technology than with feelings and sensations. In relishing her embodied nature as a field agent, Red is unique among her peers.

Conversely, Blue and her peers belonging to Garden embody the *becoming-earth/animal* processes. She explains as follows:

Garden seeds the past with us [...] and we learn from and grow into its threads. We treat the past as trellis, coax our vineyard through and around, and harvest is not a word for swiftness; the future harvests us, stomps us into wine, pours us back into the root system in loving libation, and we grow stronger and more potent together. I have been birds and branches. I have been bees and wolves. I have been ether flooding the void between stars, tangling their breath into networks of song. I have been fish and plankton and humus, and all these have been me. But while I've been enmeshed in this wholeness — they are not the whole of me. (71-72)

The metaphors, here, are evidently drawn from the semantic field of agriculture: seeding, growing, harvesting. Blue is both the plant undergoing these processes and the one harvesting the time-braid. She is, at times, animals or natural elements, but never just them, and never just herself. Her subjectivity is polymorphic and relational. Like the Agency, Garden, too, keeps its members embedded. Narrating to Red the tale of how she had been infected by an insatiable hunger as a child and had to be cut off from Garden, she writes:

Garden can, does, has, will shed pieces, always, cuttings, flowers, fruit, but Garden endures and grows stronger again. [...] I had never been alone. [...] I was only my own body, only my own senses, only a girl whose parents were running to her because she had a bad dream. I touched their faces, and they were mine; I touched the bed I was on, smelled apples stewing somewhere outside. It was as if, in my own small way, I'd become Garden — so me in my wholeness, me in my fingers, in my hair, in my skin, whole the way Garden is whole, but apart. (123)

Only in her isolation, for the first time, does Blue experience a sense of completeness, as for the rest of her life she exists as a member of a bigger, interconnected whole. She is repulsed by it, and longs to be taken back by Garden, to be again part of that entangled totality of interwoven beings. Even as an adult, back to being part of the Garden, she revels in that sense of belonging to a greater organism.

Thus, the human-machine and human-earth/animal hybrids that make up the Agency and Garden even before the events of the novella begin

coincide with processes of *becoming*. Nevertheless, at the point in which the diegesis starts, their inter-relationality has lost much of its posthuman potential: members of the Agency and Garden, despite representing alterity for the readers, are not *interacting with* alterity, at least not in the sense that Braidotti implies. Even though there has been, at some point, a process of becoming through contact with the Other that originated the posthuman subjectivities of the Agency's and Garden's members, that process has long been interrupted in favor of isolating themselves once more as a "species." There is no communication among members of these opposed factions, no true exchange of information, values, emotions. Only when Red and Blue start writing to each other can the Posthuman process of subject creation through becoming and relating to Otherness resume. From such foreign contact, unexpected and awe-inspiring, derives the metamorphosis expressed through generative language – i.e., metaphor. It is Blue that transforms Red through her words, and vice versa.

The first and most visible step of this transformation, stylistically, is the deployment of metaphors in the salutation of the letters. Blue becomes, for instance, Mood Indigo, 0000FF, Lapis, Blueprint, while Red is Cardinal, Miskowaanzhe ("red light" in Anishinaabemowin language), Price Greater Than Rubies, Strawberry, Raspberry, Apple Tree, My Heart's Own Blood. The nomination through referents evoking the color of their names (in themselves metaphorical) continues past the direct address that opens each letter. In a passage describing Red finding a message by Blue, the authors choose this wording: "She feels each letter and word and wonders how long the sky and sea spent winding this cord, and who taught her the knot code in the first place, whether the iris bit her lip in frustration as she worked through a difficult passage" (70). Later, writing directly after Blue has saved her life by taking her wolf form and fighting the beast that wanted to kill her, Red confesses: "I try not to think of you the same way twice. [...] I change your shape in my thoughts. It's amazing how much blue there is in the world, if you look. You're different colors of flame: Bismuth burns blue, and cerium, germanium, and arsenic. See? I pour you into things" (81).

Such metaphors, though, do not work merely on analogy, as comparisons or substitutions. As mentioned above, Blue can take any shape through

Garden. She is animal, plant, and matter – anything traversed with *zoe*. Red, equally, can mechanically shapeshift according to her needs. They *are*, in essence, the many things they call each other, not singularly but as a whole. Blue is all the different colors of flame, the sky, the flowers; singling only one of them out is merely naming them through synecdoche – a part for the whole. Fundamentally, this whole encompasses any and all facets of *zoe*, a fact that is all the more true because it is acknowledged by the Other. Put differently, their naming each other things, their referencing elements that evoke their polymorphous identity constitutes the interaction, the act of relating to each other that originates one of the elements of critical posthumanism. They enter into communication, and thus start changing each other. In her first message, for instance, Blue brags that she has “infiltrated” (8) Red’s mind, and Red answers back arguing: “I’ve repaid your letter with my own. Now we have a correspondence. [...] Who’s infecting whom?” (14). As they warm to each other and start revealing their grudging respect turned into affection and, later, love, the concept returns. Red writes: “I have built a you within me, or you have. I wonder what of me there is in you” (95).

This declaration foreshadows what will happen towards the end of the story, when Red’s Commandant orders her to kill Blue with a poisonous letter and Red chooses to renounce her essence and take a literal part of Blue into herself to save her. In this sense, Red and Blue’s transformation into an entangled posthuman subject is not only figurative, as expressed by their growing feelings for each other, but literal. Key, here, is the way in which the authors choose to represent the missives. Far from being traditional letters, Red and Blue send each other messages in the most disparate ways, translating words into things, *materializing* language. They subvert all tropes about epistolary exchanges while retrieving them. This becomes evident from the very beginning:

On a span of blasted ground, [Red] finds the letter. [...] There should not be a sheet of cream-colored paper, clean save a single line in a long, trailing hand: *Burn before reading*. [...] She finds a lighter in a dead soldier’s pocket. Flames catch in the depths of her eyes. Sparks rise, ashes fall, and letters form on the paper, in that same long, trailing hand. [...] The letter burns her fingers as the signature takes shape. She lets its cinders fall. (4-5)

Here, the classic intimation often found in spy stories, “burn after reading,” is overturned. Only by destroying the letter can the message be received. The following missives are written in equally unexpected media: boiling water inside an MRI machine, bones of long-dead pilgrims, feathers, knots, tree rings, the stirring of tea. Two examples to illustrate the point: first, after consulting the literature on wax and sigils and perfumes, Red sends her letter on a piece of undigested dried cod inside a literal seal that Blue kills on a mission (41-43). This case of homonymy (seal=sigil; seal=marine animal) gives corporeality to a feature of epistolary exchanges, turning the wax seal into a slaughtered animal, whose function is *still* that of protecting the contents of the letter, extending the metaphor through similarity.

Second, Blue sends six letters in crimson seeds, delivered in a pouch tied to the neck of a goose and written in aftertaste. Red “eats the first three seeds one by one. [...] As each letter unfolds inside her mind, she frames it in the palace of her memory. She webs words to cobalt and lapis, she weds them to the robes of Mary in San Marco frescoes, to paint on porcelain, to the color inside a glacier crack. She will not let her go” (101). Ingesting the seeds induces a temporary metamorphosis: as she reads the fifth, “she is not a person anymore. She is a toad; she is a rabbit in the hunter’s hand; she is a fish. She is, briefly, Blue, alone with Red, and together” (117).

By materializing the letters in all these different instances, words themselves acquire a corporeal, physical dimension. Saying that Blue’s letter was a feather is no more a simple metaphor conveying notions of levity and softness, but a literal metamorphosis of the language. These corporeal words interact with Red and Blue’s bodies, changing their physiology, contaminating them and transforming them in such a way that will draw them closer, and further from their respective factions. Indeed, it is such corporeality of words that ensures the survival of the two characters. Once the Agency succeeds in poisoning Blue, Red chooses to travel back to all the moments in which she opened Blue’s letters in order to absorb as much of her as possible, revealing that the shadow she had noticed following her through time and space, only known as Seeker, is Red herself.

“Red kills time” (174), and she does it literally – once more, a literalized metaphor – as she moves from strand to strand with no regard for the preservation of time’s braid. She works on an assumption, that Blue cannot

be killed by a poison built for a Garden agent if she has been contaminated by Red's essence: "They have sprinkled bits of themselves through time. Ink and ingenuity, flakes of skin on paper, bits of pollen, blood, oil, down, a goose's heart" (179). Thus, she collects these bits as the Seeker, absorbing them into her body:

Red finds water in an MRI machine in an abandoned hospital and drinks. In a temple abyss, Red gnaws fallen bones. In a grand computer's heart, she peers through optic circuits. In a frozen waste, she slides a letter's splinters into her skin. She takes them into herself, adapts. Finds all the missing shades of Blue.

As the letters' taunts change tone, she must be more inventive. A spider eating a dragonfly. A shadow drinking tears and coiled enzymes within. [...] She travels the labyrinth of the past and rereads the letters. Recreates both herself and Blue, so young-seeming now, in her heart.

She clutches the text like a spar against a flood.

(182)

Once she has collected all traces of Blue, she is ready for her final metamorphosis:

On a bare island far upthread, she places the seal upon her tongue, chews, swallows, and collapses.

She shades herself with Blue, from blood, tears, skin, ink, words. She thrashes with the pain of growth inside her: new organs bloom from autosenesized stem cells to shoulder old bits of her away. Green vines twine her heart and seize it, and she vomits and sweats until the vines' rhythm matches hers. A second skin grows within her skin, popping, blistering. She claws herself off upon the rocks like a snake and lies transformed. And more: A different mind plays around the edges of her own.

She feels herself alien. She has spent thousands of years killing bodies like the one she wears. Sea spray breaks the barren sunrise to rainbows.

(184)

With Blue growing inside her, Red can then access Garden to find Blue as a child and give her the antidote for the poison. Saved from certain death, Blue writes one last letter, in which she acknowledges their interwoven nature. "I want to explain myself – this self you've saved, this self you've

infected, this self that was Möbius twisted with yours from its earliest beginning” (196).

Thus, the circle is closed, in an array of metaphors pertaining to the field of bodily sensation (eating, touching, digesting, hurting, and so many more). Red is Blue and Blue is Red, both identities tangled together through the threads of time they so often walked. Their subjectivities, born from interaction with alterity, produce two posthuman beings settling into a permanent state of becoming: Red becoming Blue, Blue becoming Red. In the background – but no less relevant – lies generative, metaphorical language made matter, body, and space (“Letters are structures, not events. You give me a place to live inside,” writes Red; 95), ingested, digested, preserved within posthuman bodies slowly becoming posthuman subjects.

Red and Blue share a protean nature. Change is implicit in their existence; thus, their metamorphosis is never complete. Whatever shape they take will never be the last. In a state of permanent mutation, transformation, *becoming*, they embrace their being with each other and with their environment, letting their subjectivities be permeated by otherness. In sum, *This Is How You Lose the Time War* engages with the posthuman imagination to the point of reading as a manifesto for life *in fieri*, the highest expression of that inter-relational *zoe* which transverses all living matter.

Notes

- ¹ Due to space constraints, I point the reader to Ranisch and Sorgner (2014) for an overview of the Posthuman. Ferrando (2013) also offers useful insights on terminology.
- ² Due to space constraints, I am leaving out references to other studies of metaphor. I am especially eschewing mention to Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* and the research on conceptual metaphor on the grounds that I am not looking at the abstraction of the concept, but at its concrete realization in a specific case study.
- ³ In a simple metaphor like "Man is a wolf", man is the primary subject, the one invested by metaphor, and wolf the secondary, the one that lends its features.
- ⁴ On the discursive nature of human subjectivity, see Butler.
- ⁵ Unbecoming, in my understanding, is but another type of becoming in the sense illustrated before. It is becoming by deconstructing, by relinquishing notions unveiled as fallacious.

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FORUM

Un Forum a puntate
Frontiera/Frontiere: Conversazioni su confini e migrazioni
tra il Mediterraneo e l'Atlantico

VALERIO MASSIMO DE ANGELIS

Introduzione

Nel terzo intervento nel “Forum a puntate” sui confini e sulle migrazioni tra il Mediterraneo e l’Atlantico Claudia Bernardi propone una comparazione diretta tra le teorie e le pratiche di costruzione degli spazi di separazione, sia terrestri sia acquatici, che le compagini socio-economiche “privilegiate” degli Stati Uniti e dell’Unione Europea pongono in essere per controllare i processi migratori di chi proviene dal mondo “di sotto”, secondo un progetto di militarizzazione sempre più evidente e diffusa, che riduce sistematicamente i/le migranti al rango nemmeno più di semplici “alieni”, ma di nemici *tout court*. In queste *borderwaterlands* (quasi una versione 2.0 delle *borderlands* di Gloria Anzaldúa) continuano a persistere forme di contatto, comunicazione e contaminazione, ma prevalgono in modo sempre più deciso le forme di identificazione e marginalizzazione di chi cerca di entrare nel mondo “di sopra” sulla base di differenze di razza/etnia e genere che vanno a riprodursi perversamente anche tra le varie comunità migranti e all’interno di ciascuna di esse. E se per molti versi il confine tra Messico e Stati Uniti può ancora essere considerato una sorta di modello per tutti gli altri sistemi di demarcazione ed esclusione, negli ultimi anni il Mediterraneo si è trasformato in un Río Bravo/Río Grande assai più vasto e profondo, in una progressiva espansione che è andata ad includere aree che appartenerebbero geograficamente allo spazio “altro”, quello di provenienza dei/delle migranti, e che ora sono diventate esse stesse terre (o acque) di confine in continuo mutamento e movimento – e le cifre sulle vittime delle migrazioni testimoniano di un poderoso superamento delle *borderwaterlands* nordamericane da parte di quelle “macromediterranee” nella classifica delle necropolitiche migratorie. In questo senso, le terre/acque di confine tra Atlantico e Mediterraneo risuonano in modo sempre più lugubre, quasi all’unisono, degli echi di una sofferenza che tuttavia sempre meno riesce a trovare un qualche ascolto dall’altra parte del confine.

CLAUDIA BERNARDI

Risonanze tra i confini del Nord America e del Mediterraneo: Esclusione, militarizzazione e violenza nelle *borderwaterlands*

Vivere nelle terre di confine, le *borderlands*, significa “essere lacerate tra vie traverse”: così scriveva Gloria Anzaldúa di quel confine tra Stati Uniti e Messico che “me raya me raya” (Anzaldúa 29). Sebbene i suoi scritti siano solitamente menzionati per l’idea di frontiera come spazio di transizione *mestizo*, ibrido e in continuo divenire, colgo qui i suoi tratti più laceranti, la conflittualità e le tensioni che costituiscono le *borderlands*. Mi sembra rilevante sottolineare questo aspetto poiché ancora si veicola, nonostante una generale critica alla violenza del colonialismo/capitalismo, un’immagine di meticcio connesso e fluido che rischia di non restituire pienamente gli elementi di attrito e frizione che, al pari di altri, compongono lo scenario della *frontera*, densamente abitato da recinti e filo spinato. Le “terre di confine” sono fonte di lacerazione e scontri durissimi, ma soprattutto sono spazio abitato da un’aggressione violenta agita attraverso l’imposizione di muri militarizzati e rappresentazioni escludenti.

Un Forum che articola il rapporto tra confini e movimento migrante è quanto mai necessario e tempestivo nell’anno 2023, quando termini come “sostituzione etnica” o “etnia italiana” ritrovano un’anacronistica attualità. Gli interventi che mi hanno preceduta hanno discusso l’entità dei fenomeni migratori e i fondamenti coloniali del TransMediterrAtlantico.¹ Ora, vorrei porre maggiore attenzione sui processi di definizione delle *borderwaterlands* attraverso l’esclusione, la militarizzazione, le politiche di morte o, in altri termini, la necropolitica. Sia la terra sia l’acqua sono presenti in entrambi i contesti considerati, *waterlands* appunto che compongono il paesaggio di confine attraversato da migranti provenienti da vari luoghi del mondo. Qui

si tenta un esercizio storiografico e critico che, nel poco spazio a disposizione, intende rivedere la rappresentazione delle politiche di controllo ed espulsione. Lungi dall'essere uno strumento di difesa, tutela, protezione (o qualsiasi altra immagine sia proposta per giustificarne il loro uso), esse si configurano come un'arma offensiva impiegata per espellere, selezionare e uccidere. Tale esercizio critico è volto sia a respingere la drammatizzazione di fenomeni – come l'ingresso di migranti privi di documenti – più ridotti di quanto i media e i governi facciano credere, sia a praticare un'attenzione necessaria a marginalizzare la diffusione dell'indifferenza verso politiche mortifere che ci riguardano nell'immediato.

Posizionarsi sul limite

A scanso di equivoci, vale la pena esprimere subito una posizione specifica nei confronti dei concetti di “confine” e “frontiera”. In questo testo non sono utilizzati in modo intercambiabile, come sia l'opinione pubblica sia il dibattito scientifico spesso propongono. Il dibattito sulla natura del confine e del suo rapporto con la frontiera è ancora aperto e vivace. Qui si lascia da parte la frontiera – concetto che segue una genealogia specifica e dapprima tutta americana, *delle Americhe*, e che assume diversi significati nelle sue varie declinazioni di *frontier*, *frontera*, *fronteira* – per porre l'attenzione sul confine e sulle terre di confine, sulle *borderlands*, o meglio quelle che potremmo chiamare le *borderwaterlands*. Va da sé che per una certa letteratura le terre di confine sono un sinonimo di frontiera.

Persino in presenza di una marcata militarizzazione, il confine svolge anche una funzione di contatto. Pure quando si fa barriera militarizzata, è sempre poroso, attraversabile, e può diventare un elemento sul quale si appoggiano comunità umane che lo tramutano in un ambiente domestico, come si può osservare in alcuni siti del confine messico-statunitense.



Figura 1 – Case a Tijuana costruite sul muro di confine (fonte: García)

Sulla “fusione culturale”, sulla natura transnazionale dello spazio di confine e sulle identità ibride che lo abitano si è posta molta attenzione sin dagli anni Sessanta del secolo scorso, quando i movimenti sociali del Sudovest statunitense hanno riattualizzato narrazioni delle terre pre-conquista come quella di Aztlán o introdotto un “pensiero di confine”. Altre visioni che sottolineano esclusivamente gli elementi di mescolanza e meticciato sono state criticate per l’approccio culturalista o essenzialista. In particolar modo a partire dagli anni Novanta, la letteratura scientifica dell’America del Nord ha dedicato maggiori sforzi a identificare i conflitti sociali che animano quest’area. Nel Mediterraneo, questi due approcci hanno avuto una parabola diversa rispetto al periodo in cui sono emersi, ma anche qui la visione “cosmopolita” della cultura mediterranea che vive il suo apice storico in città come Istanbul o Alessandria ha lasciato il passo allo studio del mare nostrum come confine per eccellenza (v. Ribas-Mateos *The Mediterranean Rio Grande*). Le più recenti analisi – etnografiche, sociologiche, politologiche – guardano al confine come al nucleo dell’economia globale in una rinnovata fase di accumulazione capitalista e ristrutturazione urbana facendone, quindi, un metodo del

capitalismo globalizzato che ci permette di vedere tutti i confini come parte di un solo dispositivo (Mezzadra and Neilson). Qui, tale dibattito fornisce il contesto minimo – scientifico e storiografico – per orientarci con i termini confine e frontiera, ma resta tuttavia sullo sfondo per collocare in primo piano il processo di militarizzazione. Non è questo il solo, né il più rilevante, ma certamente è al momento il processo più urgente, attuale e condiviso tra le sponde del Mediterraneo e quelle del Río Bravo – si potrebbe persino dibattere sul processo di militarizzazione in atto lungo il confine tra il Messico e il Guatemala, ma la questione eccede lo spazio qui a disposizione.

Un avvertimento doveroso: si rischia di produrre una sorta di “nuovo etnocentrismo” laddove il confine tra Messico e Stati Uniti venga considerato come “paradigmatico” rispetto ad altri (v. Ribas-Mateos, *El Río Bravo Mediterráneo* e “The Mediterranean Rio Grande/Río Bravo”). È certamente la continuità e l’intensità dei movimenti migratori nell’attuale *Norte* messicano e *Southwest* statunitense, così come la mole degli studi disponibili sul tema, che ci permettono un’analisi più ampia e di lungo termine di questa area rispetto a quella mediterranea, ma non per questo le *borderwaterlands* nordamericane beneficiano di alcuna peculiarità esclusiva o paradigmatica. Allora il Forum di RSAJournal non può che essere benefico nell’incentivare la contaminazione tra studi di aree diverse e nel tratteggiare le risonanze e convergenze tra processi storici situati in contesti geograficamente lontani, ma non per questo disgiunti.

Politiche dell’esclusione

La questione della sovranità costituisce un tema classico che accomuna l’area nordamericana e quella mediterranea. Una linea che corre attraverso mari, fiumi e deserti svolge una funzione di demarcazione, stabilisce i termini dell’inclusione e dell’esclusione di alcune persone, opera selezioni ed esercita il potere sovrano su un’area definita. Tale proprietà del confine è stata imposta ormai in quasi tutto il mondo. Se all’inizio del Novecento gli stati erano una cinquantina, adesso ve ne sono 193 riconosciuti a livello mondiale, ognuno con i propri confini sovrani.

Varcare il confine, laddove l'ingresso non è permesso, comporta o una "illegalizzazione" del soggetto o una dichiarazione di guerra verso l'intruso. Il confine si impone come forma di protezione da un nemico: indesiderato, alieno, pericoloso, infetto, terrorista – molti termini sono stati utilizzati per etichettare e criminalizzare chi attraversa i confini senza un permesso. La rappresentazione dei soggetti esclusi è senza dubbio un tema di rilevanza globale che nell'area nordamericana e mediterranea è, inoltre, associata all'opposizione tra ricchi e poveri. Il confine agisce come linea distintiva dell'ineguaglianza e lungo le sue linee corre anche la divisione sociale tra benessere e povertà. Coloro che riescono a oltrepassare questo confine diventano "illegali" e soggetti a misure di espulsione e deportazione. Tale distinzione è funzionale alla costruzione di gerarchie sociali e simboliche che rendono queste due aree "key places engaged in the fraught relationship between global wealth and global poverty" (Heyman and Ribas-Mateos 1). Il denaro regola l'accesso a un confine che, di fronte a una carta di credito, diviene una porta. In un'intervista svolta dall'etnografo statunitense Josiah Heyman, un agente al confine tra Messico e Stati Uniti ha candidamente spiegato che "a credit card means you are legitimate" (5): una carta di credito dimostra la legittimità dell'ingresso di quella persona. In altre parole, confine non coincide solo con esclusione e partizione, ma con l'aumento delle disuguaglianze in aree che vivono un'intensa interazione. Le barriere militarizzate volte a impedire l'ingresso di migranti rispondono a una politica del benessere basata sulla paura e su un diffuso razzismo. L'esclusione è un atto tutto politico connotato da alcune *passioni*. Heyman e Ribas-Mateos associano chiaramente l'esercizio della sovranità a sentimenti specifici:

this concept of dangerous exterior and safe but threatened interior represents global inequality, with the threats being non-white, poor people. This symbolic representation (exterior dangerous people) is transferred to the domains of crime, terrorism, and illegalized drugs. This externalizes the guilt and anxiety about possession of privilege and wealth (2-3).

