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LIFE MATTERS
The Human Condition in the Age of Pandemics

edited by
Gabriela Vargas-Cetina
and Manpreet Kaur Kang

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RIAS Co-Editor in Chief, IASA President

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THE DAY AFTER

The Post-Crisis IASA and Daemons That Can Help (A Farewell Address)

Paweł Jędrzejko
RIAS Co-Editor-in-Chief
IASA President
University of Silesia in Katowice
Poland
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3251-2540

> *The concept of crisis (Gr. κρίσις) is originally linked to the concept of criticism (Gr. κρίνω). Consequently, the simplest and most accurate definition of a critical stance could read as follows: "it is an attitude of vigilant maintenance of a state of crisis."*
>
> *(Kubok, 2021: 27–8, 538)*[1]

Enough is enough. The severe constraints of lockdowns, voluntary quarantines, and restrictive travel, coupled with a pervasive uncertainty about our survival, have profoundly heightened our appreciation for the freedom to interact with the natural world and with others in communal spaces. Our isolation within the confines of our homes has led to a deeper understanding: mere *absence of illness* does not equate to *health*. We have keenly felt that *living* encompasses more than just *being alive*. This epiphany heralds a significant shift: we, as *humans*, have transformed into inextricable components of *humanscapes*—extended, post-human entities with a broader scope than ever before. In the aftermath, we arrive at the onset of the twenty-fourth year of the third millennium, motivated by the recent global crisis that has spurred us to not just live fully, but above all, to live deliberately.

Significantly, IASA's origins also trace back to a crisis. Convened in Bellagio on June 1, 2000, twenty-two preeminent Americanists from twelve countries challenged the wearied, US-centric focus of American Studies. They advocated for the *de-centering*

1. Translated by Paweł Jędrzejko.

of the Americanist reflection by means of the adoption of a broader, more inclusive perspective that encompasses both hemispheric and transoceanic viewpoints. Seven years later, in his "President's Report," Paul Giles reflected on IASA's inception, marking it as a pivotal moment in the field:

> [...] the growth and development of IASA has been at heart [the] question of [...] what Fredric Jameson would have called historical necessity. When future chroniclers of academia look back in 50 or 60 years' time, they will surely see that the shift to an international version of American Studies around the turn of the 21st century was brought about by a change in social, economic and cultural conditions that facilitated a convergence of three academic disciplines: Comparative Literature, Area Studies, and World History. Fifteen months after Bellagio, the jolt of 9/11 brought the conditions of globalization into more immediate and urgent focus, so that by the time the first world congress of IASA assembled in the Netherlands in May 2003, the intellectual landscape of American Studies had changed dramatically. (Giles 2010: 15–16)

Indeed, despite clear indicators of a brewing political crisis, the events of September 11, 2001, struck "unexpectedly." The tragedy took the world by surprise, "jolting" it brutally, even though many of us had long been engaged in disseminating both scholarly and popular multi-perspective analyses on the discourses legitimizing policies that had, inevitably, led to destruction, loss of life, and unspeakable suffering of millions. We *had* issued countless warnings. And yet, frustratingly, war and pestilence always come as a surprise, regardless of our whistleblowing efforts. After all,

> [e]verybody knows that pestilences have a way of recurring in the world; yet somehow we find it hard to believe in ones that crash down on our heads from a blue sky. There have been as many plagues as wars in history; yet always plagues and wars take people equally by surprise. [...] When a war breaks out, people say: "It's too stupid; it can't last long." But though a war may well be "too stupid," that doesn't prevent its lasting. Stupidity has a knack of getting its way; as we should see if we were not always so much wrapped up in ourselves. In this respect our townsfolk were like everybody else, wrapped up in themselves; in other words they were humanists: they disbelieved in pestilences. A pestilence isn't a thing made to man's measure; therefore we tell ourselves that pestilence is a mere bogy of the mind, a bad dream that will pass away. But it doesn't always pass away and, from one bad dream to another, it is men who pass away, and the humanists first of all, because they haven't

Paweł Jędrzejko
RIAS Co-Editor-in-Chief
IASA President
University of Silesia
in Katowice
Poland