Le macrodistinzioni di razza e classe sono certamente valide nell'impedire l'ingresso di migranti subsahariani nell'Unione Europea, così come di centroamericani negli Stati Uniti, ma la moltiplicazione del confine si dà

anche all'interno della stessa popolazione, muovendo da distinzioni che sono via via sempre più incorporate e diffuse a livello sociale. Il cosiddetto "racial profiling" effettuato dagli agenti che pattugliano le zone di confine induce a fermare e controllare guidatori, di mezzi pubblici e privati, che "sembrano migranti" o dalla pelle scura, dai vestiti meno curati o poco costosi all'apparenza. La mobilità diviene ineguale non solo nell'attraversamento del confine, ma anche quando essa si dipana all'interno degli stati incrementando, al contempo, l'esclusione al suo interno. Al contrario, coloro che dispongono di pelle chiara e appaiono benestanti sono meno soggetti a controlli e godono, anche di fatto, di una mobilità libera che trasforma il confine in un ponte tra culture diverse. Sono quindi le condizioni di mobilità che mutano la funzione del confine da barriera a membrana di contatto. La connessione tra le due zone separate dalla barriera si dispiega attraverso economie formali e informali, corridoi di mobilità lavorativa stagionale e *commuting* giornaliero, merci di consumo e tecnologia, processi di industrializzazione frontaliere di cui il sistema delle *maquiladoras* in Nord America è il primo esempio in ordine cronologico, ma affiancato dalle industrie italiane in Romania, da quelle francesi in Tunisia o dalla creazione di città industriali simili a Ciudad Juárez. Alcune forme del lavoro e della produzione attraversano o vivono lungo il confine in modo regolare, ad esempio i *commuters* o i lavoratori stagionali che sono reclutati da agenzie predisposte, come accade ampiamente nell'Est Europa, mentre altre ne sono quasi sempre escluse.

È solo muovendo da questa considerazione che possiamo comprendere come la militarizzazione dei confini, il loro ampliamento spaziale in zone cuscinetto, corridoi di percorrenza, enclave e fortificazioni, non può sostenersi senza la costruzione di gerarchie basate sul lavoro e sul rafforzamento delle disuguaglianze che poggiano su processi storici di lunga durata, primo tra tutti il colonialismo. L'esclusione è, quindi, materiale e immateriale allo stesso tempo.

La Militarizzazione delle *Borderwaterlands*

Una prospettiva, a mio avviso, adeguata alle sfide che la militarizzazione dei confini ci pone è quella di cogliere le risonanze tra aree così diverse

per storia e conformazione geografica, prediligendo il rapporto tra pratiche migranti e funzioni del confine. È il duplice rapporto dell'attraversamento e dell'esperienza soggettiva che Pablo Vila rintraccia nel reciproco legame tra "border crossing" e "border reinforcing". Ogni attraversamento del confine che apre spazi di agibilità ai migranti costituisce, allo stesso tempo, un punto di rafforzamento del potere repressivo di uno Stato: se ogni volta si stabiliscono nuove aperture, simultaneamente questo attraversamento comporta un consolidamento del confine stesso tramite il controllo e la gestione dei flussi. Il confine si rafforza e diviene anche una sorta di gabbia per le identità, rigida e mutevole allo stesso tempo:

Essere costretti ad attraversare l'Atlantico come schiavi in catene, ad attraversare illegalmente il Mediterraneo o il Rio Grande diretti verso Nord e pieni di speranza, o anche sudare nelle lente code davanti alle burocrazie stringendo in mano passaporti e libretti di lavoro, significa prendere l'abitudine di vivere a metà strada fra mondi diversi, prigionieri di una frontiera che corre lungo la propria lingua, religione, musica, il proprio modo di vestire, di apparire, di vivere. Venire da altrove, da "là" e non da "qui", e pertanto essere al tempo stesso "dentro" e "fuori" dalla situazione presente, significa vivere all'intersezione tra storie e memorie, sperimentando sia la loro dispersione preliminare sia la successiva traduzione in nuovi e più ampi assetti lungo percorsi emergenti. (Chambers 15)

Assumendo questa prospettiva, sottolineo gli elementi di *border reinforcing* sia per questioni di spazio sia perché su questo tema si stanno svolgendo la maggior parte delle ricerche di tipo comparativo e comprensivo delle due aree. La militarizzazione non è volta, quindi, a fermare i flussi, ma a peggiorarne le condizioni, a rendere più violento il prezzo da pagare per l'attraversamento, ad ampliare il confine – tutto immateriale, ma dalle materiali ripercussioni – che divide status differenti, in base a categorie razziali, sessuali, etniche e di classe.

Se è vero che i confini si moltiplicano ovunque (v. Mezzadra and Neilson), la militarizzazione produce lo sdoppiamento delle "linee di difesa" che hanno l'ambizione di proteggere uno spazio per trasformarlo in un'area di influenza. Il confine messico-statunitense che corre lungo il Río Bravo si è così moltiplicato più a sud, lungo il Río Suchiate tra Messico e

Guatemala e nel Mar dei Caraibi dove si snodano le traiettorie migranti che partono da Haiti e Cuba. Il confine europeo non si materializza soltanto a Ceuta-Melilla, sulla rotta balcanica o attraverso i pattugliamenti di Frontex e della guardia costiera libica nel Mar Mediterraneo, ma si innalza anche lungo il confine tra Libia e Niger.

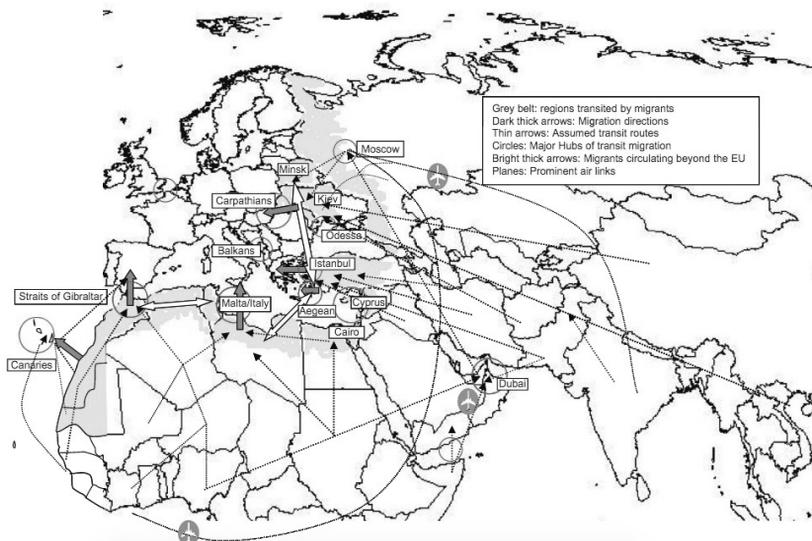


Figura 2 – Flussi migratori verso l'EU (fonte: Nyberg Sørensen)

Quando le funzioni di controllo e pattugliamento oltrepassano la linea del limite nazionale, i confini militarizzati si dipanano nelle aree limitrofe inseguendo le rotte migranti. L'aumento degli studi su queste aree è esemplificativo di questa funzione del confine, particolarmente nell'area mediterranea che è geograficamente molto più articolato e disomogenea rispetto a quella nordamericana. Ceuta-Melilla, Lesbo, Malta, Lampedusa, Calais-Dover, Evros e Transcarpazia sono varchi di ingresso di un confine mobile che si snoda lungo due continenti e si espande oltre la “prefrontiera” di Mauritania, Niger, Sudan, Turchia, Ucraina e Bielorussia, come si evince dalla seguente mappa.

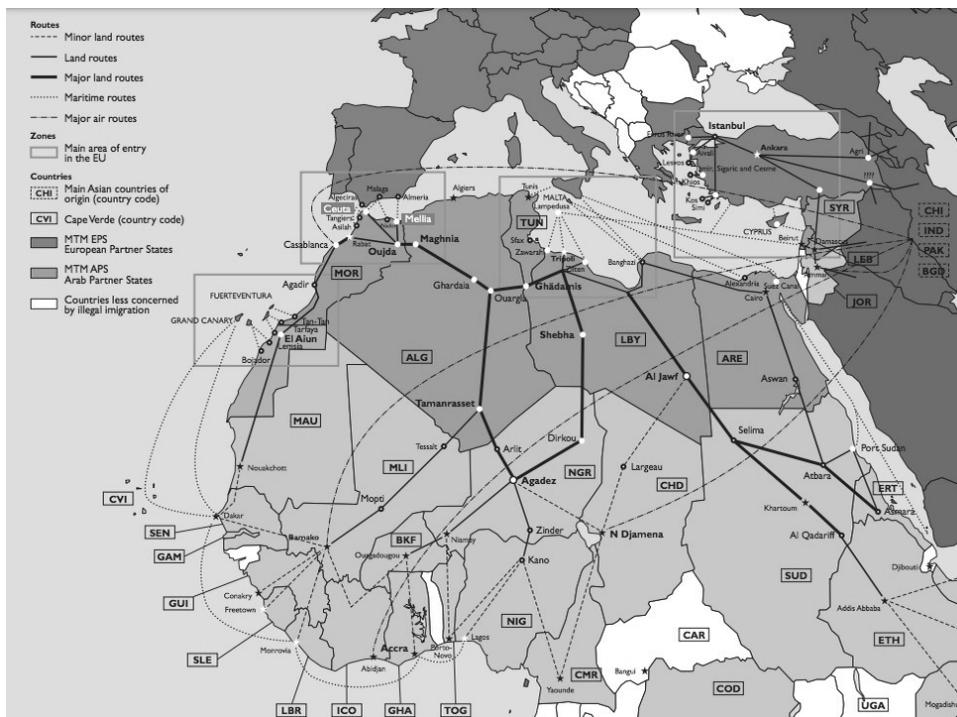


Figura 3 – Rotte migratorie nel Mediterraneo (fonte: Düvell)

Quando gli Stati Uniti fondarono la *Border Patrol* nel 1924 per controllare il confine a sud, individuarono un sistema “a dighe” composto da quattro linee. La prima è costituita da vari segmenti: gli agenti della *Border Patrol* pattugliano lungo il fiume per catturare i migranti privi di documenti, gli “aliens”; le unità a cavallo intercettano coloro che sono sfuggiti alla vigilanza ai punti di ingresso in automobile o su carri; i passeggeri vengono ispezionati nelle città di confine; treni e auto vengono perquisiti prima che lascino le città. La seconda linea è composta da ispettori posizionati

in punti strategici attorno a tutte le ferrovie che procedono verso nord, al fine di intercettare i migranti che intendono eludere il percorso ufficiale di controllo. La terza e quarta linea di difesa sono collocate più a nord, lungo alcuni nodi ferroviari a presidio dei punti più interni del territorio (Dunn 3).

Questa articolazione insiste sul territorio costruendo una geografia di confini mobili che irradiano dallo stesso limite nazionale, ma anche la sorveglianza e il monitoraggio al fine di limitare la mobilità delle persone. La *Border Patrol* nei decenni successivi vedrà un costante aumento degli agenti a sua disposizione, ma è solo con gli anni Settanta che muta la qualità del suo intervento in termini di coordinamento con altre strutture. Il “movente” di questo cambiamento risiede nell’identificazione dei migranti messicani con un problema sociale, e nella loro rappresentazione come vera e propria minaccia: “Such depictions by US government officials and media have fueled a tendency to interpret these issues as potential or actual crises with national security implications” (Dunn 17). Timothy Dunn analizza questa trasformazione ricorrendo al concetto di guerra a bassa intensità, *Low Intensity Doctrine* (LIC), utile a spiegare la complessità di strategie difensive adottate dalla fine degli anni Settanta: “maintaining social control over targeted civilian populations is the essence of low-intensity doctrine” (35). La guerra a bassa intensità risiede nella capacità degli Stati Uniti di riportare all’interno dei confini nazionali strategie di guerra, professionalismo militare e tattiche di repressione dei conflitti sociali precedentemente utilizzate in America Latina e ora volte a scoraggiare e ridurre gli attraversamenti dei migranti. La guerra a bassa intensità è una forma di militarizzazione applicata nelle *borderlands*, vale a dire anche all’interno del territorio nazionale, a scopo offensivo, sebbene sia presentata come una strategia difensiva. La LIC inaugura una lunga stagione di intervento intensivo in alcuni luoghi specifici, in particolare nelle città di confine di cui modifica radicalmente anche il piano urbano. Si apre alla “berlinizzazione” delle città di confine come Tijuana, Nogales e Mexicali, ovvero alla presenza di una “frontera urbana remarcada por un muro de separación” (Alonso Meneses 117). Le telecamere notturne, i rilevatori di movimento, i megafari, i pilastri di cemento che sostengono una rete metallica, un avvallamento di cemento che la costeggia oltre alla

costruzione di strade apposite al pattugliamento della *Border Patrol* hanno segnato la città modificandone profondamente l'aspetto.

Anche nel Mediterraneo, sin dalla firma del trattato di Schengen e dalla costituzione dello Schengen Information System (SIS) nel 1990, sono impiegate sofisticate tecnologie di sorveglianza, database centralizzati, dati biometrici, e fortificazione di alcuni punti privilegiati per l'attraversamento dei migranti – come Ceuta e Melilla. Con il 2001, le strategie dell'antiterrorismo si saldano con le politiche di controllo nel modello della *Fortress Europe* (v. Boswell; Sadik and Kaya). Da un lato vi è una restrizione delle condizioni di accesso e implementazione dei sistemi di controllo integrati in tutta la UE. La banca dati biometrica dell'Unione Europea, Eurodac, viene introdotta nel 2003 per raccogliere le impronte digitali dei migranti e rendere effettivo il regolamento di Dublino che impone misure restrittive sulle richieste di asilo. L'anno dopo è la volta della centralizzazione dei visti con il sistema VIS, a cui hanno avuto accesso anche le agenzie di sicurezza interna. Con la creazione dell'agenzia europea per il controllo dei confini e delle coste, nota come Frontex, si introduce il pattugliamento dei confini con funzioni di controllo e anticrimine, e per la condivisione degli strumenti di *intelligence*.

L'ingresso di richiedenti asilo è gestito come un problema di sicurezza interna e una potenziale minaccia. Gli stessi centri di "accoglienza" per migranti che si diffondono nei primi anni Duemila in Italia sono protetti da filo spinato, telecamere e muri di cinta. La moltiplicazione delle linee fortificate è volta a espandere l'area controllata e creare livelli sovrapposti di sorveglianza e deterrenza al transito di migranti. *Mare Clausum* è infatti quell'operazione che, dal 2016, criminalizza le operazioni di soccorso nel Mediterraneo da parte delle ONG, finanzia e coordina l'operato della guardia costiera libica, delegittima la mobilità delle persone e gli arrivi dei migranti, installa campi di detenzione e rifugio nelle aree limitrofe al confine.

Il Mediterraneo e il Nord America appaiono sempre più come un "arcipelago" di muri, enclave protette, filo spinato e campi di detenzione pattugliati da gruppi di polizia e vigilanza di varia provenienza. È proprio l'immagine dell'arcipelago a descrivere nel modo più appropriato il nuovo ordinamento spaziale contemporaneo (v. Petti): un reticolato globale che gestisce i tempi di attraversamento, immobilizza in siti fortificati (centri di

detenzione, permanenza, deportazione), fluidifica la circolazione di lavoro a basso costo e ridefinisce i rapporti di dipendenza tra aree sempre più vaste. La costruzione di spazi regionali, come il NAFTA e l'Unione Europea, produce sia una maggiore coesione interna sia una maggiore divisione con le aree escluse, oltre all'esternalizzazione dei confini tramite la creazione di zone "buffer" che diventano sempre più ampie. Il Guatemala e il Gambia sono ormai i nuovi confini a sud rispettivamente degli USA e della UE. Tale esternalizzazione e militarizzazione ha un costo e, quindi, un profitto. Infatti, numerosi studi pongono l'attenzione sugli introiti economici che la militarizzazione distribuisce a vari attori: agenzie di stato, prigioni private, enti di sorveglianza e pattugliamento, agenti di polizia, trafficanti, amministratori e governi su varia scala. Le violenze nelle zone di confine e l'intrinseca dimensione coercitiva delle politiche procedono di pari passo con i profitti per questi attori.

Morire nelle *borderwaterlands*

Nel ventunesimo secolo le morti causate da ipertermia, ipotermia, disidratazione, asfissia, annegamento e omicidio per arma da fuoco sono aumentate in modo esponenziale, e tale aumento corrisponde a un'implementazione dalla militarizzazione v. (Magaña). Nelle *borderlands* nordamericane, tra il 1993 e il 2002, Alonso Meneses conta almeno 3.000 migranti morti, circa 300 all'anno, e tre milioni di deportati. Ma nel 2012 i morti accertati sono 471, ai quali si aggiunge un numero indeterminato di persone scomparse (v. "Southwest Border Deaths"). Nel Mediterraneo le cifre dall'inizio degli anni 2000 sono ancor più impressionanti, con un picco di 3.770 morti nel solo 2015 e un numero imprecisato di persone scomparse.² Il *Missing Migrants Project* (MMP) raccoglie dati dal 2014 a livello globale, utilizzando fonti diversificate a seconda delle zone di interesse.³ Nel tentativo di entrare negli Stati Uniti attraverso il confine con il Messico sono state accertate 4.460 persone decedute, mentre sono 497 quelle che hanno perso la vita nell'attraversamento del Mar dei Caraibi. Spostandoci verso il continente europeo, il MMP distingue i dati delle morti accertate nel Mediterraneo e in Europa: nel primo caso sono 26.811, nel secondo 1.002.

I dati relativi alle morti di migranti nell'attraversamento possono essere osservati in controluce con quelli degli attraversamenti che fornisce l'articolo di Tommaso Detti che mi ha preceduto in questo Forum, due anni fa. Non tralasciamo un elemento fondamentale che troppo spesso è oscurato anche nel mostrare i dati: essi si riferiscono ai morti *accertati* durante il viaggio da un paese a un altro (agli Stati Uniti e all'Unione Europea in questo caso), dovute a complicazioni mediche, attacchi, incidenti e violenze. Ma questi dati escludono i morti nelle strutture detentive per migranti, o le morti che accadono dopo la deportazione, o le morti causate dallo sfruttamento sul lavoro favorito dallo status irregolare dei migranti.

Alonso Meneses ha inoltre indagato le possibili similitudini tra le due *borderwaterlands*, notando come il rapporto tra movimento migratorio e blocchi all'ingresso si ripeta ogni volta: quando un varco d'ingresso viene bloccato, ne viene trovato sempre un altro che è però più pericoloso e causa un numero sempre maggiore di morti. A ogni *border crossing* segue il *border reinforcing*, come spiega Pablo Vila. La maggiore difficoltà ad attraversare i confini in California e Texas ha portato all'apertura di nuovi varchi in Arizona e New Mexico, l'inasprimento del confine a Ceuta e Melilla ha fatto spostare il movimento migrante nel Sahara e nella Mauritania del Nord. I varchi sono sempre attraversabili, nonostante l'inasprimento, e assistiamo a tragedie umane anche nei punti in cui il confine è maggiormente militarizzato. La minaccia di morte diviene un fattore di dissuasione: "Una strategia, sin duda, premeditada, cruel y violenta" (Alonso Meneses 120). Le barche sui cui viaggiano i migranti, per lo più provenienti dall'Africa subsahariana, che riescono a fuggire dai campi libici e a sopravvivere al deserto, sono abbandonate in mare dalle autorità che avrebbero il dovere di portarle in salvo, come stabilito dalle Convenzioni internazionali.

"Lasciar morire" è comunque uccidere

La strategia esplicita, pianificata e frutto della volontà congiunta di governi e agenzie, solitamente supportate dall'indifferenza dell'opinione pubblica, prende il nome di *left-to-die politics* o *letting die*, politica del "lasciar morire" (v. Squire). Le sue conseguenze uniscono tragicamente la *borderland* con la

borderwater, il paesaggio desertico-fluviale del Nord America con quello desertico-marino del Mediterraneo, *Aztlán* con il *mare nostrum*. In altre parole, globale è il capitalismo, sempre più globale è la politica della morte – necropolitica – che viene adottata dai governi contro i soggetti più fragili, *in primis* donne e minori provenienti dall’Africa subsahariana e dall’America centrale.

Ciò che si sta definendo, in particolare negli ultimi due decenni, è una politica della morte che rafforza le gerarchie sociali e simboliche esistenti, rinnovandole con la distinzione tra chi merita di vivere e chi si lascia morire. In questa opposizione, rintracciamo ancora la moderna distinzione tra “civilizzati” e “barbari”, che è mutata in vari modi ma mantiene intatta la gerarchia che assegna ai primi il diritto di disporre della vita o della morte dei secondi.

Il dramma non è, quindi, relativo ai numeri degli attuali attraversamenti dei confini nordamericani e mediterranei da parte di migranti privi di documenti, come i media li rappresentano e come sottolinea l’apertura di questo Forum. Piuttosto guardiamo alla drammatica violenza con cui la militarizzazione sta segnando generazioni di persone che le sopravvivono e migliaia di migranti che di militarizzazione muoiono. È anche il dramma della disseminazione di confini immateriali, sempre più rafforzati lungo linee di razza, sesso/genere e classe ogni volta che si deportano persone o si lasciano morire in mare o nel deserto. “Lasciar morire” è una politica pianificata da responsabili precisi che, nel corso dei decenni o persino secoli, hanno accresciuto il loro potere di controllo, gestione e rappresentazione.

Note di chiusura

¹ Vedi gli interventi di Tommaso Deti, Paola Zaccaria e Lorena Carbonara sul Forum nei precedenti numeri di *RSA Journal* (<www.aisna.net>).

² Per i dati relativi al Mediterraneo, v. “The Mediterranean”, e più in generale il sito web di cui fa parte, *Missing Migrants Project*.

³ V. anche “Migrant Deaths and Disappearances”.

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Articles

ALICE CIULLA

Opening and Closing Gates in Cold War America: Foreign Policy and the Politics of Immigration Law¹

Introduction

Muhammed Schamiloglu was a tartar and a Soviet citizen. He fought with the Red Army from 1941 until 1945 when he was captured by the Nazis and brought to Germany as a prisoner of war. He was liberated few weeks after his deportation, as the Allies defeated the Nazi regime and eventually won the Second World War. When the US military administrative officers in charge of the operation asked for his nationality, Schamiloglu said he was a Turk born in Istanbul. He knew his facial traits could easily disorient those American bureaucrats who knew little about the ethnic composition of the USSR. Therefore, he intentionally hid his citizenship to avoid returning to the Soviet Union. Schamiloglu's strategy worked. He was granted the status of "displaced person," a category created after the Second World War to identify millions of Europeans living outside their countries of origin who could not return home, and was allowed to remain in Germany (see Salvatici 108; Cohen "Naissance d'une nation"; Gatrell 35-50).

In 1950, as the war in Korea started, the USA approved an amendment to its 1948 law on refugees allowing the relocation of several Soviet citizens wanting to escape their country of origin (Porter 666). When the news spread, Schamiloglu disclosed his citizenship status hoping that doing so would give him the chance to move across the Atlantic and begin a new life in the USA. As a Soviet citizen during the war, and as someone who had been forcibly enlisted in the Soviet Army, he should have been authorized to move to the United States under the country's new law provisions. However, he was (and looked) an Asian. Being admitted to the USA was harder for him than for white Europeans. The national origin quota system established in 1924 was still in place, and it would be for another 15 years.

The Chinese Exclusion Act approved in 1882 was repealed only in 1943, and Asians would not qualify for naturalization until 1952. Because of his ethnicity, he was initially denied permission to settle in the USA until his case was litigated and won in court a few years later (Salvatici 108).

Muhammed Schamiloglu's experience tells in a nutshell one side of the story of how the Cold War impacted on US immigration policy – as the country committed to its leadership role of the democratic world – and how it did not, because of long-standing prejudices, concerns, and debates on the nation's identity (the other side of the story, as will be analyzed, is that in the name of Cold War anti-communism the USA selected people's entries based on their ideological beliefs). Someone like him could qualify as the perfect candidate to play the role of the "escapee" from the Soviet enemy looking for a better future in the USA. However, he was also targeted by long-standing restrictive rules of admission based on a racist ideology.

Given the strong and sometimes paradoxical connection between the Cold War and US immigration policy, more attention needs to be paid to the issue. *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, one of the most comprehensive collections of Cold War studies, includes only one essay on global migration. The author, Matthew Connelly, a scholar of transnational history, challenges the usefulness of the Cold War geopolitical paradigm to explain transnational phenomena such as migration. He contends that the international movement of people has far more enduring and deep consequences on the countries of departure and arrival than the periodization of diplomatic history suggests. While it is hard to argue with this point it is also true that the movements of people are regulated by state decisions (including through bilateral and international agreements), as states are the ultimate decision-makers on whom to include, exclude, or deport from their borders (see Sayad).

While the 1950 amendment committed to open US borders to refugees from communist countries in the name of the ideological confrontation with the Soviet Union, anti-communist ideology and the defense of national security² brought at the same time to a more selective policy on entries based on the ideology of the applicants. The coexistence of these features reveals the Janus nature of US immigration policy, and of the politics of the USA in its confrontation with the Soviet Union. Moreover, while the

histories of migration flows do not follow the conventional periodization of the geopolitical dimension of the Cold War, most of them refer to a “post-Cold War” scenario as a distinctive framework for the analysis of migration patterns, thus suggesting that the end of the bipolar system brought some novelty as far as international migrations are concerned (de Haas, Castels and Miller 127-38).

Largely based on the historiography on the subject, this essay reflects on the link between US immigration policy as it was shaped by debates over race, ethnicity, gender, and class since the early twentieth century, and the constraints imposed by the Cold War geopolitical and ideological paradigm (including those derived from its demise as a consequence of *détente*) from its beginning in 1946 until its end in 1989. It does so on the ground of two of the most useful and powerful perspectives recently adopted by immigration historians in the United States. The first is that immigration policy is a foreign policy issue as well as a domestic policy one. Foreign policy decisions, from going to war against a country to imperial expansion to signing international agreements, greatly impact on the movement of people (see Gabaccia; Young; Wu; Marinari, “Migration” 421-22).

The second perspective prompts a rethinking of the phenomenon of “immigration,” a word that evokes stillness and stability, as “migration,” a word that evokes movement and temporariness. In other words, to fully grasp the meaning of immigration policy one needs to consider the experience of all the “people on the move” using a comprehensive analytical framework, which includes so-called “economic migrants,” refugees, permanent and nonpermanent migrants reaching or trying to reach a country (in this case, the USA). Political decisions determine how individuals migrate and the duration of their sojourn in a foreign nation. The classifications of “immigrant” and “nonimmigrant” are merely outcomes of yet another arbitrary operation (Sassen 2-6; Gatrell 16-17; de Haas, Castels, and Miller 21-41). Therefore, all rules of admission – including those to manage temporary entries such as the ones for educational purposes – will be considered as part of US immigration policy.

This essay is divided into three parts. The first one shows how the imperatives of the Cold War era influenced immigration policies, leading

to the exclusion of individuals based on their ideological convictions. The second one examines how the same imperatives created fresh opportunities for migration to the USA, emphasizing the role of refugee policies as a foreign policy instrument in relation to the Soviet Union. The third part concentrates on the transformations in immigration policy during the 1970s, coinciding with a period of détente in the Cold War, and highlights the influence of the Helsinki process on the United States.

Dissent and Exclusive Immigration Policies in Cold War America

The beginning of the Cold War offers a useful starting point to analyze how foreign policy goals contribute to open US borders as well as to close them. Since the late 1940s, the country put in place a set of regulations designed to welcome refugees from communist countries. At the same time, and especially since the 1950s, Congress passed laws to target specific groups of people or individuals whose beliefs were considered threatening to the country's national security. Those laws established a tight legal frame that ended up being difficult to navigate for the very authorities that enforced it, spurring constant debate among those policymakers who wanted American gates to be more open to "enemies" as a way of showing them – and the world – the benignity of the country, and those who wanted to close borders to show how "hard on communism" and committed to the defense of national security Americans were.

As stated in diplomat George Kennan's Long Telegram in 1946 and believed by policymakers and intellectuals for decades since the doctrine of "containment" was launched in 1947, communism was a disease that could easily spread unless halted by powerful advocates of democracy such as the US government. In the interest of national security, the United States should not only confront the Eastern bloc but also work towards diminishing the influence of communist parties within its borders and among its NATO allies (see Gleason).

We have comprehensive accounts of how US anti-communism functioned as a tool of control inside the national borders (see Selverstone; Engerman 20-43). In 1947, President Truman established a Loyalty

Review Board to conduct background checks on government officials. Between the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s Senator Joseph McCarthy, the House Commission for Un-American Activities (HCUA) and the FBI accused intellectuals, activists, government officials, and artists of communist sympathies and propaganda. They put them on public trials to show the magnitude of the anti-communist fight, not without questions and protests by civil rights defenders. As during the first “Red Scare” some thirty years earlier, policymakers thought that the best way to fight against all forms of radicalism – in this case, communism – was to treat them as imported ideologies that did not belong to the US democratic tradition. It happened in 1903 with the Anarchy Exclusion Act in the context of a global anti-anarchist fight, and it was restated by the introduction of a deportation clause in the Immigration Act of 1924, which eventually targeted a small group of anarchists and communists, and it happened during the Second World War, with the approval of the Alien Registration Act of 1940, also known as the Smith Act (Ong Hing 72-73).

However, the legislation approved during the McCarthy era openly connected being a “communist” and being an “alien” for the first time (Schrecker xiii). In 1950, Senator Patrick McCarran (D-Nevada), a Catholic, a fervent anti-communist and an advocate for immigration restriction, introduced the bill that would become the Internal Security Act after Congress overrode President Truman’s veto in late September 1950. Sections 22-30 brought about changes to the immigration and naturalization laws, impacting individuals already residing in the United States. It allowed for the detention and deportation of residents, and the denial of visas to non-immigrants who were or had been associated with the organizations specified in the Act.³ Two years later, McCarran introduced a new bill in the Senate that retained the 1924 Immigration Act’s national origins quota targeting migrants from Eastern and Southern Europe while granting a quota to the countries of the Asia-Pacific region as well as revising several other measures. Soon after, Representative Francis Walter (D-Pennsylvania) introduced a similar bill in the House. After a tight discussion that took place among several advocacy groups, the McCarran-Walter Act was approved in 1952. As Maddalena Marinari has suggested, the original intent of the McCarran-Walter Act regarding

the geographical origins of applicants was gradually eroded. This occurred through the introduction of various measures by lawmakers who supported a more lenient approach to immigration policy. These measures aimed to safeguard refugees and orphans, as well as facilitate the process of reuniting families (Marinari, "Divided and Conquered" 31-32).

Regarding the selection criteria based on ideology, the McCarran-Walter Act prohibited the entry of aliens into the United States who were associated with or had a history of being anarchists, communists, or affiliated with any other totalitarian party within the five years prior to applying for a visa. This exclusion applied if their affiliation was voluntary according to section 202 of the Act.⁴ The McCarran-Walter Act retained the term "totalitarian," which was already included in the Internal Security Act, without providing a specific definition for it. The first listed "fascist, Nazi, communist" parties as totalitarians, while the McCarran-Walter Act – avoiding explicit definition – intended to target communists only. As Truman said when he vetoed the Internal Security Act before Congress would override it, the term could prove problematic:

after all, until now, no one has suggested that we should abandon cultural and commercial relations with a country merely because it has a form of government different from ours. Yet, section 22 would require that. In one instance, it is clear that under the definitions of the bill the present government of Spain, among others, would be classified as "totalitarian." As a result, the Attorney General would be required to exclude from the United States all Spanish businessmen, students, and other non-official travelers who support the present government of their country. I cannot understand how the sponsors of this bill can think that such an action would contribute to our national security. ("Veto of the Internal Security Bill").⁵

That danger was avoided but issuing visas to foreign communist sympathizers would, from then on, prove controversial (as in the case of Charlie Chaplin, whose visa's renewal was denied in 1952) and highly discretionary.

Advocates of civil rights such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) challenged the Smith Act and the McCarran Act on several

occasions. The cases of some people facing deportation on the ground of their political beliefs were brought to the Supreme Court, which made it more burdensome for lower courts to command the deportation of non-citizens. However, the visa-granting process remained untouched. Despite a few exceptions (newspaper reporters or intellectuals such as the Italian writer Alberto Moravia who was deemed too left-leaning to receive a visa in 1951, but was granted one in 1955 and travelled to the USA on multiple occasions thereafter), issuing visas to communist sympathizers, affiliates or supporters who were not representatives of a foreign institution continued to be a hard task up until the end of the 1970s, when US immigration policy was partly transformed by the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. Even as the nation opened its gates in the Kennedy-Johnson era to relaunch the role of the USA in the world arena as a harbor of anti-communist dissenters and refugees from conflicts as an anti-communist tool, America did not welcome potential dissenters. Nonetheless, as will be analyzed in section 3, starting from the 1960s, the policy of ideological exclusion became harder to defend in front of the American and the foreign public opinion. As the Cold War consensus crumbled, the USA had to face the limits of this set of rules.

Opening Borders as an Instrument of Diplomacy: Refugee Admission and the Dismantling of the National Origin Quota System

According to many historians, the primary influence of the Cold War on US immigration policy can be observed in its significant impact on the refugee admission system (see *Bon Tempo*; Keely 303-14; Daniels 113-28).

The Second World War left Europe in disarray. Besides the unprecedented number of civilian deaths, cities and villages virtually destroyed, poverty, and the spread of illnesses, one of the most serious legacies of the war were the millions of Europeans who found themselves outside of their countries of origin because of forced removals (Judt 23). How to deal with these “displaced persons” became, together with the redefinition of borders, one of the Allies’ first concerns. During the United Nations Assembly

organized in London in October 1945, the US and Soviet delegations had an animated debate around what to do with “displaced persons” who did not want to return to their countries of origin, with Eleanor Roosevelt at its forefront (Baritono 427-46).

With the descent of the Iron Curtain upon Europe, the Soviets worried that numerous individuals would be reluctant to return to Eastern Europe, given its post-war circumstances that were of particular concern. Retrospectively, that was one of the first superpowers’ Cold War debates, and one of the moments that defined the features of the post-war world (see Cohen, *In War’s Wake* 13-33). However, it was only starting from the mid-1950s, at the height of the confrontation, that a distinct image of the “ideal refugee” in the “first world” admission system emerged: a (white) European fleeing a communist regime in search of freedom in the Western world (see Trachtenberg; Leffler and Painter; Hogan).

The USA contributed a great deal to building this definition by increasingly tightening the connection between its refugee admission system and the Cold War ideological confrontation, and by showing “kindness” to a selected group of (preferably white) people coming from socialist countries (see Loescher and Scanlan). In light of the lingering impact of the Second World War and the significant failure to provide refuge for Jews fleeing persecution, US Congress enacted a series of laws aimed at alleviating restrictions in the country’s immigration policies. In 1946, some restrictions on Asian immigration were relaxed, and in 1948, the Displaced Persons Act was approved (later amended in 1950). These legislative measures signaled a shift towards a more open approach to immigration altogether, in line with the Cold War internationalism embraced by President Harry Truman (see Marinari “Divided and Conquered”), but did not redesign the refugee admission system *per se*. The first step in that direction was the approval of the 1948 Refugee Relief Program (RRP), essentially codified to allow the entrance of European refugees coming from Germany and Italy to the United States. The RRP did not make explicit reference to communism. However, since 1952 the anti-communist spirit embodied in the Internal Security Act and the McCarran Act animated the enforcement of the program. People seeking to enter the USA as refugees were now subject to intense background scrutiny on their political activity by a subdivision of the State Department’s Bureau of

Security and Consular Affairs (BSCA). The review process was very strict, largely discretionary and openly elitist, leaving most of the power in the hands of bureaucrats that managed the applications (Bon Tempo 34-59; Zolberg 19-23).

The equation between “refugee and European and anti-communist” was therefore built within the Cold War framework, for the domestic purpose of maintaining the American liberal political identity and for the foreign policy purpose of becoming the sanctuary of freedom. The two more illustrative examples of how this policy played out are the programs to allow Hungarian refugees to the USA after the 1956 Soviet invasion of the country designed by Dwight Eisenhower, and John F. Kennedy’s policy of admitting refugees from Cuba after Castro’s socialist revolution (see Bradford; Current; Conde; Makodoro 65-82). Later, the refugee admission system (especially in the case of Chilean and Indochinese refugees) was based on concerns over the respect for human rights, and while partly challenging the notion of the “perfect refugee” it also reinforces its strength, as different positions over the admission of new refugees to the country coexisted until the end of the Cold War (Bon Tempo 133-66).

After the troops of Moscow invaded Hungary in 1956 to repress the local reform experiment, Eisenhower pushed his executive authority to the limits and authorized the admission to the USA of some 38,000 Hungarian citizens who had previously relocated to Yugoslavia and Austria (only 6,000 of them were admitted through the RRP). Allowing visas to refugees from a country invaded by Soviet tanks and deemed as “counter-revolutionaries” by all the parties of the world communist movement was a diplomatic move against the USSR – but accurately perceived as one that would not lead to a military escalation – and a message to the world. At the same time, it was an attempt by the US administration to force Congress to revise the most restrictive parts of immigration policy. The fact that Hungarians were white and Christians probably made Eisenhower’s move easier, as American public opinion was more open to welcoming them (see Bradford).

Race and class were key factors in managing the arrival of people fleeing socialist Cuba as well. According to historian María Cristina García, the overwhelming majority of migrants who left Cuba to reach the USA since 1959 was formed by white, educated political opponents of Fidel Castro.

Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson – the latter less willingly – all agreed on the political benefit that welcoming anti-Castroists would bring to the USA (see Conde; García 149-50; Current, 42-67).⁶

It was only in the late 1980s, when the Mariel Boatlift brought 125,000 people to the USA, that a more ethnically – and economically – diverse group of Cubans reached the country. The Mariel Boatlift was a turning point in the history of Cuban migration to the USA and a clear-cut example of how Cold War foreign policy goals could clash with other concerns affecting US society. In April 1980, using a well-established narrative, President Carter argued that the mere existence of political refugees from Cuba testified to the socialist failure.⁷ Yet, when Castro allowed departures from Cuba to the USA from the port of Marie soon after, and numerous boats left the country directed to Florida, his administration quickly changed posture and became much more reluctant to open the borders. The press contributed to criminalizing the so-called Marielitos, describing them as troublemakers that the Cuban regime wanted to get rid of, instead of as people escaping for political reasons or “unable or unwilling to return to their homeland” because of “persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution,” as the Refugee Act of 1980 defined refugees.⁸ The issue became a matter of diplomatic controversy between the USA and Cuba and was resolved only months later (see Jacklin; Peña; Skop). Moreover, the Mariel Boatlift incident exposed the limits of a Cold War dictated immigration policy that the text of the Refugee Act of 1980 still reflected (Cameron and Balajaran 203).

Exchange, Détente, and the End of the Cold War

A final example on how the Cold War impacted on US immigration policy is the way in which the country adjusted its legislation on cultural and academic exchanges from 1946 until the approval of the Final Act of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in 1975, a turning point in the US decision to loosen its restrictions for temporary visas. Acknowledged as an important matter by Cold War historians (see Richmond; Arndt; Cull; Scott-Smith and Krappendam), migration

scholars – with a few exceptions (see Oyen) – have largely overlooked this issue. Yet, cultural exchanges imply the international movement of people for a determined amount of time, a movement subject to the countries' visa policies, a part of their immigration policy.

In 1946, Senator William J. Fulbright (D-Arkansas) introduced an amendment to the Foreign Expenditures Bill starting what would become the most well-known academic exchange program in the USA and abroad: the Fulbright program. It granted scholarships to a selected group of American students, researchers, and professors to spend some months abroad, and allowed foreigners to spend time in the USA for academic purposes. Based on bilateral agreements, the Fulbright program was open to both democratic and autocratic governments, friendly or unfriendly to the USA. One of the first countries to send students overseas was non-aligned Yugoslavia (see Konta). Since the late 1950s, intellectual exchange involved a very limited number of people coming from the Soviet Union as well (see Richmond). In 1971, as the USA and China re-opened diplomatic channels, Chinese students and academics were allowed to go to the USA too. Moreover, exchange students coming from allied countries were virtually exempted from the background checks imposed by the McCarran Act provided they were not communist activists (see Oyen). As recalled by many who benefited from the Fulbright scholarship, the experience was life-changing, though not always in the sense the US public diplomacy establishment might have expected (see Arndt and Rubin).

While the two policies of opening borders – refugee admission and cultural exchange – were indeed a foreign policy tool and followed a Cold War rationale, greater importance should be placed on the consequences that the CSCE had on the US immigration system. The conference, which took place in Helsinki from 1972 until 1975, was launched by the Soviets to freeze the Cold War and defend territorial sovereignty, as USSR Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko contended. It involved representatives from all European countries except Albania, the United States, and Canada. Helsinki became the most important forum for East-West discussions, and the outcome of the conference would be of the utmost importance for the future of the Cold War and its eventual dismissal.

Basket Three of the Helsinki Final Act that set the standard for

the protection of human rights in all adhering countries became of paramount importance for dissenters in the USSR and its satellites as well as for advocates of detente in the United States and Europe. Basket Three explicitly mentioned three freedoms to be protected: the freedom of movement, especially as far as family reunification was concerned, the freedom of information, and the freedom of intellectual exchange. By signing the Helsinki accords, the United States had to face its immigration policy contradictions. If the three freedoms (movement, information, and intellectual exchange) were to be safeguarded, granting nonimmigrant visas to members of communist parties across the world became unavoidable.

According to a Memorandum sent by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to President Carter on March 9, 1977, the Democratic administration was aware that the double standard on admitting foreign communists had become increasingly hard to justify. In 1975, for instance, the great majority of requests by people coming from communist countries was accepted (17,400 out of 18,200), while Western European communist or socialist party leaders and members, despite – or because – they came from friendly countries, were not.⁹ The case of socialist economist Ernest Mandel is among the best known. Mandel, who had been invited to give speeches at several US universities, was denied a visa after a controversial procedure, and against the opinion of the Department of State. His case got to the Supreme Court, which upheld the choice of the lower courts.

Even more exemplary are the cases of two Italian communist leaders: Sergio Segre, head of the Italian Communist Party foreign section, and Giorgio Napolitano, head of the economic section of the party and future President of the Republic. In 1975 they were invited to travel to the USA and tour the country to give speeches at Harvard, Yale and other universities, as well as think tanks such as the Council on Foreign Relations. In both cases, at the request of the US Embassy in Italy led by John A. Volpe, the two were denied the chance to enter the country. The *New York Times* covered the story stressing the inconsistency of a Cold War policy that barred communists from entering the USA while allowing neofascists – as in the case of Italian leader Giorgio Almirante – to do so (see Schuster). Those who had invited Segre and Napolitano, university professors at Yale and members of the Council on Foreign Relations, unsuccessfully tried to appeal to Secretary of State Helmut Sonnenfeldt for a waiver.¹⁰ Despite

their failure, the issue sparked a debate that would continue to resonate for years, and would be used as a tool to revise the McCarran Act in Congress a few years later. The revision resulted from the efforts of Congressmen like Dante Fascell (D-Florida), leader of the Congressional Committee for the implementation of the Helsinki Final Act, Senator George McGovern (D-South Dakota), and grassroots advocates. In August 1977, McGovern successfully reformed Subsection 28 of the McCarran-Walter Act by amending the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 1978. Under the so-called McGovern amendment, the Attorney General could grant “the approval necessary for the issuance of a visa” to aliens affiliated to a proscribed organization otherwise admissible “unless the Secretary determines that the admission of such alien would be contrary to the security interest of the United States.”¹¹

However, the amendment did not offer the ultimate solution against exclusion on ideological grounds. Under the Reagan administration, artists, writers and political activists such as Chilean Hortensia Bussi de Allende, widow of Salvador Allende, exiled to Mexico after General Pinochet’s coup d’état and member of the World Peace Council, Italian General Nino Pasti, also a member of the World Peace Council, Italian actor and playwright Dario Fo and his wife, Franca Rame, were among the most prominent examples of how the USA could still bar entry to advocates of disliked ideologies. The State Department’s denial of visas to these well-known figures spurred an intense debate that involved civil rights associations, intellectuals and public opinion, just as much as it had since the mid-1970s (Kraut 188-92). What is worth noting, though, is that Bussi, Pasti, Fo and Rame were not excluded because of their membership to communist parties, not only because this would not be an acceptable reason under the McGovern amendment but also because they were not. Bussi was active in peace movements; Pasti had a fairly complicated relationship with the Italian Communist Party and was elected as an “independent” in its list in 1977; Fo and Rame had been long-time critics of communist parties, and were close to the Italian extra-parliamentarian left. Also worth noticing is that the only organization explicitly mentioned in the revision of the McGovern Amendment was the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), whose members were barred from the USA because of

their Marxist-Leninist beliefs and their terrorist actions in the Middle East. Although the result was the same – the exclusion of advocates of suspect ideologies, namely communism in all its varieties – the choice of whom to exclude signals a fracture in the Cold War ideological confrontation that needs further investigation. While weakened, the McCarran Act remained in place until 1989, when a large part of it was repealed (see Daniels).

As President George H. W. Bush underlined while signing the most comprehensive reform of US immigration policy after the Cold War, the Immigration Act of 1990, the law revised “the exclusion grounds for the first time since enactment in 1952, putting an end to the kind of political litmus tests that might have excluded even some of the heroes of the Eastern European Revolution of 1989” (“Remarks”). The law made a distinction between immigrant and nonimmigrant visas, and it listed political activities – rather than beliefs – as possible causes for rejection. With limited exceptions, members of “totalitarian” – including communist – parties would be allowed to enter the USA (see Edwards).

The end of the Cold War, therefore, drastically limited the ideological dimension of US immigration policy. Initially, anti-immigrant sentiments combined with anti-global sentiments on the right of the political spectrum and targeted specifically people coming from Latin America. Things changed after September 11, 2001. Since then, people coming to the USA from the Middle East were subject to more intense scrutiny and background checks and a consistent number of Middle Eastern applicants was denied a US visa (Kraut 218-23).

The equation between Muslims and terrorists did not end in the early 2000s, as testified by recent policies put in place by the Trump administration. Yet, exclusion based on ideological grounds has been eclipsed with the end of the Cold War. Since the late 1980s, and especially with the beginning of the “unipolar moment,” the debate on immigration in the USA has revolved around economic, racial, and legal concerns. “Illegal” migrants are the most unwanted subjects of post-Cold War America (see Macías-Rojas; Bon Tempo 197-206).