> taken their precautions. Our townsfolk were not more to blame than others; they forgot to be modest, that was all, and thought that everything still was possible for them; which presupposed that pestilences were impossible. They went on doing business, arranged for journeys, and formed views. How should they have given a thought to anything like plague, which rules out any future, cancels journeys, silences the exchange of views. They fancied themselves free, and no one will ever be free so long as there are pestilences. (Camus 1991: 37–38)

The iconic quote from *The Plague* aptly sets the stage for my reflections as I conclude my term. My musings, more contemplative than purely theoretical, confront our *Demons of Self-Awareness*: the demons that ruthlessly invade the everyday space of collective human experience when a traumatic event "not made to man's measure" attempts to force *agency* to yield to *powerlessness*. In this respect, the pandemic–like war–transforms affected territories into spaces of speculation. The seemingly familiar space suddenly reveals itself as *unfamiliar*, and the previously binding "grammar of the world" begins to falter when the linguistic categories that once were efficient in organizing the epistemic relations of the "known world" no longer suffice to explain the "new world." In such situations, "reason," albeit not necessarily "asleep," finds itself ill-equipped: it lacks relevant categories to address the new state of affairs, and therefore proves powerless. And then–demons come awake.

Intentionally substituting "monsters" with "demons," I draw upon Francisco de Goya's renowned etching *El sueño de la razón produce monstruos* from his *Los Caprichos* series (1797–1798), aiming to emphasize the nuanced senses of the word *demon* in the Western tradition. As is well known, the Greek word *daimōn* carries no negative connotations. It denotes a "deity" or a "genius," a causative power that renders a person unique. A *daimōn* thus empowers individuals to actively shape their reality. It is only in its later, Latinized incarnation, that the semantic field of the lexeme shifts towards negativity: *daemonium* is an "evil spirit" of a lower category. Hence, embracing this concept in the original Greek sense, one can understand "the awakening of demons" as a positive process: a creative (though possibly hopeless) attempt to overcome the powerlessness of language to resolve the aporia, or as a challenging endeavor to navigate the limitations of the language with the view to conceptualizing new epistemological categories

derived from extra-linguistic experience in order to reinvigorate human agency. Conversely, if one decides to adopt the Latin sense of the word as the fundament of one's weltanschauung, one may be propelled towards a perhaps more tempting, but potentially much less productive explanation of the human condition. A *daemonium*-based order may seem attractive by virtue of its simplicity, yet, in the long run, its epistemological productivity essentially rests upon the reduction of existence to Kierkegaardian "living towards death" in "fear and trembling." This dichotomy, however, seems to collapse onto itself in the face of the question of "the heaviest weight": the question of *responsibility* for one's own actions:

> [...] What if some day or night a daemon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!" Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the daemon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: "You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine." If this thought gained power over you, as you are it would transform and possibly crush you; the question in each and every thing, "Do you want this again and innumerable times again?" would lie on your actions as the heaviest weight! Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to long for nothing more fervently than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal? (Nietzsche 2001: 194)

The Nietzschean daemon figure, beyond good and evil, dismantles the Christian dichotomy; in the daemon, the demon/god binary collapses. He is the causative power leading individuals into a realm far from their comfort zones, into the ambiguous territory of aporia. In the liminal space, individuals must face their own questions, and seek ways to answer them to regain peace. This is the principal role of the inhabitants of the *Pan-Daimōn-ium*[2], who exert their influence, selectively or otherwise, over "all humans"

2. Contrast this term's meaning with the well-known Miltonian concept of *Pandemonium*.

Paweł Jędrzejko
RIAS Co-Editor-in-Chief
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University of Silesia
in Katowice
Poland

(*pandēmos*). Foremost among them is Nietzsche's *Daemon of Eternal Return*, confronting us with the notion that life, like an eternal hourglass, might be a cycle of repeated existence, with us—mere "specks of dust"—caught in its perpetual turning. Contemplating it "in Greek" allows us to expedite the development of our unique ethical frameworks (action). Conversely, thinking "in Latin" might intensify feelings of helplessness, spurring profound contemplation on inertia (resignation).