Conclusion

As Juan Lim and Maddalena Marinari have observed, inclusive and exclusive provisions have always coexisted – and purposely so – in the US legal immigration system (Lim and Marinari 49-52). Yet, the Cold War era had distinctive features that need further exploration. Its total character, its ideological dimension, the role the USA played in it, and the fact that the end of the Cold War led to the emergence of new conflicts and new issues over the question of immigration makes the Cold War a fertile ground of research on the management of immigration, in and beyond the paradigm of the superpowers' confrontation frame. Cold War imperatives played a key role in framing US immigration policy. Anti-communist concerns lay under the rejection of visas to non-US citizens because of their ideology and political activity in the early Cold War. As détente unraveled, the USA willingly decided to get rid of this policy and replace it with a new one, despite the survival of part of its rationale (excluding dissenters). At the same time, eager to present itself as the linchpin of the liberal-democratic world, a place where respect for civil liberties was guaranteed, the USA established refugee programs to welcome people coming from the socialist bloc, and adapted to the new paradigm of the 1970s as human rights acquired a primary role in the international agenda. These issues coexisted from the beginning to the end of the Cold War, when a new set of rules, based on a new set of principles, was adopted.

Despite the complex architecture of international law that guarantees protection under certain circumstances to specific groups of migrants (refugees), and despite some regional bodies trying to provide supranational legal frameworks applicable to all its members as the European Union has, managing migration is still largely a state matter. Therefore, while migrations and migrants force us to rethink a state-centered narrative of historical phenomena and adopt transnational frameworks instead (see Goodman), a state-centered analysis and a diplomatic history perspective can still be relevant to explaining policymaking, especially when thinking of the role played by the USA during the Cold War.

As the story of Muhammed Schamiloglu shows, the interplay of foreign and domestic policy paints a multi-faceted and complicated picture of how

the USA managed (and manages) its immigration system. Exploring the link between US immigration policy and how the Cold War contributed to shaping it can help us broaden our knowledge in both fields of immigration history and Cold War studies.

Notes

¹ I wish to thank Maddalena Marinari for her thoughtful comments on earlier versions of this essay.

² To complicate the picture, race still played an important role in deciding whom to welcome to the USA. While Eastern Europeans fleeing communist regimes were allowed protection, Asians escaping after the Chinese revolution of 1949 were still subject to strict – and racist – rules.

³ Internal Security Act of 1950 (McCarran Act), <https://www.law.cornell.edu/topn/internal_security_act_of_1950>.

⁴ Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, <<https://immigrationhistory.org/item/immigration-and-nationality-act-the-mccarran-walter-act/>>.

⁵ Veto of the Internal Security Bill, September 22, 1950, <<https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/public-papers/254/veto-internal-security-bill>>.

⁶ In 1960 Eisenhower invoked the Mutual Security Act to assist them in resettling to the USA, thus granting them the refugee status. Kennedy continued this path by establishing the Cuban Refugee Program and assisting unaccompanied minors migrating to the USA in the so-called “Operation Peter Pan.”

⁷ See for instance Jimmy Carter’s “Cuban Refugees in the Peruvian Embassy in Havana White House Statement.”

⁸ 94 Stat. 102 Public Law 96-212, Mar. 17, 1980, <<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-94/pdf/STATUTE-94-Pg102.pdf>>. See also Kennedy 1981.

⁹ Jimmy Carter Presidential Library (JCPL), Plains File, Subject File, Secret Service, 2/77-11/80, Box 37, State Department Memorandum from Vance to Carter, March 9, 1977.

¹⁰ National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park (MD); RG 59, Department of State, Office of the Counselor, Helmut Sonnenfeldt, Country and Subject Files, 1973-1976, A1 5339-A, Germany 1976 THRU Presidential Transition 1974, Box 4, Italy, July 1976.

¹¹ H. R. 6689 (95th): Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Year 1978. <<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/95/hr6689>>.

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GIULIANO SANTANGELI VALENZANI

Picturing Italy: Cold War Perspectives in American Travel Writing on Italy, 1948-1960¹

After World War II, the combination of post-war economic growth, increased accessibility, and changing attitudes towards travel rapidly led to a significant shift in international tourism. Between the end of the 1940s and the early 1950s, in fact, Marshall Plan aids, together with the spread of new, cheaper forms of travel, enabled the European tourist industry to revive. By that time, a new conception of travel was emerging that would result in the boom of mass tourism in the 1960s. This happened also because rekindling tourist channels became a US goal during the Marshall Plan years; indeed, for the US administration exporting visitors to Europe became not only a profitable way to support the economic reconstruction of the Allies and thus bridge the “dollar gap,” but also a means of exporting images of American prosperity and, more generally, of strengthening Atlantic ties (see Endy). In short, tourism was conceived as a contribution to strengthening the Western bloc by reducing the distances, both geographical and cultural, among European countries and between Europe and America. After all, tourism is not, and never has been, a mere economic budget item, but also an instrument of public diplomacy (see McKenzie; Langer).

In post-war Italy, the urgency to resume tourism spurred a collective effort to revive travel activities. Amidst the postwar challenges of reconstruction, public opinion, the private sector, and several municipalities rallied to prompt governmental intervention in the revitalization of Italian tourism. The inaugural National Congress of Italian Tourism held in Genoa in 1947 marked a pivotal moment, fostering discussions on postwar travel's multifaceted roles. In response to calls for coordinated national efforts from the tourism industry, the De Gasperi Government established in 1947 the Commissariat for Tourism. This body, while mainly supervising

the activities of several other agencies (Berrino 242), recognized tourism's economic and political significance. De Gasperi's acknowledgment of the "cultural and spiritual" impact of mass tourism at the 1952 National Convention of Provincial Tourism Boards exemplified this awareness (Paloscia 83). Within this dynamic landscape, American tourists were immensely alluring due to their substantial dollar spending power. In Italy, however, any opportunity to attract American tourists was subordinated to the outcome of the April 1948 general elections, which Washington watched with apprehension because of the growing strength of local leftist parties. Therefore, it was the political situation, coupled with the fact that the tourist infrastructure was largely destroyed or severely damaged, that prevented American tourism in Italy from getting a kick-start until late in 1948. From that moment, the number of Americans entering Italy would grow gradually during the following decade, but settled, nonetheless, at only around 5% of all international entries into the *Bel Paese* (Statistica del Turismo 1951, 1955, 1960). It was only in the 1960s that the flow of arrivals from North America would increase dramatically.

Italy, as well as the other Western European countries, also began early on to promote itself in the US market with renewed vigor, in line with the upsurge of mass tourism. As early as 1948, at the behest of Italy and under US pressure, the European Travel Commission (ETC) was established among the European countries participating in the Marshall Plan to jointly promote travel to the United States. Additionally, in 1951, Italy initiated its own promotional campaign brand specifically aimed at the United States. By the mid-1950s, the primary focus of Italian promotional efforts was undoubtedly America, as a report from 1953 indicated that 65% of the entire foreign promotion budget was allocated solely to the United States ("Italians Study US for Tourists" 1953).

Yet, despite the importance of the 1950s as a time of transition for Italian tourism towards modernity and a tighter tourist relationship between Italy and the USA, no systematic attention has yet been devoted to the analysis of US tourism in Italy during this time span, as most authors treated the decade after the war to scant attention, focusing rather on the earlier period ranging from the nineteenth century to the Fascist era, or on the later phase of mass tourism. The subject, however, is particularly significant if

we consider the new international context and the changes that occurred in American society and in its relationship with Western Europe. Therefore, in an attempt to contribute to this complex topic, this essay will examine a selected body of American travel literature on Italy published between 1948 and 1960 to outline the historical significance of the American perception of Italy in this period, exploring how their understanding of the country reflected broader social, political, and economic trends. In particular, it is especially relevant to understanding the extent to which the new international context and the Cold War imperatives found a reflection in the travel narrative about Italy, a country of fundamental importance to the stability of the Western European bloc in the eyes of Washington administrators, and how this situation became tied up with previous, long-standing assumptions about the country.

As for the time span of the research, it addresses two major turning points in Italy's visibility in the USA; 1948 was the year when American tourism to Italy revived, while 1960 was the year of the Olympics in Rome, which spotlighted Italy's recovery and growing attractions on the global stage. In order to attain its goals, the essay will thus examine travel articles on Italy published between 1948 and 1960 in *Holiday* and *National Geographic Magazine*, as well as a variety of articles published in the travel columns of both national and regional newspapers. Also, four different travel guides published in the United States during that decade will be used.

As an initial start, it must be emphasized how the American tourists, after the war, perceived themselves to be invested with a new role, as the administration in Washington did not fail to remind them. Things were changing in the American travelers' self-perception and more broadly in their own attitudes toward Italy and Europe. The unequal relationship between the United States and Europe which had developed after World War II was reflected in the tourist exchanges between the two areas. As such, the new situation of economic and political strength in which American tourists were perceived led inevitably to an attempt by the American travel system to repudiate the existing clichés about uncultured Americans, parvenus of the civilized world, simultaneously inebriated and humbled by the cultural richness of the old continent. This shift in perception is

well reflected in the comparison drawn between the American tourists and the old pioneers of the West which is found in several occasions in travel literature during the 1950s. A piece in the 1957 *New York Times*, for example, made this explicit. Speaking of Americans vacationing in the old continent, the author stated: "It excited me and swelled my national ego to meet and talk with hundreds of these modern frontiersmen and women of the United States" (Chasins 23). John W. Houser, vice-president of Hilton Hotels International, similarly noted how American hotel chains were successfully acting as "international pioneers" ("Hotel Talks" 5) in the world, while another travel article noted how nowadays "tourists make the old western pioneers look pale" (Burton 4), and Jack Stepler rejoiced in the "American colonization of Europe" that was occurring through tourists. American travelers, in other words, began to perceive themselves as coming from the true center of the Western world and, by traveling to Europe, as going towards the peripheral outskirts of that world. What's more, the American tourist's position of strength was reinforced by the notion that by spending dollars in Europe he was actively helping the Old World get back on its feet: "The tourist helps Italy and enjoys himself" (Mowrer 12). As Erik Amfithreatrof suggested, in fact, American tourists looked with undisguised pride at Italy's economic recovery, seeing it as a sign of their own importance in the new international context (190). It is no coincidence, perhaps, that this celebration of the tourist-pioneer occurred at a time when the Western genre was experiencing a golden age in the American pop culture, for it provided a convenient and reassuring metaphor for the Cold War challenges (Slotkin 347). The intellectual defense of the new American traveler/pioneer was also undertaken by authors of the caliber of John Steinbeck, who in 1956 lashed out in *Holiday* against European prejudices about his fellow Americans and against the sense of guilty embarrassment that had pervaded American tourists for too long (25). This trend found to a certain extent a reflection in the artistic production of those years. Surveying American literary production of Roman settings during the 1950s, in fact, William Vance notes a similar undermining of the myth of American innocence/naïveté abroad. Americans by now were experienced in worldly affairs long before they arrived in Europe. They no

longer seemed in need of having “initiations” of any kind from old Europe (407).

This new situation, however, also necessarily connected with a long tradition of American accounts of Italy, which had stratified in the Anglo-Saxon imagination a long series of assumptions still very much in vogue after the war. As such, the relationship between American tourists and Italy after World War II was by no means a first encounter, but rather the resumption of a travel pattern that had begun at least a century before and that therefore rested on ideas, beliefs and clichés already rooted in American thought (see Withey). Tourism studies call this body of preexisting ideas about a tourist destination a “destination image” (Crompton 18). Thus, Italy was not being “discovered,” but rather “reconfirmed” as a travel destination.

In the traditional, nineteenth-century American perceptions, two major impressions of Italy overlapped. The country was a state of mind as well as a concrete destination, which created a certain ambivalence in the American gaze. Home of the arts, culture and beauty on the one hand, Italy was also perceived as an antiquated country, stuck in the past. Italians, for their part, were described as an amiable and artistic people but also as ignorant, indolent, poor and vicious (Diggins 5; Amfitheatrof 4), theatrical and childlike (Cosco 7). Traditionally skeptical of allegedly “Mediterranean” forms of emotional externalization, American Protestants often interpreted many Italian customs as a symptom of lasciviousness and animalistic instinctual passion (see Casillo; Ducci; Cosco; Hom; Diggins). Neither the Fascist regime’s efforts to promote a new image of Italy abroad (see Aliano), let alone the allied occupation period that followed the fall of the regime (see Buchanan), changed this general framework.

Thus, when tourist flows from the USA to Italy resumed late in 1948 after the victory of the Christian Democratic Party in the April general election, this was the prevailing situation of the Italian destination image. Given the slowness with which the image of a place changes over time, it would be hard to imagine American travel literature altering its perception of Italy in the short term just because of a new international context. To a large extent, in fact, Americans in the 1950s continued to address Italy according to the same patterns and images developed and reinforced

through the nineteenth century. Two parallel visions still persisted, that of idealized, romantic, and timeless Italy, and that of a far less seductive real, often abject, present-day Italy. As always, these two visions were not irreconcilable with each other, and indeed overlap frequently in American reports. And yet, these narratives were now clearly taking on a whole new meaning, because of the new international role assumed by the United States and the consequent economic subordination of the European countries. In this sense, these representations of Italy also took on a political innuendo, as they reflected the asymmetry of power that existed between the United States and Italy. Travel writing, after all, was highly responsive to American foreign policy, not only because, in a sense, many travel writers tended to take pro-establishment positions, but also because many of them were actively tools of propaganda. The State Department, in fact, enlisted several travel writers to promote the aims of the United States to the general American public (Klein 110).

One of the main messages conveyed in travel articles, throughout the 1950s, was about Italian poverty. Sure enough, the dire situation of post-war Italy left ample room for a bleak description of the country's misery and squalor. Yet, this description was also largely functional in showing a country on its knees and much in need of American friendship and assistance. Italy, in fact, was mostly described as an extremely poor country, plagued by innumerable problems, but – somewhat condescendingly – it was still credited with a great single virtue: the dignity of its inhabitants despite their actual conditions. If it is not surprising to find hints of widespread but dignified poverty in travel reports from the late 1940s, just after the launch of the Marshall Plan (people in Naples “have always been poor, but it has been a poverty without shame [...] I saw smiling women caring for their babies in the streets, cooking on primitive stoves in the open, and carrying great burdens”; Hume 717), things did not seem to change even a decade later, as still in 1956 the official guidebook of the American Geographic Association stated that “Italy is a poor land; it lacks most of the metals, minerals, and fuels that are vital in our industrial [...] But it has one great asset – the people” (Kish 55-56); or again, in the *Holiday* magazine: “What most strikes me is the courage it must demand to love, to breed, to sing, to keep from being bitter, to preserve one's pride, when a man cannot tell where his next meal is coming from” (O'Faolain,

"Italy" 124). The notion of Italians as a hungry, barefoot people was so strong that in 1952 Jim Gilmore seemed almost amazed to find that in Milan "everyone looks well-fed and well-clothed" (6). After all, despite the country's participation in the Marshall Plan and subsequent membership in the NATO defensive alliance, by the end of the 1950s the United States still viewed Italy with concern. They believed it to be the most vulnerable among the Western European nations, fearing that it might eventually undermine the entire European strategic establishment. Both the Truman administration and, later, Eisenhower grew increasingly exasperated due to what they considered Italy's slow progress in political and economic reform (Mistry 204). As such, it is not surprising that according to American travel writings of the late 1950s Italy was not only a truly wealthy and advanced country, remaining in need of American aid and supervision.

Italy's great tourism assets, culture, historic monuments and art, were certainly admired, but they also prompted a concerned look at the country's perceived backwardness. On the one hand, undoubtedly, this old-fashioned Italy full of traces of the past was exactly what the Americans wanted to see. The American travel material contained endless references to the idea of a country where the ruins and monuments built centuries before the arrival of Europeans in the New World were still part of everyday life. After all, this substantial difference with America had always been an irresistible incentive to visit the *Bel Paese* and also a source of embarrassed admiration on the part of many American visitors (Vance xix). Still in the 1950s, actually, for some American travelers it was almost a shock to discover that Italy could also be industrial and modern. Thus, for example, the astonishment of C. L. Munson appears sincere when he writes: "The city of Verona surprised us. We had expected a rural village, or something mildly Shakespearian, since the Bard of Avon used Verona for one of his play settings. But Verona was industrial and shell-pocked" (27). The more modern-looking Italian cities found little resonance among Americans for this very reason: "Few American tourists visit Milan for there isn't much here to see compared with the rich treasures of such cities as Rome and Florence" (Crane 24). Milan, a modern and industrial destination par excellence, was being associated with difficulty to an Italy still perceived as old-fashioned and as such it is very rarely encountered in travel articles. In short, when Italy acquired a more modern outline, one less tied to

images of monumental grandeur in decay, it ceased to correspond to the destination image that American culture had assigned to the idea of Italy and thus became less appealing and interesting.

At the same time, however, the great art cities also elicited ambiguous glances at local poverty and decadence. Rome, Naples and Venice, the favorite destinations for American tourists, in fact, were repeatedly described in terms of references to the theme of anti-modern Italian decadence, which appeared to be the inevitable downside of the “history theme.” As John Diggins put it, a “nation steeped in history” could also quickly become “a nation left behind by history” (5). Once again, the travel narratives were also a reflection of the new international role of the United States. Italy’s miserable decadence was fascinating and troubling at the same time: America should have continued to help this attractive country that had fallen dangerously behind in progress and development. In 1960, for example, a *Holiday* article on Trastevere contained vivid details about the miserable charm of certain Roman views, crowded with peasant women “so heavy they cannot move” and children “poking like rats among the debris for bits of precious metal or pieces of leather” (Kubly 48-49). Venice was beautiful, but plagued by a “filth dilapidation and general atmosphere of stagnation” (Hawkins 12), according to the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*. Also tinged with a sense of ruined grandeur was the other report on Venice published by *Holiday* with a colorful description of beggars seeking alms outside restaurants frequented by tourists (Bemelmans, “Venice” 61).

Decadence and disarming misery were also intertwined in what appears to be a well-established trope in American travel literature: the interest in the Italian aristocracy. This theme was very well suited to symbolically representing a nostalgic and pre-modern Italy, for after the war and the subsequent advent of the Republic Italian aristocrats did indeed appear something of the past. In the *Holiday* April 1960 issue, devoted to Rome, an entire thematic chapter was centered on the “black” aristocrats (i.e., the most conservative papal nobility) in which this symbolic connection was made explicit: “There is a certain reputation for decadence associated with the upper class in Rome; for one thing the very streets around them were the scenes of the decadence and decline of the great empire...” (“The Black Aristocrats” 92). What is more, as Stephen Gundle rightly pointed

out, the Italian aristocrats themselves, now deprived of their past celebrity status by economic problems and by the emergence of a new generation of VIPs from cinema, had to largely reinvent themselves as “personalities for consumption” (115) by opening their homes to film crews or journalists and writers. The displaced Italian noble was thus now available for travel literature in the new developing mass-tourism system, and the *Chicago Tribune* in 1950 could cheerfully write about “throng[s] of displaced noblemen” (“Poorhouse for Princes” 14) roaming Italy. And so, several articles and travel guides became populated with Italian princes, dukes and barons, usually described not without ironic overtones.

Not that these figures were invented out of thin air by American travel writers, of course. While it is possible at times to guess some artistic license with facts, it is nevertheless true that many aristocrats lent themselves to this kind of activity more than willingly. As mentioned above, aware of their new status within Italian society, they reinvented themselves as living tourist attractions. In the American public, culturally distant from and distrustful of the very concept of aristocracy, such articles must certainly have aroused some curiosity. What is more, it is very likely that writing about impoverished nobles well disposed toward the American tourist (and toward his dollars) also induced in the reader a certain sense of pride and vindication toward old Europe. Not surprisingly, in the majority of cases the role assigned to these nobles in the articles was that of chaperons, privileged guides to Italian wonders (Bemelmans, “Midas Tour of Italy” 45; “Countess in Rome” 103; Sterling 36). An aristocrat ready to play the role of upper-class guide for the US visitor became a symbolically powerful image. “I would like to be of assistance. *I am at your service*” (emphasis added), a Duke told the very middle-class journalist (Bemelmans, “Road to Salerno” 90). Once again, America’s new position of strength was thus emphasized, as the travelers were symbolically served even by the former Italian ruling class.

Italians’ poverty and alleged backwardness also caused some concern about their capacity to accept democracy and American values. Ordinary tourists as well, once they returned home, indulged sometimes in reflections on Italy that reinforced the idea of a country still unfit to participate on an equal footing in the US model. The encounter with a different society, perceived as different from one’s own, has always been a strong incentive

to travel; however, few tourists actually can or even want to tolerate too much novelty (Hitchcock et al. 3). What is important to them is to seek confirmation about their own society through comparison with others, especially vis-à-vis local realities perceived as poorer and more degraded (Pearce 135).

This is why an American tourist returning from Italy could say in 1952 that “Italians still don’t know the meaning of liberty [...] for they see no answer to their problems,” finding in this observation a way to reaffirm instead with pride that “American democracy is something that is not just lip service but is something that is acted out each day, for we really have the longest tradition of democracy of any nation” (“Impressions of Italy Vary” 40). Similarly, another tourist stated that “Italy can never become a truly Democratic state – it simply lacks the capacity to understand the American way of life” (“Impressions of Italy” 23). Less trenchantly, an Indiana school teacher who moved to Northern Italy, wrote to his hometown newspaper that the Italians “seem to have little loyalty to friends, locality or government because of their unhappy past experiences” (“Teacher Relates” 1).

Although potentially problematic because their recent past and their character made them unprepared for democracy, Italians in their own right could not, however, be a real threat to the United States. In fact, they had never been. During World War II Italian fascism had been considered an almost comical enemy in American public opinion, compared to the Japanese Empire and the German Reich (Buchanan 239). Similarly, after the 1948 elections, even Italian communism was described in travel literature as essentially harmless because it was the expression of an “Italian-style” communism, spawned not by fanaticism but by poverty and hence more easy to tackle. In 1950, a travel article from New York reported: “Although there is communism in Italy, it is not Soviet communism [...]. It is not an anti-clerical communism, but merely a general protest against everything brought about by economic insecurity” (“Impressions of Italy” 23). A view perfectly in line with the sentiments of many American officials in Washington, who believed that Italy’s political instability had purely economic causes (Mistry 66). Or again, an American family returning from Sardinia asserted that the local communists “seem unaware of the party

principles which they support" ("Sardinia" 8). According to *Holiday* in the *Bel Paese* "Communism is strictly Italian style – anticlerical but not pro-Russian" (Kubly, "Italy's Adriatic Coast" 59), and elsewhere Robert Neville wrote with irony of the Communist Mayor of Spoleto who during the Festival of the Two Worlds welcomed American tourists (Neville 9).

Italians were largely described as a people sincerely eager for freedom and democracy, but there existed a conviction that, just as they had once fallen under the spell of Mussolini, their simplicity and naïveté could lead to a similar mistake, should there be a lack of close supervision of their communist leanings. This is another occasion when the Cold War *zeitgeist* became entangled with travel literature. After World War II, the constant repetition of old stereotypes and the emphasis on the "true character" of Italians seems to have a political subtext. The stress on their wild passion, but also on their simplicity and child-like nature, seems to suggest the idea of a good-hearted people that, however, could easily fall prey to dictators and tyrants. Hence, the new Italian democracy needed constant vigilance (Wingenter 327). This idea, after all, is also found in accounts of foreign office agents and US officials. "The Italian people have a certain immaturity, like children, and... could be very most ungrateful and forgetful" (Mistry 154), warned Roy Melbourne of the Foreign Office in 1948. In a more casual tone, in 1951 *Life* magazine reported that what Dwight Eisenhower loved about Italians was their "childlike enthusiasm" (Serra 458).

American suspicions of Italians in the post-war era were also colored by longstanding assumptions about the profound differences between northern and southern Italians (Amfitheatrof 167) that projected the image of a country divided in half and therefore problematic and unstable. In fact, not all Italians were considered equally in danger of falling prey to communist propaganda. Being more uneducated and economically poorer, southern Italians were at times perceived as the real threat. Commenting on Italian internal migration from South to North, *Holiday* warned in 1955 that "the south is thus endlessly swelling the population of the north, diluting its culture, and creating that sort of lumpenproletariat which is the natural fodder of communism everywhere" (O'Faolain "Italy," 124). While this and similar statements contrasted with the political reality of Southern Italy which was firmly controlled by the Christian Democrats, they

undoubtedly reflect the American belief that there was a natural equation between poverty and the spread of communism, and that Southern Italians were more likely to be troublemakers. A long-standing American fear that had its foundation in nativist drives to counter the influx of Southern Italians to the North at the turn of the century.

Indeed, when it came to Southern Italy, American travel writers resorted to a variety of clichés concerning especially the theatricality and exoticism of the local population. The poor state of infrastructures in the South in general and the scarcity of American tourists south of Naples amplified the region's sense of exotic otherness. This obviously reflected also the idea of a country that, in large measure, was still underdeveloped and backward, but a racist subtext about Southerners' alleged aversion to work, their gullibility and indiscipline is also evident. Travel writer H. V. Kaltenborn, for example, warned readers that "the Sicilians are not as carefree as the Neapolitans. They are also more Oriental; they keep their women from frequenting public places" (14). Rodion Rathbone of the *Chicago Tribune* went even further:

Visitors often complain that Neapolitans are dishonest, and this may be true in the sense of western European morality [...]. In Naples and to the south there is a different cast to the mind. The southern Italians think less in terms of right and wrong, and more in terms of possible advantage to be gained [...]. There is great poverty in Naples, much of it unavoidable, but all compounded by the Neapolitan's inherent dislike for work. (18)

Southern exoticism also manifested itself in the incredulous accounts of the peculiar religiosity of local people and their mysterious folkloric manifestations. In his travel article for the *National Geographic Magazine*, for example, Edgar E. Hume recounted how people living in the South "believe in the presence of supernatural beings such as demigods (usually evil ones) and warlocks" (717).

The differences drawn by American observers, however, were not just between North and South; they affected almost every part of the country and each region. For Americans in the 1950s Italy was in fact the country of physical and psychological regional differences. There was a keen interest

in cataloging the alleged human, behavioral and physical differences between Italians. What is more, this tendency did not find correspondence (at least not to the same extent) in the cases of other European populations. The idea that men and women from Naples were profoundly different from those in Perugia, Rome or Venice, for example, and therefore should be treated appropriately, recurs in travel guides published in the USA. In *When in Rome*, a renowned American guidebook published in 1954, the authors listed, region by region, the peculiar traits of the local people. So the Lombard is “loyal, gay, good-natured; hard worker [...] for him, time is money,” while the Umbrian is “peaceful and generally kind [...] deeply religious, mystic,” and the Neapolitan is characterized instead by his “mixed Spanish-Greek temperament, leading to sentimentalism, love of poetry, song, dance” (Streeter and Weisbecker 9). The travel guide on Italy published in 1960 by *Holiday* similarly stated that “The Neapolitan has a reputation for exuberance, gaiety and sentimentality; the Sicilian for pride, clannishness and a burning loyalty [...]. The Venetian is easy-going, somewhat subtle, skeptical and cynical; the Umbrian simple and devout...” and so on (*Italy* 8). This interest in categorizing “types” of Italians clearly stemmed from the fact that in the new postwar tourism it was much easier to make direct contact with local people, as opposed to the old nineteenth-century elitist tourism. Once again, the same idea is to be found also in non-tourist literature. The assumption that Italians were so different one from the other that “sometimes you will find two different types occupying two neighboring villages” was contained also in the *Pocket guide to Italy* that the Department of Defense distributed to soldiers serving in Italy during the 1950s (3). Sure enough, because of its history, Italy has a wide variety of regional customs that arouse curiosity in foreigners. But there was more to it than that. During the 1950s, in fact, it became imperative for Washington that encounters between Americans and foreign populations served as a stabilizer of relations and not as a cause for anti-Americanism. The administration itself took pains to guide the American public to an understanding of the importance of this tourism diplomacy. From July 1957, for example, all US citizens applying for a passport received a pamphlet with a message from President Eisenhower urging them to act as goodwill ambassadors abroad, behaving responsibly

and politely toward local populations (Osgood 246). Thus, travel literature was clearly quite responsive to the cultural context of the period, offering travelers a sort of handbook of encounters they were likely to make.

Sometimes, however, American travel writings indulged in purely phenotypic descriptions, concerned primarily with the physical appearance of Italians. One can sense an almost ethnographic curiosity in encountering a human reality that was perceived as diverse and peculiar. Here again, old racial stereotypes heavily overlaid with new considerations on Italy, intended now as a periphery of the American-led Western world. In a tourist guide for the Holy Year in 1950, for example, the author stated that “most of the inhabitants of Italy are pure Italian stock, but between the natives of one part of the country and those of another, there are very distinct differences. In the south is the dark-haired, dark-skinned type, rather short of stature. In the north it is just the opposite – light-skinned and tall of stature” (Sequenzia 52). Similarly, *The First Book of Italy*, a guide published in 1958, explained how most “northern Italians are brisk, businesslike, and efficient. And in this area there are more blonds than there are in other parts of the country. [In Southern Italy] where the swarthy Greeks, the Phoenicians, and the dark-skinned Arabs once ruled, most people still have black hair and dark eyes” (Epstein 5). Again, in *When in Rome* the authors launched into a merciless and grotesque physical description of people from Rome:

Physically, the men are heavy-set, thick-chested, muscular specimens [...] with jet-black hair, sharp eyes, stubborn chin, hawk-like nose. And the women? Same dark hair, flashing black eyes [...] but also the lovely shoulders and wide hips of a Hawaiian hula-hula dancer coupled with the common Latin tendency to put on too much weight in the middle thirties. (Streeter and Weisbecker 90)

The guide even recommended to the reader specific locations where they could go and see these typical and genuine “Romans of Rome”, as if they were intriguing, exotic attractions (Streeter and Weisbecker 90-91). The idea that being among Italians was a highly exotic experience was

further reinforced when the guide compared people from Rome to Native Americans when describing their tendency to gesticulate (197).

This emphasis on experiencing the exotic, and on encountering a different, backward people (even physically different), in a context imagined as stopped in time, are all elements of an asymmetrical, colonial type of tourist relationship traditionally reserved by the West for Third-World destinations (see Crick 1989; Palmer 1994). All of these elements, however, also come to the surface in the American travel writing on Italy during the 1950s, which often appears focused on establishing an asymmetry of strength between the visiting American and the local Italian, relegated almost to the role of a fairground attraction.

Not surprisingly, a large proportion of the travel narratives referring to encounters with locals was based on explicit sexual subtexts. In the American material, both the alleged wild erotic power of local women and, occasionally, the charm of local men were heavily emphasized. “The Italian women are the best-looking in Europe by two miles, the men use the most fragrant hair lotions on earth” (McLemore, “Food Notes” 6), noted a 1957 travel article. An important influence in this regard came of course from cinema, through which Vittorio De Sica, Sofia Loren, Gina Lollobrigida and other stars imprinted well-determined standards of beauty on overseas audiences. “The greatest Italian discovery since spaghetti is a 26-year-old fawn-eyed, heavy-chested movie actress named Gina Lollobrigida” (“World of Women” 91) a 1955 article in the travel magazine *Holiday* concluded. Repurposing a classic tourist marketing gimmick, the fictional narrative sometimes went so far as to titillate the reader by letting him envisage not only the chance of meeting Italian women well disposed toward the American tourist – “the women were very friendly there [...]. They blew kisses at us as we went up the mountainside” (Craig 2) – but even the chance of meeting the movie divas in person: “American tourists in Italy (especially the male variety) are being treated to a delightful surprise these days. Alluring Sophia Loren now finds it amusing to pop over to their café tables ‘just to chat’” (Kilgallen 4). Or again: “What does a 17-year-old youth do when he suddenly finds he has won a dream trip to Rome? [...] He met Gina Lollobrigida!” (Craig 2). On the flip side, i.e. for the benefit of female readers, travel articles sometimes also resorted to the stereotype

of the romantic and seductive Italian male: “There are plenty of tall, dark, handsome Italian men, but probably not enough, at the present flow of tourists into this country, to guarantee every visitor the same blazing romantic idyll...” (Friendlander 15).

During the 1950s and the 1960s, while Italian cinema gained popularity in the US, the American movie industry contributed enormously to the fascination with Italy and to the sexualizing of encounters between Americans and Italians. Films such as *Roman Holiday* (1953), *Three Coins in the Fountain* (1954), *Summertime* (1955) or *Gidget Goes to Rome* (1963) helped promote an image of Italy as a romantic location par excellence, a gateway to passionate love affairs. It is now well established the impact that films can have on tourism (see Beeton). The cultural context of the Cold War adds an additional ingredient to the mix. The genre of “runaway” movies where an American falls in love with a European, in fact, was somehow metaphorically investigating “what ought to be America’s relationship with Europe” in the new international context (Anderson 16). It did not focus only on depicting a renewed “partnership” between the two shores of the Atlantic, but also on symbolically representing a form of dependence. As Laura Ruberto has illustrated in her analysis of female Italian immigrant characters in post-war American cinema, there was a widespread tendency to portray desperate yet sexually available Italian women, in much the same way as Italy was perceived as a poor country, well disposed towards the USA. In travel literature, the inference was often far more sexually explicit. The aforementioned guide *When in Rome*, for example, devoted an entire paragraph to describing Italian women – especially Roman women – and their customs, even giving some awkward advice to the tourist eager to embark on romantic conquests (Streeter and Weisbecker 89-90). Even in a more conventional travel guide like Sydney Clark’s *All the Best in Italy*, the author rhetorically asked what made Italy special, and, with a wink at the (male) tourist he playfully intimated: “Is it pretty girls? Wait till you see them, in the big cities, in the remote hamlets of the hills, in the cabarets of Rome, on the multitude of beaches, where you see *a lot of* them, quite literally!” (17). After all, as the *New York Times* reminded its male readers, contrary to popular belief, there was no ban on wearing bikinis on Italian beaches (Hofmann 25).

The emphasis on the seductive and approachable character of local people, which went so far as to hint at the concrete possibility of sexual liaisons, obviously had important implications. On the one hand, it was a repetition of century-old images about the natural seductiveness of Italians. On the other, it suggested a natural attraction between America, represented by the tourist (mostly male) and Italy that was evidently also a reflection on the imagined relationship between a powerful, manly America and a weak womanly Italy in need of help. Fantasizing about sexual conquests on vacation, moreover, is a common strategy in travel narrative, which allows the tourist to visualize the “conquest” of the destination through the bodies of the local population. Sexualizing the encounter with the locals, in other words, suggested to readers the idea that Italy was in a subordinate position and at their disposal.

To conclude, two elements emerge from what has been observed so far. The first is that the American destination image of Italy is *confirmed* rather than *modified* by the post-World War II context. In doing so, travel literature created at times a disjoint with the real situation of US-Italian relations, or it clashed with other beliefs and ideas. While the US administrations looked suspiciously at Italian communists during the 1950s, for example, it seems that travel literature had already de-rubricated them as a minor, almost folkloric phenomenon. Also, the incessant reiteration in travel articles, still at the end of the decade, about Italy’s endemic poverty is at odds with other celebratory narratives on the Italian “economic miracle.” As early as August 1951, for example, *Life* magazine reported in triumphalist tones that the “amazing postwar recovery [...] has made defeated Italy seem the most vigorous nation in Europe” (Serra 458). Moreover, a long series of complaints and negative opinions about Italians – as well as equally long-lasting negative Italian perceptions of American tourists – demonstrates the difficulty of realizing the idea of making all tourists “goodwill ambassadors” of the American model that both Truman and Eisenhower had tried to establish. “The three chief pests of modern Italy are: some systematic gouging, universal overcrowding and the almost inescapable noise,” stated E. A. Mowrer in 1950 (12). Sometimes, articles even displayed outright animosity: “This trip to Italy has convinced me that there is a [...] thing that Italians live for, namely cheating the eyeballs

out of American tourists. They are so good at it that I believe it must be taught in their schools..." (McLemore "Cheating Americans" 12).

At the same time, however, it is clear that the international context of the Cold War was also adding a new angle to travel literature, one that inserted the traditional destination image of Italy in such a way as to highlight the new role of the United States. In many ways, Italy was seen to be a poor and backward country, inhabited by people who were gay and cheerful, but also naive and inexperienced in the ways of democracy. Therefore, the travel writings entered fully into the administration's insistence about the need to help, but also to check and supervise Italy. These narratives, moreover, also served as a reminder to departing tourists that they were traveling to a destination peripheral to the center of the liberal, democratic world.

The second element of interest, on the other hand, is related precisely to the American mindset regarding travel abroad. It could be said that a transition was taking place from the "innocents abroad" ironically described by Mark Twain to the post-World War II American tourists, who were now represented with *no* irony as new pioneers, protagonists of the postwar recovery and victims, if anything, of the Europeans' attempts to cheat them.

Sure enough, even if during the 1950s there was a less celebratory travel narrative about the new American tourist (above all, by Horace Sutton of the *Saturday Review*), the sense of a profound change in power relations (even in the field of culture), eloquently expressed by *Holiday*, appeared far more recurrent and widespread. Yet, some sort of reaction within American society occurred as early as the end of the decade. It is no coincidence that a book like *The Ugly American* achieved immediate success after its publication in 1958. Although it was not a book about tourists, the press and media immediately appropriated the title to name the new American tourist who, according to many, was endangering the prestige of the United States in the world with his attitude. When all is said and done, this new development was a further confirmation that America's "tourist-ambassador" project had been less successful than originally hoped (see Endy).

Notes

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EVA PELAYO SAÑUDO

The Urban Cowboy: Gender, the Frontier (Ethni)City and the Myth of the West in Mario Puzo's *The Fortunate Pilgrim*

(Dis)placing the West(ern): New Transnational and Urban Perspectives

This article aims to consider the transnational presence of the myth of the West through Italian American literature, particularly Mario Puzo's *The Fortunate Pilgrim* (1965), which exemplifies the diversity of its urban manifestations by revisiting key western icons. It analyzes not only the circulation and cultural function of the Western in urban areas, but also the crucial interplay of gender representation in configuring old and modern myths. Before showing the relevance of Italian American culture to this revisionary project, it is necessary to establish the conceptual introduction to transnational and urban theory as appropriate frameworks of analysis which have re-oriented readings and conceptualizations of the West(ern).

On the one hand, as has already been made evident by recent research on the so-called Transnational Post-Westerns (see González), the transnational study of the myth of the West is highly productive for transcending that physical and symbolic US region. As a matter of fact, the Italian influence on one of the genre's pivotal resurgences is widely recognized, although little is yet known about the equally significant impact on Italian American artistic productions. Furthermore, the focus on this ethnicity leads to important critical re-readings of the West that highlight the discrepancy between the cowboy as an all-American white icon and the racial and ethnic diversity of actual cowboys (see Barraclough; Goldstein-Shirley; Hardaway).

On the other hand, apart from the well-known transnational cultural transfer in terms of cinematic genre, the Western ramifications have been particularly studied from a spatial point of view. In this sense, the so-called New Western Historiography (see Limerick et al.) has also challenged the traditional conceptualization of the West as an autonomous and self-reliant physical space, highlighting instead the existing connections to other economic and cultural centers in the US Eastern coast, including the interdependence between urban culture and the frontier myth (see Mennell). New findings can be located about the deeper influences of the Western and its archetypes, that is, the most celebrated cultural icons such as the cowboy or the frontier. By continuing to examine the flows of this mythical or legendary space of the West which transcend its geopolitical borders, well-defined manifestations of the genre can be discovered in otherwise unusual contexts and literatures.

This article evaluates in particular that powerful imaginary in other urban landscapes such as New York, which also featured a paradigmatic fascination with the concept of the (Old) West. This has been shown in the imagination of Italian Americans, as is well reflected in their early fiction and later artistic productions (see Casillo; Gardaphé *From Wiseguys to Wise Men*). This urban perspective has been surprisingly understudied and underrecognized. According to Neil Campbell,

the presence of the urban has often been another aspect of the hidden within the stories of the US West, a lost dimension buried below its mythic landscapes and heroic action narratives. In reframing these stories one needs to understand how the genre Western was constituted by this absence and recognize the subtle presence of the city *within* the West. (165; emphasis in the original)

The emergence of the “urban post-western” that Campbell identifies in some films attests to the constant redefinitions of the traditional genre. Although cinema has always been a useful channel for expressing the (re)definitions of the West, it is by no means the only creative device to have fashioned such a popular genre. In her early study *Early Westerns: How to Trace a Family* (1996), Nanna Verhoeff already alluded to the obvious contributions by film and literature, particularly with the rise of the dime novels that popularized

the Western story. In addition, there were earlier artistic manifestations, namely photography, that shaped the tradition of the West. More interestingly, Verhoeff also retrieved the importance of the urban setting or the metropolis, what was called the “frontier city”:

The Western frontier is de facto also an urban frontier. First of all, there was a lot of boosting and advertising to get people to move to the new cities, particularly by Railroad companies. These growing urban societies constitute an aspect that is often not taken into account in histories of representations of the West [...] so that when film came around, a few decades earlier a tradition of representations of the West already existed. (93)

As I will show, Mario Puzo’s novel can also be read in a new perspective when considering the contribution to this ethos of reimagining the Western frontier mythology within early twentieth-century New York City. De Angelis has also noted how this

central myth of American identity is evoked, that of the cowboy and the pioneer, of the Frontier, and of the inner migration from East to West. Puzo displaces this movement and its myth, one of the most iconic situations codified in Westerns, usually set in the barren wilderness of the Great Plains, to the East, re-enacting it in the urban environment of New York City. (162)

Considering not only Puzo’s literary text but also relevant evidence regarding his cultural context, this article reconsiders the Italian American position in transnational Western literature and analyzes the presence of the West in the city and gender representation. To this end, the analysis concentrates on two central elements of the classical West: the cowboy and the frontier, although reconceptualized in the context of twentieth-century immigration. These two elemental features serve to identify the US Western impact on Italian American culture in general and in its literature in particular, through the especially representative novel *The Fortunate Pilgrim*.

Immigration, Ethnicity and Gender: The Cultural Function of the Western and the Archetype of the Cowboy

The Fortunate Pilgrim, set in New York City in the early twentieth century, features classic Western influences and, more interestingly, an urban cowboy. Although only Larry is explicitly defined in the novel as a cowboy, we can find further traces of the Western myth, rendered through the lens of the city and particularly the US history of ethnicity and immigration. For example, there are very explicit comparisons between the old pioneers and immigrants:

They were pioneers, though they never walked an American plain and never felt real soil beneath their feet. They moved in a sadder wilderness, where the language was strange, where their children became members of a different race. It was a price that must be paid. (Puzo 8)

As will be further explained, it is clear that Puzo was deeply influenced by a genre that was so popular in both film and literature. Furthermore, I contend that it is possible to analyze his novel around the influence of the myth of the West in terms of immigrant belonging, a myth scripted through an urban setting as well as from a female perspective, both of which modify some of the conventions.

Italian American critics have pointed out that the legendary cowboy of the West serves two main functions for migrants. On the one hand, it offers a cultural model for newcomers and helps the immigrant to develop a sense of belonging to the new country. On the other, also as a popular icon, it represents the “cultural ancestor” of the gangster figure, which guarantees the continuity of certain values (Gardaphé, *From Wiseguys to Wise Men* 182). Robert Casillo has alluded to the similarities between the Western genre and Italian cultural codes to study the deep influence of Westerns on contemporary directors such as Martin Scorsese and on Italian American audiences as a whole since the 1950s. More particularly, the Old West is resonant with Sicilian stories which deal with mafia gunfire, as well as with other alleged cultural traits. Casillo claims that

the resemblance between Western and Sicilian codes with respect to masculinity, honor, vengeance, and the treatment of women help to explain not only Scorsese's characters deep affinity for the American West (as in the films of Ford and Hawks) but that of many Italian Americans. (530)

On the one hand, Italian Americans literally embodied the Western, given that Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra typically starred in such roles and were, as Scorsese and a considerable part of the Italian American community, great consumers of westerns in their childhood. In fact, everyone was significantly exposed to such an influence, since the Western had become a mass product: "For decades [...] the expectation that the American film industry would supply westerns to eager audiences was regularly met, and thus largely taken for granted" (Creekmur 395). On the other hand, this influence needs to be analyzed in a broader light as part of a cultural and social transition where an apparently new cultural icon actually implies the regeneration or revival of former values and desires. More specifically, this transformation is generally linked to the accommodation of issues of gender, race and ethnicity. This cultural and ideological context is important to understand the manifold representations and reinventions of prominent archetypes such as the cowboy.

According to Richard Gambino, "the mafioso rivals the cowboy as the chief figure in American folklore, and the Mafia rivals the old American frontier as a resource for popular entertainment" (277). In this respect, it is interesting to compare how a far more well-known text by Puzo has captured the attention thanks to the mythology of the mobster. The introduction to a recent edition of his classic mafia novel *The Godfather* also shows that this text represents a new myth where "the mob story [i]s [now] the central epic" (Thompson 1). This myth replaced the old imaginary of the West with that of the urban frontier and the immigrant rise. In addition, "it provided a strikingly tempting alternative to the official and legal authorities of the day. As the Western pioneers carved a system of justice out of the wilderness, the Corleones create their own within the chaos and corruption of the city" (3-4). At the same time, they respond to the call of the "old" frontier, that is, the regional West, when Michael moves the family and the business to Reno.

Literary critic Fred Gardaphé has analyzed the shift of this popular attraction from the cowboy to the gangster: the latter appeals to spectators as a new incarnation of the codes of masculinity and of a vanished past of glory previously presented in the former. By the 1970s, the mafioso or gangster filled the void left by the charisma of the cowboy, especially in relation to issues of masculinity in US culture (*From Wiseguys to Wisemen* 90). Gardaphé claims that the American fascination with the Italian (American) male mob – and the consequent over-representation of this ethnic type – relates to a historic shift in gender power relations. “An ethnicized version of the iconic John Wayne” (90), as he describes this archetype, it is a projection of (lost) fantasies, a way to deal with changing notions of masculinity in the 1960s and 1970s. The plethora of characters “who exhibit physical power and aggressiveness, criminality, and overt sexuality” is not casual but serve (male) audiences to cope with “the fall of the traditional American he-man”, even if by association to a very specific ethnicity; in fact, the ethnic archetype conveniently functions as a surrogate of US mainstream masculinity: “these are attempts by Hollywood filmmakers to marginalize troublesome characteristics of traditional patriarchy that were under feminist attack by associating them with Old-World ethnic cultures” (42). In short, the use of this stereotype by mainstream media unveils not only an underlying gender ideology but also the fundamental interplay of race or ethnicity.