Although apparently both these perspectives are radically different, the idiom of the Daemon of Eternal Return seems akin to the language spoken by Ecclesiastes: "That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before" (Ecclesiastes 3:15 NIV). Emphasizing the idea of perpetual recurrence, such language may—quite possibly—resonate equally well with Western thinkers and their Hinduist, Buddhist, or Taoist counterparts alike. In each case, however, true, fearless, acceptance of the concept that "there is no new thing under the sun" either necessitates *belief* (or the *suspension of disbelief*) in a transcendental order (if the demon is read through Latin), or in the potential of one's agency (if the demon is read through Greek).

Equally vital is the subtle guidance of the *Daemon of Ratio*, as it transitions belief into the realm of immanence. Granted, that in philosophical contemplation of reality, we are urged to withhold judgment until hypotheses are substantiated. Yet, this deliberate *pause-in-belief* does not imply a passive acquiescence to unfolding events or an unthinking reliance on divine intervention. This methodical pause is a necessary step: the Daemon of Ratio demands the elimination of logical fallacies and the meticulous gathering of e-*vide*-nce—factual elements that influence discourse and propel action—prior to engaging in diverse hermeneutical analyses that validate judgments. Importantly, discourse is not the core essence but a distinctive aspect of existence, a perspective echoed in Nietzsche's reflections on facts and their interpretive nature.

> *Facta*! Yes, *Facta ficta*!—A historian has to do, not with what actually happened, but only with events supposed to have happened: for only the latter *have produced an effect*. Likewise only with supposed heroes. His theme, so-called world history, is opinions about supposed actions

and their supposed motives, which in turn give rise to further opinions and actions, the reality of which is however at once vaporised again and *produces an effect only as vapour*—a continual generation and pregnancy of phantoms over the impenetrable mist of unfathomable reality. All historians speak of things which have never existed except in imagination. (Nietzsche 1997: 156)

In translating Nietzsche's insights into Ricoeurian phenomenological terms, the *facts–prefigurations*—available to our discursive apparatus only as *vapors*, or *mimetic narratives*—would be seen as *configurations* of reality. This process, in turn, forms the foundation for the *refigurations* performed by narrative recipients. However, mimesis thus understood hinges firstly on the extent to which the narrative recipient acknowledges the chronicler's authority and, secondly, on the recipient's willingness to engage with the *always-already*—to face the aporia inherent in endless semiosis. Considering that human experience is inextricably linked to the world in which one exists, and may have no beginning outside of it, an individual is perpetually an *always-already*-subject, interpreting reality through *factual* lenses. This raises a pivotal question: what are the morally actionable, effect-producing *facts* within this framework?

Amid the chaos of pandemics or wars, the conflict extends beyond mere human struggles with (their) commonsensically understood "demons"—fears, ambitions, traumas, desires, angsts, and all of other conditions and structures always-already in place even before we become aware of them. Although, beyond doubt, such "side effects" of being-in-the-world or being-with-others generate facts that are effect-producing, whether these facts prove to be morally actionable depends on if and how we engage them. This is why I claim that, at least in the Western perspective, the conflict also entails, perhaps more crucially, a fierce battle between the daimōn and the daemonium. Recognizing the eternal recurrence of such catastrophes as pandemics or wars, the "Greek mindset," embracing the *daimōn*, fosters an existential philosophy that emphasizes participation in the realm of immanence, shaping our ethical considerations and energizing actions. In contrast, the "Latin approach," in constant fear of the *daemonium*, seems to foster the perception of self as permanently plunged in "fear and trembling," despairingly "sick unto death," and prone to attrib-