In turn, the emergence of the cowboy is situated within other social or cultural challenges. As film critic Melenia Arouch notes, in the context of racial conflict and the Anglo American need to reaffirm its identity both in the physical space of the US West and in the “narrative of the nation,” the cowboy was transformed into “a national emblem, a positive social symbol of masculine ethos in a time of instability” (4). Rebeca Scofield also associates the revival of iconic masculine imagery to the “supposed cultural emasculation experienced by white, male Americans in the 1960s and 1970s,” and mentions the 1980 film *Urban Cowboy* as reflecting the anxieties of this cultural and political terrain in which the Reagan era tried to counteract opposing tendencies of US life such as feminism and wider social protests, about gun control or the Vietnam War:

Following *Saturday Night Fever* and disco, John Travolta's starring role in *Urban Cowboy* offered the lynchpin in an already developing fad of cowboy chic. Whether they were petrochemical workers outside Houston or wealthy businessmen on Long Island, "real cowboys" proliferated in new spaces in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They dressed in starched shirts and tight Levi's, drank cheap beer, hit on women, and attempted to master the mechanical bull. America's renewed love affair with all things cowboy exposed a growing need to reassert white masculinity in both the political and cultural realms. (325)

This shows the extent of the reinvention of an archetype which pervades the US cultural imagination rather than being bound to a concrete physical space, moving therefore the traditional untamed frontier to the opposite Eastern coast and paradigmatic metropolis. In other words, the cowboy figure and the myth of the West by extension are by no means limited to precise geographic settings but function as cultural models and symbols of US history, standing for very specific notions of masculinity and national identity. As such, this framework is used to study new configurations of the myth of the West, particularly the representations which center on the space of the city, as mentioned at the start. I now turn my attention to analyzing the key (re)configuration of the urban cowboy in *The Fortunate Pilgrim*.

The *Fortunate Pilgrim*: Literary and Historical Context of the (Urban) Cowboy

The Fortunate Pilgrim adapts the myth and iconography of the West to an urban setting, which becomes clearly intertwined with the history of immigration, another powerful mythology if considered from a contemporary perspective, but this was not always the case. Puzo's *The Fortunate Pilgrim* preceded his bestselling novel *The Godfather* (1969), but few people have noted the critical potential of the former as an ambivalent representation of "all things American." Seen in the light of twenty-first century cultural criticism, Ellis Island and the history of immigration definitely stand in line with the Western frontier as iconic

images of the United States. Specifically, they have become the prevailing cultural narratives of the country, and as such are often used to convey a conservative discourse or ideology. According to Matthew Jacobson, during the 1970s the so-called ethnic revival succeeded in reestablishing the identity and legitimacy in the national fabric of European immigrants, including Italians, who had particularly experienced the twentieth-century US pressure to assimilate, losing their language, being considered as enemy aliens during World War II, and suffering other types of ethnic prejudice. This long-due conquest emerged in the wake of wider social movements, such as the Civil Rights movement, but evolved in different directions. Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty replaced the famous Plymouth Rock of the Pilgrim Fathers as a foundational national myth. Together with the common rhetoric of the “nation of immigrants,” they became landmarks in this public history of immigration and established a new mode of “American nationalism,” or what Jacobson calls “hyphen nationalism” or “Hyphen Nation” (11). While this served to acknowledge the so far discriminated hyphenated (that is, non-American) immigrants, the USA installed that myth of origins by excluding other histories such as those of African American or Native American communities. The history of immigration was duly recognized but at the expense of a “portentous *forgetting* of the gradual and violent history of this settler democracy [...] long before the first immigrants [...] ever came ashore” (9; emphasis in the original).

By contrast, in the novel, and considering the early-twentieth-century context in which it is set, what would become one of the key US narratives about the history of immigration was not yet legitimized. Immigrants, then perceived generally as non-Americans, were far from being considered icons and were rather influenced by mainstream models, namely the cowboys and the fantasy of the West as a way of acknowledging a legitimate national identity. In other words, the main mythology informing US national belonging was that of the cowboy, at that time a popular hero of unrivalled proportions. This explains why the male immigrant could embrace this figure as a cultural icon in an attempt to partake of the country’s social life and cultural norms. Gardaphé has identified this Western influence and the way in which “Puzo describes Larry [the young main character in *The*

Fortunate Pilgrim] as an urban cowboy” (*From Wiseguys to Wise Men* 24), due to the cultural climate in which the author was immersed:

Puzo continually refers to the cowboy, a popular figure in films of the late 1930s and early 1940s, a type of admired, public masculinity that boys of Larry’s era imitated. The cowboy figure conveys a strong and stable sense of masculinity, an appropriate symbol of American independence. (27)

In fact, Westerns and cinema in general became interlinked as apt vehicles for Americanization:

the genre’s increased popularity became deeply intertwined with what appeared to be its quintessential Americanness. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the western was intricately associated with the discourse of Americanization, which itself began to impart a national identity to the country’s rapidly expanding popular cinema. (Creekmur 396)

In short, Puzo’s formative years (he was born in 1920) coincided with the heyday of the classical cowboy genre: “By 1910, the western was firmly established with the moviegoing public and would reach its zenith in the mid-1930s when more than two dozen cowboy stars were making series of cowboy movies” (Pitts 1). Certainly, the main male character and the setting of the novel are a voiceover of cowboy fantasy. Furthermore, resorting to the legendary West helps both adaptation to the new country and an acceptable codification of masculinity. *The Fortunate Pilgrim* actually opens with a scene where the protagonist Lorenzo (Larry) Angeluzzi is riding on a horse as he performs the role of an urban cowboy along the railroad tracks by signaling when a train is coming through: “In 1928 the New York Central Railroad used the streets of the city to shuttle trains north and south, sending scouts on horseback to warn traffic” (Puzo, *The Fortunate Pilgrim* 3). Although the novel uses the term “scout,” the pictures and the press of the times show that the word “cowboy” was more common. This is how young men on horseback were generally known back then, as New York City or West Side cowboys, given that from about the 1850s the City Council created the job to avoid the high number of casualties caused by

street-level freight cars such as on 10th Avenue (precisely where Larry is working), which was nicknamed Death Avenue (LaFarge n. pag.). Linked to this fictionalization, the discovery of those virtually forgotten figures has also inspired the “historically-based” tale for children *Tenth Avenue Cowboy* (2008), by Linda Oatman High, set in 1910, at the very time of “the real-life cowboys who actually rode through city streets warning of oncoming trains” (Littlewood n. pag.).

Puzo’s novel also displays a more mythic connotation of the figure of the cowboy, who is actually becoming a vanishing hero, particularly in the context of the processes of modernization: “In a few more years this would end, an overhead pass built. But Larry Angeluzzi, not knowing he was the last of the ‘dummy boys,’ that he would soon be a tiny scrap of urban history rode as straight and arrogantly as any western cowboy” (*The Fortunate Pilgrim* 3). Moreover, Puzo continues the captivating description with an insistence on, apart from his riding prowess, his physical appearance that recalls the typical characterization in many US Western films, which feature a neat and good-looking protagonist (Abel 171): “His spurs were white, heavy sneakers, his sombrero a peaked cap studded with union buttons. His blue dungarees were fastened at the ankle with shiny, plated bicycle clips” (*The Fortunate Pilgrim* 3). In short, Larry perfectly embodies “the charisma of the cowboy” previously discussed in Gardaphé’s analysis of the figure; he is as valid a hero, daring and seemingly individualist in his adventure or quest, which is evidenced by the explicit comparison: “He cantered through the hot summer night, his desert a city of stone” (3). This is the portrayal of a powerful and honest young man, intended to inspire due esteem or respect: he waves as he makes his horse “rear up for the people sitting on the sidewalk,” while “little children stopped their games to watch him in silent admiration” (3). Drawing once more on Gardaphé, “these feats demonstrate that Larry is well on his way towards manhood, since in order for a (young) boy to become a man, he must perform masculine feats in public” (*From Wiseguys to Wise Men* 24).

In addition, Larry is explicitly compared to the famous early cowboy star Ken Maynard (*The Fortunate Pilgrim* 48). However, Larry is a very distinct type of the traditional hero; he is an urban cowboy, since the setting of his exploits is the growing metropolis of New York City, which

is undergoing urbanization and industrialization. Thus, rather than riding in the prairies, he “spurred his jet-black horse through a canyon formed by two great walls of tenements” (3). Instead of sleeping outdoors under a starry sky, he daydreams about his future “in the smelly stable, cowboylike on prairie of stone” (50). Moreover, as much as he enjoys prancing in front of the people on the sidewalk, far from enjoying an exhilarating ride with his horse, Larry is compelled to lead “the animal left into the open railroad yards that formed a great spark-filled plain of steel down to the Hudson” (4). In other words, the western imaginary is replicated in the urban context, which necessarily produces a different outcome. During his journey through the streets, Larry comments on one of the “outdoor movies shown by Hudson Guild Settlement House” in which he sees “a monstrous horse and rider, bathed in false sunlight, thundering down upon him”; instead of identifying with the images, Larry feels threatened as he “felt his own horse rise in alarm as its tossing head caught sight of those great ghosts” (4). This is a telling reaction which disrupts the narrative, given the fact that the character has up until then seemed to fit so well into the myth of the West. Although Larry is so obviously inspired by that heroic imaginary, his negative reaction to the menacing “ghosts” suggests that he has become aware that his reveries do not represent the “true” West, caught up as he is in the “false sunlight” of the West.

As a matter of fact, it is common for studies on the West to remark on the centrality – or lack thereof – of the authenticity of Westerns. This preoccupation with reality specifically concerns the apparent conflict between the genre’s tendency to immortalize a myth of the West in opposition to historical consistency, thus causing an “outrage over Hollywood’s distortions of history” (Scott xiii). However, not only did the most popular Western films but also the novels about the West adapt “original” stories, but they also disentangled some of the genre’s fundamental meanings from that specific region. Richard Slotkin discusses the characteristic abstraction of well-known literary conventions to appeal to new audiences and mass culture: “by translating the West into a purely mythic or fantasy-space, [authors] made western settings available for a range of stories unlimited by the constraints of historical or conceptual consistency” (216). In this sense, it is interesting to note the diminished

role of western landscapes and regional history in favor of the representation of a more urban experience. For example, Zane Grey, “the most popular Western writer of all time” (211), makes “use of the old Myth of the Frontier to answer the dilemma of a post-Frontier, metropolitan society” (215). Specifically, the detective story is the clearest example in which the traditional mythic space is replaced by an urban setting by adapting those western standard elements. Thus, following Slotkin, the “hard-boiled” detective finds its literary roots in the “red-blooded” cowboy. Crime fiction

follows a formula of heroic action. [...] like the West of the nineteenth century, the modern city is a living entity capable of generating events (crime, waves, scandals, new rackets) that may require incorporation with, and modification of, the formulas of literary fiction. (217)

Puzo’s novel also attempts to revive the frontier world within a growing metropolitan society. Although not in relation to crime, in Puzo’s *The Fortunate Pilgrim* the urban frontier is definitely present, and this (un)familiar setting similarly incorporates as well as alters the conventions of fictions about the West(ern), such as that of heroism. On the one hand, if Larry himself gets only a glimpse of his heroic role in the American imagination, he turns out not to be the expected male hero in Italian tradition either, particularly when his father dies and Larry is forced to replace him as the breadwinner. It can be argued that his ethnicity presupposes a substantial factor that essentially diminishes the quintessential freedom and autonomy that the traditional cowboy would enjoy. On the contrary, tied as he is to his family and imbued with the immigrant work ethic, Larry turns out to be a young man bound by the authority of his mother and unable to economically provide for her and his younger siblings:

In typical Italian fashion, in the father’s absence, the father’s responsibilities fall to the oldest son. Therefore, Larry must begin contributing to the family’s welfare at a young age by providing for the family through his railroad job and by protecting his brothers when they get into trouble on the street. [Nevertheless,] when he falls short of providing the customary protection for the entire family, his mother, Lucia Santa, must step into a family position of power traditionally reserved for men. (Gardaphé, *From Wiseguys to Wise Men* 25)

On the other hand, in the 1920s New York, like many other US cities, was subject to ongoing transformation and urban expansion. Hence, we can further identify literary readings of New York as a “frontier story” and, more fundamentally, the spirit of conquest in relation to the history of immigration and urbanization. Esther Romeyn has noted how the city has figured as a primarily open and limitless space, a mythical land of opportunity, in the immigrant imagination, pointing out specifically the Italian American belief that the streets in New York were paved in gold. Nevertheless, the fierce reality of another saying turned out to be more appropriate: Italian immigrants had to “make America,” or *fare l’America*, the expression initially used to express the decision to migrate and the hope of making a decent living, although the majority of immigrants just wanted to make enough money to return to Italy. In fact, their literally having to build the new country radically modified immigrant expectations, given that Italians did not find streets paved in gold, as was advertised of the “New World,” but paved the streets themselves.

In this respect, Italian male immigrants had to face their own urban frontier and take on the responsibility of leading their families to a new kind of civilization, as well as assisting in the city’s transformation into modernity. However, in the novel this spirit of conquest, in the context of twentieth-century immigration and urbanization, is not portrayed through Larry but the figure of Lucia Santa, his mother, who becomes his substitute as the most important character when the novel progresses. In fact, in a substantial reversal of gender roles as usually depicted in migration history and literature, the nickname Fortunate Pilgrim refers to a female immigrant, *La Mamma* or *Mamma Lucia*, as the novel has been translated into Spanish, Italian or German. It is an autobiographical narrative that recreates the author’s mother and her migratory and family-raising struggle. Puzo himself considered this novel his best, even though it was eclipsed by *The Godfather*, which dealt with the mafia subject matter that the market and audiences were looking for from writers of Italian origin (Puzo, *The Making* 4). De Angelis also explains the contrasting reception of the novels and how the male figure seemed to be more likeable, which could explain why “the protagonist of *The Godfather* is Lucia Santa turned

into a man” (158), that is, that Don Corleone was actually based on the female immigrant:

Even if the critical reviews were mostly favorable, sometimes verging on enthusiastic, *The Fortunate Pilgrim* did not make a fortune for his author. Maybe telling the story of an average, lower-class immigrant Italian family was not yet the subject material upon which a writer could build a career. But four years later a very different family, headed not by a woman who is “sainted” (Lucia *Santa*), but by a man whose honorary title designates a surrogate of God himself, the Godfather, won Mario Puzo fame and financial success. (158; italics in the original)

Lucia Santa will assume control due to the death of her husband and the failure of Larry himself to support the family as breadwinner, as was demanded of men, especially within the Italian tradition. Gardaphé argues that the husband Anthony Angeluzzi offers no other performance than “his failure as a man” (*From Wiseguys to Wise Men* 25). Furthermore, his death is precisely the opportunity that authorizes Lucia Santa to almost completely exert her power in the family, although she fills the breadwinner role only after the eldest son Larry has in turn failed to do so, a role also complemented by the sister Octavia whose earnings keep the family from the poorhouse. In this respect, Lucia Santa bitterly describes her own husband, besides as a drinker and gambler, as “the master, but a chief without foresight, criminal in his lack of ambition for his family, content to live the rest of his life in the slum tenements a few short blocks from the docks where he worked” (*The Fortunate Pilgrim* 29). In dying, Anthony additionally shows his inability to execute the one duty he is expected to properly fulfil, providing for the family. This explains why he is even held as somehow responsible for his own death given that, in Lucia Santa’s view, he has “carelessly let himself be killed in one of those accidents that were part of the building of the new continent” (10). As a result, the women in the family, Lucia Santa and her daughter Octavia, “are enacting masculine roles quite naturally to fill voids left by the men in their lives, who ultimately present masculinities that have failed to perform” (Gardaphé, *From Wiseguys to Wise Men* 26).

In this particular case the heartfelt “disruption” is further linked to the specific effects of immigration on family dynamics and gender roles

therein: “such power is also a result of what has been critically identified as the afore-mentioned ‘failed masculinity’ of Italians due to unsettling displacement or other consequences of migration” (Pelayo-Sañudo, “Failed Family Sagas” 51). In the novel, Lucia Santa’s second husband, Frank, is also a failure when he is hospitalized and “given a long period of rest. But this man had to work, he had children to feed” (*The Fortunate Pilgrim* 115). Far from being a coincidence, this event is judged as a social ill of masculinity and immigration: “it was always the men who crumbled under the glories of the new land, never the women. There were many cases of Italian men who became insane and had to be committed, as if in leaving their homeland they had torn a vital root from their minds” (115).

All in all, the displacement of the urban hero for the heroine results from the reversal of gender roles in relation to twentieth-century immigration and the development of Italian American ethnicity. As has been shown above, in Italian American society and literature “it is acceptable that women ‘usurp’ their husbands’ power when these ‘fail’ in their traditional roles” (Pelayo-Sañudo, *Spatialities* 61). In addition, it is in this resumed position of power that Lucia Santa challenges some of the traditional male narratives of personal glory and heroism. Defining these in her own terms, she renders a female experience of such central concepts of the culture, which are also typical of the Western, as well as of gangster stories. For example, she rejects the values of respect and honor through violence that Larry proclaims when retaliating a previous offence against his younger brother Guido:

Larry felt tired and at peace. He was no longer a villain. Tonight when he rode up Tenth Avenue on his horse, the great black engine and endless train behind him, people on the Avenue would look at him, shout to him, talk to him. He would be treated with respect. He had protected his brother and the family honor. No one would dare mistreat anyone in his family. He fell asleep. (*The Fortunate Pilgrim* 86)

By contrast, Lucia Santa is

a little irritated by all the fuss about the fight, the masculine pride and hoopla, as if such things were really of great importance. Now

she wanted to hear no more of it. She had that secret contempt for male heroism that many women feel but never dare express; they find masculine pride in heroics infantile, for after all, what man would risk his life day after day and year after year as all women do in the act of love? Let them bear children, let their bodies open up into a great blood cavern year after year. They would not be so proud then of their trickling scarlet noses, their little knife cuts. (87)

In line with such female socialization, the individualist male conquest is substituted by a sense of triumph in a collective sense. This is indeed a typical representation of Italian American female identity that critics have identified in different novels. In *Claiming a Tradition: Italian American Women Writers* (1999), Mary Jo Bona has studied this recurrent representation found in female literary production and has coined the term *ethnic bildungsroman* to analyze such texts. It refers to novels of development which reflect the experience and values of some minorities and women, such as the focus on family growth rather than individualistic autonomy which used to be the most common sign of maturity in the traditional bildungsroman. Whereas this genre has conventionally focused on a male quest for autonomy away from the institution of the family, Bona has set to prove that it needs to accommodate the specificities of female and ethnic identities too. It is precisely the family that is a key component of Italian American cultural identity as well as of women's socialization: "modified by the categories of ethnicity and gender, the characters' developments [...] are crucially influenced by their position in the Italian American family" (19).

In Larry's case, his descent into crime in the novel can be explained by the male models available for him in his community. He becomes the individual in society that is expected in terms of gender and ethnicity, that is, by pursuing the values of honor and respect through violent means. This violence, which can be taken to the extreme, is justified in the name of family: "He felt full of affection for his mother and brother and the whole family. 'Nobody is gonna lay their hands on anybody in my family,' he said. 'I woulda killed the guy except for my job in the railroad'" (*The Fortunate Pilgrim* 86). Hence, the urban cowboy of Hell's Kitchen also imitates the gangster role typically associated with Italian American manhood.

Notions of family are implicated in male bonding in the Italian American community (for example, the important bond between mother and son) and also in traditional forms of Italian American masculinity, particularly the world of wiseguys and mobsters. For women, identity is also deeply connected to the family and therefore complicates the usual narratives of autonomy and individual victory in fiction. In short, the quest and final success of the whole family is what counts the most and Puzo's text fits well the definition of being one of those "Family Novels of Development" (Bona, *Claiming a Tradition* 23). By the end of the novel and elucidating its title, Lucia Santa will manage to move her family to the Promised Land. She gets out of the congested urban space which is Manhattan's Little Italy at the time and reaches the greener suburbs of Long Island. *The Fortunate Pilgrim* ends with Lucia Santa's congratulatory confirmation to her children that "yes, now they were on Long Island" (301). Following De Angelis, there is a clear spatial and temporal break as they finally ascend "the city upon a hill, as in the very last paragraph of the novel, where Lucia and her sons and daughters really go *up* towards their new life, crossing the bridge that will separate them from their past" (161; emphasis in the original). This is a final and hard won conquest away from the filth and clamor of the tenements where especially she, as a woman, was confined and burdened by "the endless chores" (*The Fortunate Pilgrim* 190).

In this sense, even though the act of "leaving Little Italy" for suburbia (see Gardaphé *Leaving Little Italy*) has been commonly associated with becoming white and middle-class, or achieving the American Dream (Dwyer 61), this longing for departure by the central female character may well be seen in the manner of the traditional Western fantasy looking for wider spaces, with its sense of promise and freedom. The immigrant and urban space can be considered to be difficult to tame since the environment Lucia Santa inhabits is especially hostile and she finally abandons it. Despite hard work, Italian immigrants generally had to live in unsafe and crowded tenements (see Hall), surrounded by the contamination produced by the concentration of industries around lower Manhattan (see Anbinder), as well as endure labor exploitation and ethnic prejudice (see Connell and Gardaphé). It seems that the suburb, similarly to the most basic notion of the US West, becomes a new mythology in the immigrant imagination,

encapsulating the idea of progress, which the novel's title also underlines. In fact, Lucia Santa is not the only one to leave for Long Island, which is, admittedly, the immigrant dream despite the idea that the ghetto may offer a safe and familiar place away from the "foreign land" of America particularly for first-generation immigrants (Mulas 51). She has no one to say goodbye to on Tenth Avenue as everybody has already "moved out": "And others too had left for all those strange towns dreamed of for so many years" (*The Fortunate Pilgrim* 296-97).

The suburbs were the "utopian havens [...] from the ills of city life" (Gardaphé, *Leaving Little Italy* 31). Yet, despite the intense desire, Lucia Santa's promised land is a place she hesitates to go to when the moving day is approaching. She is nervous, cannot sleep and thinks that "she had never meant to be a pilgrim. To sail a fearful ocean" (*The Fortunate Pilgrim* 296). This hesitation can be arguably interpreted as the fear that the promised land might be a new frontier to conquer. It is no coincidence that the departure is compared with immigration through those references to the pilgrimage and the ocean. This large move to the suburbs was a significant episode in the Italian American community which was equated with a second migration or diaspora (Hendin 14; Bona, *By the Breath of Their Mouths* 139), and the disappearance of the enclaves of Little Italy in many cities. To conclude, therefore, Puzo further complicates the western frontier mythology in *The Fortunate Pilgrim* by constantly avoiding any settled definition and identification with a precise location. The representation of the frontier (ethni)city is a central device, as well as the gender perspective. The West is also reimaged beyond the male character Larry, the so-called urban cowboy in the novel, by focusing on another alternative pioneer, the female pilgrim Lucia Santa.

Notes

¹ It is worth contextualizing the important role of Italy in the revival of Westerns. There exists a central spin-off of the classical Western genre since the 1960s, which had a comparable global impact and acquired its own status in what is known as the Spaghetti Western (see Frayling). The Italian production of Westerns, or Spaghetti Westerns, with its own particular political function, came to replace US conventions of the Western genre as such. As a case in point, Italian director Sergio Leone is for many the main referent, when not “the master,” of the genre. According to Michael Fisher in *Radical Frontiers in the Spaghetti Western: Politics, Violence and Popular Italian Cinema*, his films and several other Italian Westerns have a clear political orientation, which is both local and international, engaging with causes as diverse as the Mexican revolution, fascism and Nazism, as well as the leftist Italian movements around 1968. Moreover, this new political context explains one of the attractions in the Italian reinvention of the genre in formal terms, namely “the Hollywood genre’s obsessive focus on the legitimacy of violence” (Frayling 2).

² My understanding and definition of terms such as “mythical” and “archetype” are based on the common belief that the West has been basically imagined and retrieved over the generations around very specific and abstract images and idea(l)s, mostly transmitted by popular culture and linked to meanings of national identity. Borrowing from Nicolas S. Witschi, “the American West is an extremely powerful idea, one that has evolved over several centuries in the imaginations of countless people both in the US and abroad, an idea (re)produced in books, movies, paintings, and the like. It is an idea that shimmers with abstractions such as frontier, opportunity, honor, individualism, and justice, and it is often (but not always, to be sure) recognized by visual cues such as the cowboy hat, the horse, vast stretches of open rangeland rimmed by snowy peaks or desert mesas, and the handgun” (4).

³ I would like to acknowledge the Roosevelt Institute for American Studies Research, in Middleburgh, The Netherlands, where I spent a week to do research in the field of American Studies. I am grateful for their support to write my article and for providing me with the sources I needed while working at the facilities. A particularly helpful one was this on-site thesis I had found through their online catalogue.

⁴ For example, critical studies about the popular Wild West shows have concentrated on the crucial representation of race as a vehicle of expression for national identity. It is essentially a spectacle of contesting nations or races (typically Indians or Arabs) in which the US subject (typically the cowboy) would become the final conqueror and the superior rival in the competition (see Kollin).

⁵ The opening image not only evidences Puzo’s concern with the question of modernity but replicates the advancement of the frontier and nation building in the USA which is such an integral part of the western imaginary (as is shown, for example, in the famous film *High Noon*).

⁶ In fact, in an interesting reversal of traditional representations about cowboys, the story can well adapt to the setting of the city and capture different sorts of migration,

eastward rather than westward, given that the main character Ben is a boy who moves with his family from a ranch in the West to New York City. Although he experiences a really difficult transition, as he thinks that he cannot fulfill his former dream of becoming a cowboy, Ben soon finds about the “real” urban cowboys (the Tenth Avenue Cowboys) living and working in his neighborhood. It is thanks to this crucial encounter that eventually Ben “begins to feel as though the city is truly his home” (Fleishhacker, qtd. in Clark n. pag.). The author herself has recognized the impact of those unknown yet “real cowboys,” revered as idols and heroes by children at the time (qtd. in Clark n. pag.). After some research, she decided to take them as the subject matter of her book. For this reason, it is worth analyzing the relevance and role of that mythic character of the West in the urban context too. As a review of the book effectively points out, this not only provides a “glimpse into life in early-20th-century New York City,” but also “could be used to expand studies of American history, cowboys, and cross-country migration” (Clark n. pag.).

⁷ Of course, Puzo is not the only one to compare the western imaginary to modernity. This is a common trope of Western films, for example, advocating for a simpler existence through the figure of the cowboy, particularly in the face of rife progress or mechanization (Hockenull 174; see also Pelayo-Sañudo “Never-Aging Stories”). At the same time, one cannot overlook the general concern about the pace or consequences of modernization, ranging from the evils of industrialization to contemporary mass culture, all of which is often manifested in the “ancient ideal” of pastoralism in US culture (Marx 4).

⁸ They comprised, for instance, more than 80 percent of the workforce in New York’s Department of Public Works, which was responsible for the construction of the skyscrapers and the subway system (Mangione and Morreale 138; see also Gabaccia).

⁹ Although this topic goes beyond the scope of this article, Mary Jo Bona also identifies different texts which portray mentally or physically impaired men as opposed to powerful and resourceful women, “immensely strong immigrant mothers who help the family survive the early days in America. [...] The writers often characterize their fictional males as divided selves, suffering eventual illness and even death” (207). Following Marinaccio, “the matriarch with an absent husband” (286) is a recurrent literary heroine. See also other useful studies with more explanations for the depiction of “superheroic” women and mothers who are acknowledged a powerful position within the family (see Barolini; Nardini; Orsi).

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EMANUELE NIDI

Introduction

A Transatlantic Discussion on the Meaning of Pan-Africanism: The Panda-Du Bois Correspondence

The following document is an excerpt from the correspondence between Mfumu Paul Panda Farnana, a Congolese activist, World War I veteran, and former Belgian colonial official,¹ and W. E. B. Du Bois, the preeminent African American scholar and activist widely regarded as the “Father of Pan-Africanism” (Padmore 117-46).² The letter, dated May 31, 1921, comes from the W. E. B. Du Bois Papers at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, a collection recently digitized and made freely accessible online.

The epistolary conversation took place in the context of emerging Black nationalist and internationalist movements after World War I (see Blain; Foley; Makalani), when Du Bois founded the Pan-African Congress (PAC) as a conference of Black intellectuals and colonial administrators, creating a political institution to engage in the debate over the future of African colonies in the new world order (Lewis, *Biography of a Race* 574-78). From the perspective of its founder, the PAC represented a gradualist project that aimed to improve the situation of Black people through dialogue and cooperation with colonial powers. The goal of Pan-Africanists was not so much the immediate self-determination of African populations, whom they patronizingly regarded as still unprepared for democracy, but the legitimization of a global Black intelligentsia as a political subject worthy of respect and consideration on the international stage. Driven by this goal, Du Bois convened four Pan-African Congresses in major European and US cities between 1919 and 1927 (Adi 43-59; Geiss 229-62; Langley 41-103). The Second Pan-African Congress saw the largest attendance, with 110 delegates from 26 countries, and was organized between August and September 1921 around three sessions in three European capitals –

respectively, London, Brussels, and Paris (Lewis, *The Fight for Equality* 37-50).

In the spring of 1921, Du Bois sought collaborators to help him plan the meeting. He approached Panda, born in Congo and raised in Brussels, who seemed to him the perfect choice to organize the Belgian session.³ In his reply, Panda expressed his willingness to help and requested further information. Apart from the organizational issues, he was particularly interested in clarifying the racial nature of the Pan-African Congress. Should it be a conference for Blacks only, or an interracial conference? What role should the Black nationalist leader Marcus Garvey play? Finally, he emphasized the “scientific” nature of the symposium (that is, its dedication to historical and ethnographic issues) and suggested that a visit to the Tervuren Museum in Brussels be arranged to appraise Pan-Africanists of their African heritage. Du Bois responded by welcoming Panda’s cooperation. He explained that he had conceived the Congress as a discussion among all those interested in the fate of people of African descent, and although most of the delegates would be Black, it was not appropriate to prohibit the participation of whites. He then politely but firmly stated that Garvey should not be considered an ally, but an opponent of the Pan-African Congress and a proponent of an unrealistic and fraudulent program. “We can not,” he concluded, “count upon him or trust him” (Letter from Du Bois to Paul Panda, June 17, 1921, Du Bois Papers 1). Finally, he cautioned against approaching the discussion in too strictly scientific a manner. After all, the goal of the meeting was not only to heighten the delegates’ historical and anthropological awareness of the African continent, but also to work out a set of political demands and reach an “agreement on lines of action” (2).⁴

This transatlantic discussion hints at two possible conceptions of internationalism. On the one hand, Panda saw the Pan-African Congress primarily as an instrument to promote the study of African problems by a group of dedicated intellectuals and political leaders. On the other hand, Du Bois stressed the need for a common program and a political agenda. This dichotomy is particularly noteworthy when one considers the debate surrounding the Second Pan-African Congress. In fact, fierce controversies characterized the event. Despite its moderate program, the

pro-colonial press saw it as an emanation of Garveyism and Bolshevism, a revolutionary meeting organized to threaten the colonial order in Africa. These allegations affected the internal discussion, which was polarized between the French-speaking delegates, headed by Senegalese deputy Blaise Diagne, who staunchly defended French and Belgian policies in Africa, and the English and US delegates, led by Du Bois, who advocated a more radical, though by no means anti-colonial, agenda. After the heated final session in Paris, a new Pan-African Association was officially constituted, but the rift between Du Bois and Diagne was now public knowledge and led to an irreparable fracture within the nascent movement (Adi 49-55; Dunstan 14-47).

In this inflamed debate, Farnana had to choose a side. Paul Panda Farnana was born in Bas-Congo in 1888 and grew up in Brussels, where he pursued advanced studies in horticulture. He spent the years before World War I between his motherland and what he now considered his adopted country, studying in Belgium and working as an agricultural officer in the Congo. When the Germans attacked Belgium, he decided to join the Congolese Volunteer Corps to fight the invaders, and eventually ended up in a prison camp in Germany. As was the case for other Black soldiers around the world, the experience of war proved to be a turning point for Farnana. In 1919, he founded the Union Congolaise, an association defending the rights of Congolese veterans (Adi 52). Despite its loyalty to the Belgian Empire, the Union Congolaise took a combative stance in the face of racist accusations from the metropolitan press. When the Belgian *Journal des combattants* portrayed the Black soldiers as uncivilized brutes and suggested their deportation to the African savannah, the Union Congolaise replied defiantly:

In the trenches the soldiers never tired of repeating that we were brothers and we were treated as the whites' equals. Nevertheless, now that the war is over and our services are no longer required, people would rather see us disappear. In that regard we are in complete agreement, but then under one condition: if you insist so vehemently on the repatriation of blacks, it would be only logical for us to demand that all whites now in Africa be repatriated as well. (qtd. in Van Reybrouck 17)

Notwithstanding this defiant language, Panda Farnana was no radical Black nationalist. Rather, he advocated a gradualist reform of the colonial system, in the strain of Belgian pacifist intellectuals such as Paul Otlet. Otlet, a philanthropist and bibliographer, worked with Farnana and the 1913 Nobel Peace Prize winner Henri La Fontaine to guarantee a prestigious venue for the Pan-African Congress, the Palais Mondial in Brussels.⁵ He had long championed the cause of African peoples. As early as 1888, he wrote a pamphlet titled *L'Afrique aux Noirs*, a proto-Pan-African essay.⁶ His thesis posited that European civilization was too far removed from African reality to engage in effective missionary activity. Europeans needed allies closer to African customs and culture, a kind of intermediate layer between the Old World and the Dark Continent, and these were the “millions of Negroes already Christianized, accustomed to regular work, and endowed with all the requirements of an advanced civilization” (Otlet, *L'Afrique aux Noirs* 12-13; my translation),⁷ that is, African Americans in the United States. Otlet wrote of a “Black Moses,” Gilles Moss, a preacher from Indiana who advocated mass emigration to Africa to Christianize and educate the illiterate, heathen masses. He fantasized about a collaboration between Moss and King Leopold II, envisioning a future Congolese state ruled by Blacks in which Léopoldville and Banana would shine as African New York and Chicago (12-15).

Panda Farnana certainly shared Otlet's commitment to the education of the African people. He firmly believed in the intellectual equality of all races and was convinced that men like him, raised and educated in Europe, could contribute to the cultural uplift of the masses at home. True to the spirit of the Pan-African Congress, he was a fierce critic of the Belgian government, but he did not advocate national liberation. Instead, he argued that the empire must involve Black leaders and local chiefs in colonial administration or risk igniting discontent and revolt. Racial prejudice, in his view, was a mortal danger to colonialism itself.⁸ In his correspondence with Du Bois, Farnana expressed his admiration and support for the African American leader, but when the discussion flared at the Second Pan-African Congress, he was puzzled and repelled by the behavior of the Americans, who appeared unreasonable and extremist in their polemical stance. He eventually sided with Diagne and distanced himself from what he perceived

as the most radical positions of the US delegation.⁹ This event marked a break in his relations with African American Pan-Africanists. Jessie Fauset, the African American writer and Du Bois's principal collaborator at the Second Pan-African Congress, regretted that the few Africans present at the session of Brussels had nothing even remotely critical to say about Belgian policy in the Congo (15). According to Fauset's account, even a proposal to send African American teachers to the Congo was rejected by Panda, who worried about the predictable Belgian reactions (13). When Du Bois called for a Third Pan-African Congress in 1923, Panda declined the invitation, adding bitterly that participation in the 1921 event had been detrimental to the cause of his people.¹⁰ Years later, Du Bois commented on the falling out, stating that the Union Congolese leader still wrote to him, "now and then,"

but fairly spits his letters at me, – and they are always filled with some defense of Belgium in Africa, or rather with some accusation against England, France and Portugal there. I do not blame Panda, although I do not agree with his reasoning. Unwittingly summer before last I tore his soul in two. His reason knows that I am right, but his heart denies his reason. ("The Negro Mind" 389-90)

Given Panda's political opinions, his interest in Marcus Garvey in the letter of May 31, 1921 deserves careful consideration. Marcus Garvey was the most prominent Black nationalist of his era, heading the first Black mass organization in the United States, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), a group with outposts throughout the world that (Garvey boasted) counted millions of followers. Despite Garvey's contradictory and at times reactionary views on economic, social, and gender issues, the UNIA was perceived by both opponents and friends as a revolutionary, anti-colonialist organization. The slogan "Back to Africa" became the signature of its emigration program, far beyond the Garveyists' actual commitment to mass departure to the African continent. The UNIA, with its huge conventions in Harlem, its sensational military parades, and its self-owned naval society, the Black Star Line, seemed to be on the rise (see Ewing *The Age of Garvey*; Stein).

The rise of a powerful Black nationalist organization aroused fear and suspicion among the colonial powers, often to the point of paranoia. Belgium was particularly alarmed by the specter of an indigenous Garveyist movement in Congo. The spread of “Kimbanguism” seemed to confirm these fears. In April 1921, just a month before the exchange of letters between Panda and Du Bois, a Congolese mystic named Simon Kimbangu placed himself at the head of a messianic movement that caused the colonial government considerable concern. Kimbangu, inspired by prophetic visions, founded a new church that sought to present a syncretic alternative to white denominations, combining Christian faith with homegrown religious traditions. Kimbangu’s disciples claimed to have witnessed healings by the prophet and devoted themselves to his idea of an African religion for African people. The worship of the thaumaturge struck the colonial administration as dangerous, and British control behind the movement was suspected. A warrant was issued for the arrest of Kimbangu, who went into hiding in June. More and more preachers appeared throughout the Congo, claiming to be inspired by his example and calling for disobeying the whites and refusing to pay taxes. This prompted Belgium to increase its military occupation of the area and further restrict religious freedom. Kimbangu was finally arrested in September 1921 (Ewing, “Kimbanguism, Garveyism” 156-65; Kodi 56-64).

The Kimbangu affair was crucial in drawing Belgian attention to Garveyism. The fact that the Garveyist newspaper *Negro World* circulated in the Congo, together with the similarities between Kimbanguism and the African Orthodox Church of the UNIA, were seen by colonial officials as irrefutable evidence of the connection between the two movements. The colonial press also linked the turbulent events of the spring to Panda Farnana, already strongly suspected of being an agent of the UNIA and an ally of Kimbangu, although Farnana always denied any such involvement (Kodi 65-69). *L’Avenir Colonial Belge* attacked Panda for his sympathetic statements toward the “Back to Africa” movement and the “energetic and humanitarian action” of “Afro-American Moses” (qtd. in Kodi 67). Given the many legends and rumors that circulated, it is legitimate to speculate what the Union Congolaise leader actually knew about Garvey and the UNIA. According to his letter to Du Bois, his curiosity was piqued by

an article authored by Victor Forbin, published in April 1921 by *Lectures pour tous*, an illustrated magazine.¹¹ Forbin, who described himself as a “negrophile,” gave in his article (“Un Moïse Nègre”) a brief overview of African American history from the Civil War to World War I, focusing on Garvey’s role in fostering a new sense of pride – and revolt – in Black people. His analysis was largely based on his readings of *Negro World* issues, therefore providing a glossed-over account of UNIA’s activities, which were obliterated by all the financial and legal problems surrounding the Black Star Line enterprise at that time. Forbin explained that while Garvey’s confrontational attitude towards colonialism might be feasible in the future, it posited a dangerous utopia in the present, as Africans hardly had the strength to resist French, British, and Belgian rule. “What I wish,” he concluded, “is that the movement organized by Marcus Garvey [...] will lead the United States to treat its millions of Negroes with a broader sense of justice and humanity” (Forbin 856; my translation).¹²

Forbin did not forget to mention Garvey’s bitter polemic against other notable Black political leaders, Du Bois included (852). Panda was therefore aware of the rivalry when he wrote to his interlocutor inquiring about the participation of “[v]otre célèbre Marcus Garvey” (Letter from Paul Panda to W. E. B. Du Bois, May 31, 1921, Du Bois Papers 3). How could he possibly think that one of the main opponents of the Garvey movement could agree to the invitation? This apparent naiveté might be viewed in light of Panda’s subsequent reference to the Universal Races Congress, to which Du Bois made no response.

The Universal Races Congress, held in London in 1911, was the venue for recognized personalities and intellectuals concerned with the state of race relations economically, politically, and scientifically. In addition to Du Bois and Paul Otlet, participants included such diverse figures as Austrian biologist Felix von Luschan, Russian anarchist Pyotr Kropoktin, British theosophist Annie Besant, and former Haitian president François Denys Légitime (see Holton; Rich; Lewis, *Biography of a Race* 439-43). Panda likely regarded the PAC as a context for a similarly eclectic discussion. If that was the case, even people who held opposing political views, such as Marcus Garvey and Blaise Diagne, could share the same stage.

Du Bois thought differently. His demeanor made clear that he saw the

Pan-African Congress as an organ of action, not just discussion, organized around a program, even if only broadly defined. This goal was hampered by the suspicious attitude of his international interlocutors, who were often concerned about being associated with a political agenda that they had not agreed on nor discussed in advance. The dynamic was evident in the preparations for the Second Pan-African Congress. Alice Werner, a scholar of African languages and professor at the School of Oriental Studies who assisted Du Bois in organizing the first London session, was initially skeptical of direct participation and changed her mind only when she was assured that none of the resolutions adopted at the Congress would bind the participants in any way.¹³ F. H. Hawkings and Frank Lenwood, the foreign secretaries of the London Missionary Society, also sought assurances before attending that they would not be forced to adhere to the positions adopted by the Pan-Africanists.¹⁴ John Hobbis Harris, the London secretary of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society, was even more explicit, demanding that the list of participants and the resolutions to be adopted be discussed in advance.¹⁵

Many expressed concerns about Garvey's possible involvement and stressed the need to clearly separate PAC from Garveyism. Du Bois even wrote to the British ambassador and to US Secretary of State Charles Hughes to officially distance himself from his rival and to declare that the sole purpose of the Pan-African Congress was to promote communication and friendship among Blacks.¹⁶ So it is not difficult to understand the resolute tone in which the PAC founder answered Panda's questions. The latter was sufficiently aware of the colonial press's suspicions and attacks to reassure him and declare that he fully agreed on this point: Garvey's name should not be associated in any way with the Congress.¹⁷ What he could not have known was that the Belgian press, despite all the Pan-Africanists' attempts to placate the colonial establishment, would still lash out at them. This hostile environment greatly affected internal debate. Panda was more influenced than others, due to his national background and, during the Congress, would come to see the intransigence of the US delegation as an obstacle to an effective discussion of Africa's current problems. When he declined the invitation to the Third Pan-African Congress a few years later, he declared that the Congolese had nothing in common with African

Americans and accused Du Bois of being a hypocrite. Du Bois denied the allegation, arguing that one could not question the sincerity of the Pan-African Congress, regardless of whether one agreed or disagreed with the lines of action it propagated.¹⁸

The discussion over the internal democracy of the PAC is of great interest to historians of Pan-Africanism. Although the Pan-African Congress presented itself as the voice of Africans and Blacks throughout the world, its actual representativeness was questioned by both opponents, such as the Garveyists,¹⁹ and supporters and founding members of the movement, such as Ida Gibbs Hunt (Roberts 121-45). Du Bois, in particular, was accused of manipulating the debate to promote his own political vision, while he and his allies in turn lamented that their opponents within the PAC used undemocratic methods to control the internal vote and promote moderate positions (Fauset 13-16).

In addition to differing assessments of the colonial order, Pan-Africanists were also divided by contrasting visions of what Pan-Africanism should be: an informational conference or a political organ. It is reasonable to assume that the interest in Marcus Garvey in Panda's letter to Du Bois was not so much an expression of fascination with Black nationalism as an attempt to broaden the conversation and potentially bring more attention to the PAC. His idea of an informative and inclusive gathering hinted at a different version of internationalism, one that more closely resembled a Palais Mondial seminar than the kind of League of Nations shadow cabinet that Du Bois had in mind. There is little reference of this or other similar questions in the reports published by PAC officials during their congresses. Scholars of Pan-Africanism must confront what Jake Hodder has called the "elusive history" of early Pan-Africanism, namely the opacity of sources, the conflicting information provided by participants, and the unreliability of journalistic accounts (115-18). Overall, historiography devoted to the PAC is seriously hampered by the fact that most accounts of the congresses are filtered through Du Bois's interpretation.²⁰

To overcome this obstacle, one must go beyond the official documentation and the bulletins signed by Du Bois and Diagne to examine the dense web of contacts and international connections between activists and associations that made the convening of the Congress possible in the first

place. This requires a microscopic view that contrasts with the *long durée*, synoptic and diachronic approach often adopted in the historiography of Pan-Africanism.²¹ The task is to research scattered documents and personal correspondence with the aim of expanding existing archives on Black internationalism and heeding hitherto unheard voices (Hodder et al. 8-10). This fragment of correspondence between Paul Panda Farnana and W. E. B. Du Bois, when placed in its proper historical and political context, provides a clue to the broader debate that surrounded the Pan-African Congress about the nature and goals of the movement.

Notes

¹ For a biographical account of Paul Panda Farnana see Tshitungu Kongolo. See also Brosens; Kanobana; Kodi 49-51; Van Reybrouck 178-80.

² On Du Bois's Pan-Africanism see Mullen 89-104; Rabaka; Reed 79-83.

³ See Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Paul Otlet, ca. May 16, 1921, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

⁴ Full bibliographic details of the letter in W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

⁵ Paul Otlet and Henri La Fontaine were among the most influential European intellectuals and philanthropists at the turn of the century. After World War I, they founded the Union des Associations Internationales, an association of humanitarian groups that sought to secure world peace by promoting universal knowledge. To this end, they developed a special bibliographic system, the Universal Decimal Classification, and sponsored conferences dealing with international issues, from the emancipation of women to the racial question. See van den Heuvel. On Paul Otlet, see Otlet *International Organisation*; Wright.

⁶ The pamphlet is housed by the Mundaneum Archives in Mons, Belgium, in the collection Les papiers personnels Paul Otlet. A digitized version is available at *Mundaneum*. <<https://catalogue.mundaneum.org/index.php/Detail/objects/76653>>.

⁷ "Il existe dans les États de l'Amérique des millions de nègres déjà christianisés, habitués au travail régulier et faits à toutes les exigences d'une civilisation avancée."

⁸ For an interesting document proving Panda's commitment to the cultural uplift of his people, see Union Congolaise, "Développement intellectuel de la Race Nègre Congolaise," ca. Nov. 1920, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

⁹ See "Notes Coloniales," *L'Echo de la Bourse*, 6 Sept. 1921, 3, Les Papiers personnels Paul Otlet (PP PO 0819/1).

¹⁰ See Letter from Paul Panda to W. E. B. Du Bois, 19 Sept. 1923, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

¹¹ Although several editions of *Lectures pour tous* have been digitized (see *Gallica*. <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb32805602k/date>>), this does not apply to the year 1921. The author has consulted the copy housed by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris.

¹² “Ce que je souhaite est que le mouvement organisé par Marcus Garvey [...] amène les États-Unis à traiter leurs millions de nègres avec un plus large sentiment de justice et d’humanité.”

¹³ See Postcard from Alice Werner to Frances Hoggan, 31 May 1921; Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Alice Werner, 17 June 1921; both in W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

¹⁴ See Letter from London Missionary Society to W. E. B. Du Bois, 5 Apr. 1921, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

¹⁵ See Letter from John H. Harris to W. E. B. Du Bois, 6 May 1921, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

¹⁶ See Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to British Embassy, Washington DC, 27 May 1921; Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Charles Huges, 23 June 1921; both in W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

¹⁷ See Letter from Paul Panda to W. E. B. Du Bois, 11 July 1921, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

¹⁸ See Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Paul Panda Farnana, 18 Aug. 1923; Letter from Paul Panda to W. E. B. Du Bois, September 19, 1923; Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Paul Panda Farnana, October 6, 1923; all in W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

¹⁹ For a selection of documents about the Garvey movement and the Second Pan-African Congress, see Hill.