uting malevolent forces to the "evil spirits," thereby generating configurations that shift the narrative towards self-absolution, and ultimately legitimize refigurations that diluting personal responsibility delegate it to transcendence. Embracing Greek thought, we engage in an ongoing quest with *facta-ficta*, revising language critically (Gr. *κρίνω*), without expecting finality in our categories, acknowledging that our imperfect language is essential for defining our existence within immanence. Conversely, "Latin thinking," in which demons are seen as elements of a transcendent realm, unreachable without relinquishing the self—or as part of a faith-based narrative, and in which human is potentially lacking tangible impact—involves the risk of rendering us indifferent to historical lessons, legitimizing a fatalistic *nihil novi* as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Of course, *daimōn*-based thinking is not risk-free. Yet, erring in the effort to revise the once-sufficient, but now exhausted epistemological categories is a causative act: after all, the Latin word "errare" has several meanings. It may mean "to make a mistake," but also to "wander without direction," or "to become lost on one's way"—this is the word used by Homer's Latin translators to describe Ulysses's wandering in search of Ithaca. And even if we suspend, or abandon, our search for the "lost" path, it does not mean that we have stopped erring—erring is an invariable component of human existence even if we choose to make a "therapeutic" leap of faith. However, if we *purposefully* fail to obey the prompting of the Greek *daimōn* and shrink from shouldering "the heaviest weight" of which the proponent of *Gay Science* writes, we doom ourselves to sending "reports from the besieged city" time and again, forever. If we do not take responsibility to blow the whistle when we see rats in the streets dying by the thousands, we effectively permit ourselves to join the ranks of those who will doubt the reality of the pestilence—or war—until people begin to die. And then we will need "Latin" demons to blame, because the sense of guilt "would possibly crush" us.

And here we are, at the onset of 2024. The war in Ukraine still raging, the conflict in the Middle-East more bitter than ever, our Colleagues dead in the absurd shooting at the Charles University in Prague. Should we give up? Should we grow content with *nihil novi*, even if we do not have any evidence that the *Daemon*

Paweł Jędrzejko
RIAS Co-Editor-in-Chief
IASA President
University of Silesia
in Katowice
Poland

of Eternal Return has indeed caught us in the cycle of repeated existence? Or should we embrace the *daimōn* and unleash our causative potential, actively shape our reality, err, and shoulder "the heaviest weight"? I can only answer this question for myself, but I believe we would not have all arrived where we are now, if we did not share the same intuition. All of us, the "old guard," on our way towards the shadow line, and the IASA Emerging Scholars; both the seasoned IASA members and the newly admitted Americanists, we are here to err together. At IASA, we believe that our responsibility as humans-of-letters—in the broadest sense of the phrase—is to make sure that the question "Do you want this again and innumerable times again?" asked by the daemon in Nietzsche's thought exercise indeed lies on our actions as the "heaviest weight." As teachers and scholars responsible for the history of the future, a history that tends to repeat itself, we have the power of agency. As scholars and scientists, we have the will and the skill to use the effect-producing *vapors*, the *facta-ficta*, to err our way out of the discourses that imprison us in the everlasting cycle of suffering. We drive our points home by means of reading literature, film, performing arts, history, social and material realities, legal discourses, and many other interpretable objects, not necessarily tangible, not necessarily in physical existence. After all, as Daniel Defoe, whose aphoristic observation Albert Camus adopted as the motto of the *Plague*, points out—"it is as reasonable to represent one kind of imprisonment by another, as it is to represent anything that really exists by that which exists not" (Defoe 1720: 18). Guru Gobind Singh went even further when he ordained Guru Granth Sahib as his successor, thereby equating the human agency with the agency of the—largely poetic—text. Let us allow ourselves to see ourselves as *extended-humans*, not only inseparable from our universe, but also responsible for it, as caring gardeners cultivating "an attitude of vigilant maintenance of a state of crisis" (Kubok, 2021: 27–8, 538).

Deliberately exercising our own agency through fiction we exercise deliberate life: a life rooted in the principle of responsibility. Having made erring our profession, we choose to err responsibly, professing mindful, careful empathy. We are here, because, like Camus, we realize that "though a war may well be 'too stu-

pid,' that doesn't prevent its lasting. Stupidity," the writer aptly observes, "has a knack of getting its way; as we should see if we were not always so much wrapped up in ourselves." We are here, because our compassion allows us to see *humanscapes* beyond the scope of our own egotistic selves, and that gives us a fighting chance to exorcise the demon of stupidity out of this most beautiful of worlds. Living deliberately, we should not feel guilty for not having been able to achieve that goal yet, for not having been able to prevent Russian invasion of Ukraine, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the shootings in Prague, the conflict between Israel and Palestine, or the death of George Floyd. Rather, as researchers and teachers, we should credit ourselves with our agency in preventing all the wars and plagues that never happened because we have been consistent in successfully opening up eyes every day.