²⁰ The point was energetically raised by classic historians of the Pan-African movement such as Immanuel Geiss and Ayodele Langley. See Geiss 232; Langley 3.

²¹ See Adi; Esedebe; Geiss; Langley; Padmore.

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Letter from Paul Panda to W. E. B. Du Bois, May 31, 1921

Bruxelles. Le 31 Mai 1921

Monsieur W. E. Burghardt Du Bois
70 Fifth Avenue
New York

Cher Monsieur Du Bois,

Je m'empresse de vous accuser réception de votre bien aimable mot du 16 courant. Nous sommes donc parfaitement d'accord pour le congrès Pan-Africain au Palais Mondial à Bruxelles. Aussitôt que je serai en possession de renseignements plus détaillés, je commencerai à m'occuper de l'organisation ici. Quant à la reconnaissance pour le Gouvernement elle existe effectivement pour le fait que le Congrès peut se faire au Palais Mondial qui appartient au gouvernement: j'ai d'ailleurs eu un entretien à ce sujet avec messieurs Otlet et La Fontaine.

Voulez-vous donc me faire parvenir le plus rapidement possible les renseignements suivants:

A) Le Congrès sera-t-il fait uniquement par des Noirs?... c'est-à-dire que les Européens ne seraient que des auditeurs.

B) Le Congrès sera-t-il fait en collaboration par des congressistes Noirs et Blancs? Je crois que ce sont bien vos intentions personnelles. Donc il faudrait prier les personnes compétentes à y prendre part. S'il y a un nombre suffisant de Congressistes Noirs, il vaudrait mieux peut être que la discussion se fasse entre les hommes de la Race Noire les vœux seuls seraient adressés aux divers pays ayons des relations avec les Noirs.

Peut-on compter sur la présence de représentants Noirs de divers pays? Votre célèbre Marcus Garvey voudra-t-il exposer son plan et idées? en même temps que vos collègues du Congrès des Races (à Londres en 1911)?

Enfin voulez-vous me répondre sur les questions suivantes que j'annexe à cette missive. Je le répète, dès que je serai fixé je commencerai à lancer toute l'affaire. Il faut nous dépêcher pour être prêts en Août. En attendant de vos bonnes nouvelles, je vous envie l'expression de mes confraternels sentiments.

M'fumu Panda

9 Rue St. Georges

Bruxelles

Mrs. Vinck et sa famille vont bien ils habitent à 5 minutes d'ici.

Avez vous lu dans "Lectures pour tous" du mois d'Avril le compte rendu sur un "Moïse Nègre" (Marcus Garvey) l'article est de Victor Forbin?

Questionnaire

A. Organisation du Congrès?...

- a) Le Comité organisateur (sa composition)
- b) Horaire: temps ou nombre de mots par congressistes (textes et voeux)

B.

a) But du Congrès? (naturellement les droits de la Race)

b) Questions à discuter:

1. Histoire de la race... Ethnographie
2. Histoire des civilisations africaines
3. Évolution générale de la Race...
4. Droits politiques... etc...
5. Revendications des Droits de la Race

N.B. (La 1^{ère} ou la 3^e journée) on devrait aller visiter le Musée de Tervuren c'est-à-dire le Musée du Congo de cette façon vous vous rendez compte de toutes les richesses de l'Afrique.

Enfin, les questions que je suggère pour chaque journée peuvent bien entendu être complètement modifiées. Mais pour avoir un résultat plus tangible, on devra être très scientifique ce qui aidera pour les revendications qui doivent ensuite être envoyées à chaque gouvernement ayons des relations avec les Noirs.

Letter from Paul Panda to W. E. B. Du Bois, May 31, 1921¹

Brussels, May 31, 1921

Mr. W. E. Burghardt Du Bois
70 Fifth Avenue
New York

Dear Mr. Du Bois, I hasten to acknowledge receipt of your kind letter of the 16th of this month. We have definitely agreed to hold the Pan-African Congress at the Palais Mondial in Brussels. As soon as I have more detailed information, I will start organizing it here. The recognition of the Government is a fact, as the Congress can meet in the Palais Mondial, which belongs to the government itself.² I have already exchanged views with Mr. Otlet and Mr. La Fontaine on this subject.

Please send me the following information as soon as possible.

A) Should the Congress be composed only of Blacks? That is, the Europeans would only be spectators.

B) Should the Congress consist of a joint effort of Black and white delegates? I think this option is in line with your personal intentions. Then it would be necessary to invite the most qualified people. If there are enough Black delegates, it would be better to have the discussion among the Black race and only submit the resolutions to the various countries that have relations with Blacks.

Can we rely on the presence of Black representatives from different countries? Would your famous Marcus Garvey be willing to present his plan and ideas? As well as your colleagues of the Races Congress (in London in 1911)?³

And finally, please answer the following questions at the end of this letter.

As I said, as soon as I have all the information, I will begin to organize the whole thing. We must hurry to be ready in August. While I am waiting for your good news, I would like to express my brotherly feelings to you.

Mfumu Panda
9 Rue St. Georges
Brussels

Mr. Vinck and his family are well and live about five minutes from here.⁴

Did you read the report on the “Black Moses” Marcus Garvey in the April issue of *Lectures pour tous*? The article was written by Victor Forbin.

Questionnaire

A. Organization of the Congress

- a) The Organizing Committee (its composition)
- b) Time: available time or number of words for each delegate (written and oral)

B.

- a) Aim of the Congress (of course, the rights of the race)
- b) Topics to be discussed:
 1. History of the race (ethnography)
 2. History of African civilizations
 3. General evolution of the race
 4. Political rights, etc.
 5. Claims to the rights of the race

N.B. On the first or third day, we should visit the Tervuren Museum, that is the Congo Museum, so that you can experience all the treasures of Africa.⁵

Finally, I would like to say that the topics I propose for each day can be completely changed, of course. But to achieve tangible results, we need to be very scientific. This will help us to make demands that must be sent immediately to every government that has relations with Black people.

Notes

¹ English translation by Emanuele Nidi.

² The Palais Mondial was an international center for non-governmental international organizations and the headquarters of the Union of International Associations of La Fontaine and Otlet. It was directly sponsored by the Belgian government and later changed its name to Mundaneum. See Rayward 454-56.

³ Panda is referring to the London Universal Race Congress of 1911.

⁴ In his May 16 letter, Du Bois pointed out some political figures with whom he was on friendly terms and could help in the organizational work, among them the socialist senator Emile Vinck.

⁵ In fact, the Pan-Africanists visited the Museum after the September 1 session. See Members of the Pan-African Congress visit the Congo Museum, September 1, 1921, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

Abstracts

Leonor María Martínez Serrano, “All Nature Teems with Life”: Anthropogenic Wastelands in Robert Hass’s Ecopoetics

Drawing on Rosi Braidotti’s thinking on the need for “a downsizing of human arrogance” and solidarity with other (non)humans,” as well as on Rob Nixon’s and Saskia Sassen’s insights into the perverse logic of capitalism and the slow violence brought about by environmental degradation, this article examines the representation of anthropogenic wastelands in American poet Robert Hass’s acclaimed *Time and Materials: Poems 1997-2005*. The concept of wasteland as an image of decadence, crisis and a mindset marked by exhaustion is present in a significant set of poems in Hass’s collection, where two kinds of wastelands can be discerned. The first kind concerns the devastation of spaces, terraforming, overexploitation, species extinction and the depletion of natural resources in the Anthropocene, which is particularly palpable in the ten-part “State of the Planet,” an ambitious piece that condenses the story of the Earth from the Big Bang to the present. The second kind of wasteland concerns the massive corporeal waste brought about by the devastating wars punctuating the twentieth century. As a poet, Hass is called on to bear witness to his time, one that seems to be intent on destroying the biosphere as the *oikos* life has built for itself at the expense of relentless economic growth. Yet he is prompt to write other poems, not of denunciation but of exultation, that sing of the beauty and vulnerability of the physical world homo sapiens is *a part of*, not *apart from*.

Maria Cristina Iuli, “Wanderers in the Neighborhood of Being”: Katherine Larson’s Poetry of Bios

The article discusses Katherine Larson’s first collection of poems, *Radial Symmetry* (2013), as a work that interrogates the relation between poetics and knowledge of life-forms. First, it provides the background for reading Larson’s poetry in the context of aesthetics as a domain in which literary and philosophical discourse overlap, and then it situates Larson’s work

more specifically within philosophical the discourse of “nature” framed, on the one hand, by Ralph Waldo Emerson’s pluralistic, non-representational view of language in *Nature* and, on the other, by Martin Heidegger’s reflections on Being, language and beings in “The Question Concerning Technology”. Finally, the essay delivers a close reading of some of Larson’s poems in order to exemplify the difference they make in engaging “nature,” “life,” and “Being” by means of language: whether by taking care of those entities, or by reducing them to “standing reserve.” Larson’s poems provide an apt focus for a wider discussion about the viability of poetry as a means to approach the morphological diversity of life right at the time of its human-driven sixth mass extinction.

Jane Desmond, *Poetry, Animals and Imaginative Ethnographies of Creaturely Lives*

In conversation with recent work on post-humanism and theorizations of the “more-than-human” world, I explore the capacities of literature, and especially contemporary poetry, to function as a sort of imaginative ethnography. Considering selected poems by US authors as a mode of “multi-species ethnography,” I draw on anthropological debates about ways of knowing more-than-human worlds, and the challenges of articulating that (necessarily anthropocentric) speculative knowledge. I argue that poetry, with its emphasis on condensation and multi-layered semiotics, along with its affective dimensions built through craft tools of sound, image, rhythm and line breaks, can function as a form of transpecies imaginative translation. It may even cultivate empathy, ultimately building toward change in human-animal relations in the world, through acts of writing and interpretation that imaginatively translate across the species divides, articulating shared human and more-than-human worlds.

Owen Harry, *Daoism and Posthuman Subjectivity in Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Lathe of Heaven**

Posthumanists consistently challenge traditional notions of the human subject as bounded and autonomous. For these theorists, American environmental literature has proven to be a valuable source of more relational models of subjectivity in which humans are recognized as interconnected with nonhumans. However, the significant influence of the

religious imagination on this literary tradition has largely been disregarded by posthuman ecocritics, and so too has its potential contribution to combating anthropocentrism. Building on recent arguments for parallels between posthumanism and Daoist thought, this article analyzes the work of Ursula K. Le Guin, whose speculative fiction has been acclaimed by posthumanists for its experiments in post-anthropocentric subjectivity, but whose strong Daoist influence has not been recognized by these same critics for its role in such experiments. I argue that Le Guin's central character in her most explicitly Daoist novel *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971) embodies Daoist concepts in ways that align closely to Rosi Braidotti's model of posthuman subjectivity. Beyond this recognition of compatibility between the two perspectives, I argue that reading the novel in light of recent re-evaluations of the concept of *wuwei* (non-action) also suggests an alternative conception of human agency that may inform the posthumanist project.

Daniela Fargione, Breaking Bread and Sharing Dreams with the Other-than-human: Extinction and Multispecies Community in Lydia Millet's *How the Dead Dream*

Lydia Millet's novels have gained momentum within environmental discourses since they often prove how "looking outside the human is what gives human life its meaning" (Millet). In this article, I analyze *How the Dead Dream*, the first novel of a trilogy published almost ten years after J.M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* (2001), the novella written for the 1997-1998 Tanner Lectures at Princeton University. Millet's book, I argue, is a direct reply to Coetzee's invitation to reconsider the place of the human vis-à-vis the other-than-human within the complex framework of posthumanism. This implies a recession of the onto-epistemological and ethical divide among species that saturate popular discourses on extinction. Drawing on material ecocriticism and, especially, on Stacy Alaimo's research (*Exposed*, 2016), I investigate and critique different forms of epistemological impermeability, such as the assumed domestic safety, cleanness, and the sovereignty of the (male) Western subjectivity. By tracing the radical transformation of T., the main character in the book and rapacious speculator, I demonstrate how the aesthetic and the ethical intersect in the narration of this story of coevolution and cohabitation.

Valentina Romanzi, *Love Is a Thing with Feathers: Posthuman Metamorphoses in *This Is How You Lose the Time War**

Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone's *This Is How You Lose the Time War* (2019) follows agents Red and Blue as they move through space and time to fight a seemingly endless war between their respective factions. Written in epistolary form, it traces the evolution of their relationship from enmity to star-crossed love. A mix of poetic language and science fictional prose and tropes, the novella touches upon several issues pertaining to the contemporary reflection on the posthuman. The interpretive framework of this essay hinges on the concepts of metamorphosis and metaphor, deployed to explore how the novella continually updates the subjectivity of its protagonists through a series of contacts and interactions with various kinds of Otherness. The goal of this essay is to show that the ontological value of the protagonists' selves shapeshifts both through their interaction with each other's alterity and through their contact with the letters – that is, the metaphorical language of their epistolary exchange. As the missives take ever-different forms according to their chrono-spatial context, their message is absorbed through touch, taste, smell, sight, and other senses, resulting in an embodied assemblage of addresser, message, and addressee that well represents the posthuman pull towards a hybrid subject, in a text that equally eschews the boundaries of genre.

Alice Ciulla, *Opening and Closing Gates in Cold War America: Foreign Policy and the Politics of Immigration Law*

This essay examines the manifold impacts of Cold War imperatives on American immigration policy. In the bipolar era, and especially until the peak of détente in the mid-1970s, anticommunism provided the political prerequisite to the restriction of the visa system. There was widespread consensus around the need to exclude foreign radicals in order to preserve the integrity of the nation. At the same time, the willingness of the USA to present itself as a model superior to the Soviet Union was the pretext for opening borders and increasing the entry of refugees, especially from communist regimes. Both these approaches had to face long-existing matters of concern over the national identity, in which race, ethnicity, education, and economic conditions represented crucial factors to select incoming migrants. Focusing on the connections between the Cold War (a

multi-faceted era, whose periodization varies according to the perspective adopted) and American immigration policy (which rules the most evident of transnational phenomena), migration offers the chance to rethink both, and provides suggestions for further research on the subject.

Giuliano Santangeli Valenzani, *Picturing Italy: Cold War Perspectives in American Travel Writing on Italy, 1948-1960*

This essay proposes a qualitative analysis of a sample of American travel literature on Italy produced between 1948 and 1960. The objective is to unravel the complex interplay between the evolving post-World War II global scenario and the well-entrenched American perceptions of Italy developed over the 19th and 20th centuries. Therefore, the article scrutinizes the narratives' thematic and ideological shifts in relation to the backdrop of Cold War politics, the Marshall Plan, and Italy's own transformation into a republic. It investigates how these geopolitical factors influenced the portrayal of Italy in American travel literature and, conversely, how the traditional romanticized image of Italy persisted or evolved. In addition to highlighting to what extent the language and rhetoric of travel literature interacted with the dictates of contemporary contingencies relying deeply on past images and themes, the essay also attempts to offer some insights into the evolution of American self-perception toward Europe by observing travel writings. Sources for this research are travel articles in newspapers and especially American magazines (*Holiday* and *National Geographic*) and 4 travel guides published in the United States between 1949 and 1960.

Eva Pelayo Sañudo, *The Urban Cowboy: Gender, the Frontier (Ethni) City and the Myth of the West in Mario Puzo's *The Fortunate Pilgrim**

The article addresses how the mythical Western imaginary goes beyond its geopolitical borders, examining its influence on other urban landscapes such as New York. The city that never sleeps also captured a paradigmatic fascination for the concept of the West. This has been shown in Italian American culture and literature since the times of this ethnic settlement, although as part of the US cultural imagination at large the notion of the West is rarely bound to a concrete physical space. The article analyzes not only Italian or Italian American positions within transnational Western literature, but also the crucial interplay of gender representation in

configuring old and new myths. To this end, the analysis concentrates on two central elements of the classical West(ern): the cowboy and the frontier, although reconceptualized in the context of US twentieth-century immigration and urbanization. These two elemental features serve to identify the impact of US Westerns on Italian American culture in general and literature in particular through Mario Puzo's novel *The Fortunate Pilgrim* (1965). As a result of shifting the critical attention about the West(ern) to the understudied space of the city, this article aims at providing an innovative insight to recover a figure which is both historical and legendary, that of the so-called urban cowboy.

Notes on Contributors

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CLAUDIA BERNARDI is Associate Professor in History of the Americas at the University of Perugia, and Principal Investigator of the project *The Mobility Regime across Mexico and United States: The Case of Farmworkers from Tabasco and Oaxaca (1930s-1970s)* at the University of Padua. Her first monograph *Una storia di confine: Frontiere e lavoratori migranti tra Messico e Stati Uniti (1836-1964)* won the 2019 Prize for First Work of the Italian Society for the Study of Contemporary History (SISSCO). She is board member of the Italian Society for Labour History (SISLAv), and coordinator of SISLAv research group Free and Unfree Labor. She is *Profesora visitante* at Centro de Estudios Históricos (CEH) of Colegio de México, visiting affiliate (after having been postdoctoral fellow there) at the Weatherhead Initiative on Global History at Harvard University, and guest researcher at the Berlin Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut (IAI). She was research associate and visiting fellow at Ghent University and visiting fellow at Basel University.

ALICE CIULLA is postdoctoral fellow at Roma Tre University, where she got her Ph.D. in History of the United States in 2019. Previously, she was fellow of the Antonio Gramsci Foundation and DAAD research fellow at Freie Universität, in Berlin. Her research interests focus on US-Italian diplomatic and cultural relations in the twentieth century and on the history of the Cold War. Her first book is *La cultura americana e il PCI: Intellettuali ed esperti di fronte alla "questione comunista"* (2021).

JANE DESMOND is Professor in Anthropology and Gender and Women's Studies, and Co-founder and current Director of the International Forum for US Studies, a center for the Transnational Study of the United States at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA. She also holds appointments in the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory, the Center for Global Studies, and in the College of Veterinary Medicine. Her primary areas of expertise include performance studies, critical theory, visual culture studies, the political economy of human/animal relations, as well as the

transnational dimensions of US Studies. A former Fulbright Professor in American Studies in Germany, she has also held visiting professor positions in American Studies in Hungary and China, and is a past president of the International American Studies Association. She is the author/editor of five books, including the monograph *Displaying Death and Animating Life: Human-Animal Relations in Art, Science, and Everyday Life* (2016).

DANIELA FARGIONE is Associate Professor of American Literatures at the University of Turin. Her research interests include environmental humanities (food, migrations, climate change), the interconnections of contemporary American literatures and the other arts, and the theory and practice of literary translation. She is member of several advisory and executive boards, among which TIGEHR (Turin Interdisciplinary Group of Environmental Humanities Research), UNESCO-DESS (Decennio per l'Educazione allo Sviluppo Sostenibile), CLIMATE CHANGE PROGRAM (UnitoGO – Unito Green Office), and CRISIS (Centro di ricerca interuniversitario sui cambiamenti socio-ecologici e la transizione alla sostenibilità). She is co-editor with Serenella Iovino of *ContaminAzioni ecologiche: Cibi, nature e culture* (2015), and with Carmen Concilio of *Antroposcenari: Storie, paesaggi, ecologie* (2018) and *Trees in Literatures and the Arts: HumanArboreal Perspectives in the Anthropocene* (2021). She has been recipient of several scholarships and visiting fellowships, among which the Fulbright Distinguished Lecturer Chair at the University of Pittsburgh for the Spring Semester of 2023.

OWEN HARRY is an Instructor at the National University of Singapore, where he recently defended his Ph.D. in English Literature. His dissertation, *Posthuman Ecospiritualities in American Literature*, examined the importance of the religious imagination – particularly Buddhism, Christianity, and pantheism – to the work of contemporary American environmental writers who seek alternatives to notions of human separation and superiority. He has published essays on the work of Gary Snyder and Richard Powers.

MARIA CRISTINA IULI is Associate Professor of American Literature and American Studies at the Università del Piemonte Orientale, Vercelli, Italy. She has been Fulbright Distinguished Chair at Northwestern University

in 2019, and recipient of several fellowships and honors. Currently, she is coordinating the research unit at UPO for the project “Transatlantic Transfers: The Italian Presence in Post-War America,” funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research. A specialist in modernism, in the contemporary novel, in literary theory and science and literature, and in transatlantic studies, Iuli is author of several monographs, essays and translations. Among others: *Effetti Teorici: Critica culturale e nuova storiografia letteraria americana* (2002), *Giusto il tempo di esplodere: Il romanzo pop di Nathanael West* (2004), *Spell it Modern: Modernity and the Question of Literature* (2009), and *Nathanael West: Miss Lonelyhearts* (2017). Her work is published in *Modernism/Modernity*, *The Arizona Quarterly*, *Flusser Studies*, *Symplokē*, *Aut-Aut*, *The Italian American Review*, *Literature d’America*, *RSAJournal*, and others. Her current research focuses on Black feminist pedagogies and transatlanticism in the Seventies.

LEONOR MARÍA MARTÍNEZ SERRANO is a Lecturer in the Department of English and German Philology at the University of Córdoba (Spain). Her research interests include ecocriticism, Canadian literature, American literature, and High Modernism. She has been a Visiting Scholar at the University of Toronto and the University of British Columbia (Canada), the University of the West of Scotland (UK), the University of Białystok (Poland), and the University of Oldenburg (Germany). She has co-edited *Modern Ecopoetry: Reading the Palimpsest of the More-than-Human World* (2021) and authored *Breathing Earth: The Polyphonic Lyric of Robert Bringhurst* (2021).

EVA PELAYO SAÑUDO is a Ph.D. in Gender and Diversity from the University of Oviedo, Spain. Her fields of research are Italian American literature, and gender, diaspora, urban and postcolonial studies. She has conducted research at the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute (Queens College, NY), Stony Brook University (NY) and the University of Calabria (Italy). She has recently published the monography *Spatialities in Italian American Women’s Literature: Beyond the Mean Streets* (2021), which has been awarded the Enrique García Díez in English Literature Research Prize by the Spanish National Association of North-American Studies and the Javier Coy Research Prize by the Spanish Association for American Studies.

VALENTINA ROMANZI is Adjunct Professor of English at the University of Verona. She holds a Ph.D. in Transcultural Studies in the Humanities from the University of Bergamo. She specializes in contemporary popular culture, with a particular focus on utopias, dystopias and (post-)apocalyptic fiction. Her latest book is *American Nightmares: Dystopia in Twenty-First-Century US Fiction* (2022). She is currently researching nonhuman narrators in SF through a number of sociological perspectives and has just co-edited a special issue on the topic for the journal *ContactZone*. She is an editor of *Iperstoria: Journal of American and English Studies*, and a member of the Scientific Committee of *ContactZone: Journal of the Italian Association on Science Fiction and the Fantastic*.

GIULIANO SANTANGELI VALENZANI is adjunct professor of History of the United States at the University Federico II (Naples). His research interests are mainly focused on the history of American tourism and on the history and culture of the US South. His most recent publication is the book *Great Times Down South: Promozione turistica nel Deep South statunitense (1976-1981)* (2020), which will be soon published in English. He recently contributed to the volumes *Ricostruire i luoghi di memoria nelle Americhe* (2023) and *Presidents and Place: America's Favorite Sons* (2023).