Karma always gives you back what you give the world.

Paweł Jędrzejko
President of the International American Studies Association
(2021–2023)

Paweł Jędrzejko
RIAS Co-Editor-in-Chief
IASA President
University of Silesia
in Katowice
Poland

Abstract: Amid the chaos of pandemics or wars, the conflict extends beyond mere human struggles with (their) commonsensically understood "demons"—fears, ambitions, traumas, desires, angsts, and all of other conditions and structures *always-already* in place even before we become aware of them. Although, beyond doubt, such "side effects" of being-in-the-world or being-with-others generate *facts* that are *effect-producing*, whether these *facts* prove to be *morally actionable* depends on *if* and *how* we engage them. Summing up the mission of the post-Crisis IASA, I build my argument around Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of personal responsibility in the face of the *Daemon of Eternal Recurrence*, Paul Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutics, and leading Western existentialists to demonstrate that, at least in the Western perspective, the conflict also entails, perhaps more crucially, a fierce battle between the *daimōn* and the *daemonium*. Recognizing the eternal recurrence of such catastrophes such as pandemics or wars, the "Greek mindset," embracing the *daimōn*, fosters an existential philosophy that emphasizes participation in the realm of immanence, shaping our ethical considerations and propelling actions. In contrast, the "Latin approach," in constant fear of the *daemonium*, seems to foster self-perception as constantly plunged in "fear and trembling," despairingly "sick unto death," and prone to attributing malevolent forces to the "evil

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Keywords: demon, pandemic, Nietzsche, IASA mission, Ricoeur, Camus, existentialism, daimōn, daemonium, crisis, International American Studies Association

Bio: Paweł Jędrzejko, PhD. D.Litt. is an Associate Professor at the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland, and Faculty Member of the PhD Programme in Studies in English Literatures, Language, and Translation of the "Sapienza" University in Rome. President of the International American Studies Association in the years 2021–2023; Co-Founder and Co-Editor in Chief of the *Review of International American Studies*. Associate Editor of *Er(r)go. Theory–Literature–Culture*. Ocean-Going Yachtmaster. Musician and lyricist. Former Director of the University of Silesia Press. By ministerial appointment, in years 2015–2016, he served as a member of the Advisory Committee for the Implementation of the Strategy of the Open Access to Academic Contents at the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education. In the same years, he served as the representative of the President of the Conference of the Rectors of Academic Schools of Poland (CRASP) in an international contact group at the European University Association at the European Parliament. His research interests include literary and cultural theory, history of literature, comparative cultural studies, translation theory and philosophy. Departing from the assumption of the aporetic (ontic/discursive) character of reality, Jędrzejko fosters research penetrating the common grounds of human cognitive experience and creative activity and focusing upon the complex interdependencies between individual awareness of the worldmaking power of language and the shape of daily interpersonal and intercultural relations. The areas of his particular interest include the philosophy of friendship, the philosophy of existence, the history of 19th century American literature, the literary philosophies of the "American Renaissance" the oeuvre of Herman Melville, postcolonial and post-dependence theories, as well as translation theories. His full CV is available at http://www.ikila.us.edu.pl/index.php/en/staff/item/765-pawel-jedrzejko.

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Paweł Jędrzejko
RIAS Co-Editor-in-Chief
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Gabriela Vargas-Cetina
Autonomous University of Yucatan, Mexico
RIAS Associate Editor
and
Manpreet Kaur Kang
Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, India
Issue Editors
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6375-1117
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1174-0357

In December of 2019 a new illness was identified in the city of Wuhan, China. It resembled a flu, but caused fever and a type of pneumonia which was very difficult to control and could be lethal among older adults. The virus was quickly identified as a type of coronavirus and named SARS-Co2 but could not be contained by the Chinese authorities. Carried by international travelers who had visited Wuhan, it rapidly spread to the United States and through Europe, first wreaking havoc in Italy and Spain and then in the entire world (BBC, March 20, 2020). In March of 2020, when the virus had reached most countries, causing major suffering and death, the World Health Organization (WHO) called on national governments to take special measures to avoid contagion as much as possible. These measures included "preventing transmission amplification events, and preventing further international spread" (WHO, 27 February 2020). In March of 2020, WHO declared COVID-19, as the condition provoked by the SARS-Co2 virus was named, a pandemic (Ducharme 2020). WHO declared the end of the COVID-19 emergency on May 5 of 2023 (WHO, 5 May 2023), after at least thirteen million people had died from the SARS-CoV2 virus (UN, May 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic led not only to a drastic loss of human life worldwide, but also posed an unprecedented challenge to human existence and survival at the global level, probably

the greatest test to humans in the post-World War-II history, causing devastating economic and social disruption. Thousands of people lost their jobs, often falling into extreme poverty as thousands of businesses folded. Suicide statistics skyrocketed; the count of isolation-related depression cases has never been higher, and mental health, especially among the youngest, has become imperiled. And although the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2021 and Israel's war on Palestine, in 2023, diverted the world's attention away from COVID, millions of people world-wide continue living under the constant threat of the virus, as registered by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation in October 2023 (World-wide pandemic recovery survey at https://vizhub.healthdata.org/pandemic-recovery-survey/#overview). New COVID strains keep researchers and vaccine specialists on their toes, while politics, both globally and nationally, impacts the availability, cost and even efficacy of the booster shots (Matta, Shanker, Sanjay Rajpal and K. K. Chopra, and V. K. Arora, 2021, Klobucista, 2022).

Beyond doubt, the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has affected everyone. As the world survey quoted above shows, the aftermath of the pandemic seemed to point towards a renewed focus on the fundamental truths of life, such as survival, livelihood, human dignity, and basic human rights. But in reality, COVID-19 awakened many demons. Governments leaning towards the old *divide et impera* cynically used regulations concerning isolation to pass laws that would otherwise cause riots in the streets (Agamben 2020). Scapegoating, xenophobia, and the intensification of hate discourses dangerously resembling those reverberating in Germany in the 1930s emerged during the pandemic and have continued in its aftermath. Intellectuals have been targeted by silencing policies worldwide. Importantly, the pandemic brought forth the manifestation of yet another face of privilege, glaringly showing through the pandemic's global statistics, that not all lives matter equally (Stiglitz 2020). Some social groups have proven to be more vulnerable, and governments protect some groups while caring less or even abandoning others, and after the massive vaccination campaigns of 2021 and 2022, which saved millions of lives, came along new, brutal wars, including the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, and Palestine by Israel. These circumstances continue

to remind us that we live in a world widely divided by politics, privilege, and military objectives. Needless to say, the effects Stiglitz pointed out in 2020 continue to date: the pandemic has proven particularly detrimental to the elderly, to Indigenous nations, and to those living in utmost poverty. People without access to running water, refugees, migrants, or displaced persons also stand to suffer invariably both from the pandemic and its aftermath, which includes the current wars in Ukraine, the Middle East and several African countries. This issue of the *Review of International American Studies* aims to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our cultural milieu, and the pathways now opening (or closing) for humans and life.

Not all these paths are life-producing or life-nurturing, as John T. Matteson and Giorgio Mariani remind us in their articles. The issue of existential homelessness, which resonates loudly with the personal and even collective experiences many of us had during the covid pandemic, is explored by John Matteson in his essay "Love, Labor, and Loss: The Trans-Atlantic Homelessness of James Baldwin." Matteson delves into the complex themes of love, labor, and loss in the life and works of James Baldwin, particularly focusing on Baldwin's transatlantic experiences. Baldwin's diverse identities—as a Black man, a gay man, an intellectual, and an American abroad—impacted his sense of self and belonging. Matteson reflects on Baldwin's critique of America's mythologies, emphasizing the nation's struggle with its own invented self-image and the consequences of such blindness.The essay elucidates Baldwin's role as a post-modern Jeremiah, tirelessly working to dispel illusions and reveal the fractures within American society. It examines Baldwin's dual consciousness, shaped by his experiences abroad, leading to a "cosmopolitan loneliness" and a perpetual quest for a true spiritual home. Matteson argues that Baldwin's sense of exclusion was not solely based on race but encompassed various dimensions of identity, emphasizing the inherent complexities within the concept of being "American." Matteson highlights Baldwin's concern for the economic foundations of exclusion and the pressure of Americanness tied to the relentless pursuit of success.

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina
Autonomous University of Yucatan, Mexico
RIAS Associate Editor
and
Manpreet Kaur Kang
Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, India
Issue Editors

Examining Baldwin's reflections on masculinity and race, the essay delves into his novel *Giovanni's Room*, where Baldwin explores themes of sexual purity and historical blamelessness within the context of the White American psyche. It explores the theme of America's perceived innocence and its impact on various aspects of society, including racial attitudes, foreign policy, and sexual repression. The conclusion emphasizes Baldwin's commitment to exposing the flaws of exclusion, rooted in humankind's inability to confront reality honestly and a loss of the capacity to love, leading to a profound sense of social alienation and existential loneliness. There is a possibility of societal redemption through love and a rediscovery of common ground.

The White American psyche of exclusion that Matteson underscores was seen playing out during the COVID pandemic in terms of access to hygienic environments and availability of healthcare. Statistics related to the number of infected and the number of casualties among the marginalized groups are a disturbing but sad reflection of racial attitudes in America. It reinforces the manifestation of the face of privilege and the harsh reality of some social groups being more vulnerable, and the fact that not all lives matter equally.

Appropriately taking our minds to the post-COVID world we now live in, in his article for this *RIAS* issue, Giorgio Mariani reflects on peace as an artifact of contemporary military might: today, "peace" seems to be understood as the absence or desisting of always-possible armed hostilities, and not as a state that could be conceptualized as natural or self-sustaining. The case of the Russian war on Ukraine shows that both Russia and Ukraine believe that being ready for and waging war are the sure and only pathways towards peace. Politicians, from those who subscribe to NATO to those advocating Russia, want us to accept this definition of peace as the absence of war. This conclusion makes it urgent for us to re-think our views on the current, terrible wars and crime-related violence, which is affecting more civilians than military effectives. Against the political status quo, we must reconceptualize peace as separate from war, and not as one of its results or extensions. In the age of nuclear weapons, we must come to understand that national borders cannot be any lon-

ger the limits of our conceptual maps, lest we miss the chance to improve the world in which we are living and build a better one. These two articles are a good introduction to the following section, where authors do deal with either COVID-19 or similar pandemics.

Djelal Kadir provides us with a glossary, inspired by medical terminology, offering us possible alternatives when trying to name those new afflictions of personality and intellect which we acquired during and have continued to develop after the COVID-19 pandemic. Kadir has coined terms to name many of our contemporary maladies and conditions, including the obsession with social media, living of our lives inside the online multiverses, our inescapable exposition to warmongering, and the looming fear of viruses that the pandemic has left in its wake. The article is written tongue-in-cheek (obviously!) but addresses actual afflictions for which we are yet to have names; the causes and the effects are real, and certainly we must look at ourselves with humor and hope for future cures of the body and the soul.

In a more sociological vein, Tomasz Burzyński analyzes the importance of patient empowerment narratives on the anti-vaccine movements in the United States. Drawing on what he considers anti-vaccination movements—a form of "lumpenliberalism" that puts individual choice and emancipation above the interest of the collectivity—he highlights the character of biomedicine as not only a form of knowledge and a combination of biology and technology (as it has been characterized in former sociological work), but also approaches it from a functionalist perspective. In the 21st century, after the experience of grassroots social movements opposing vaccines and vaccination, it becomes clear that biomedicine is not only a knowledge system in itself, but also a social system that rests on a set of social expectations and public perceptions.

Looking at the past and to the future, the realm of American literature also comes to shed light on our contemporary human condition. Digging stories from American literature, Navdeep Kahol seamlessly combines the themes of pandemics and war. She reminds us of past pandemics and how their ravaging effects can be glimpsed through novels and essays. In 1918 a new influenza virus rapidly spread across the US. Hundreds of American soldiers who were preparing to leave for Europe, to fight in WWI, became

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina
Autonomous University of Yucatan, Mexico
RIAS Associate Editor
and
Manpreet Kaur Kang
Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, India
Issue Editors

ill. After the first recorded outbreak at Fort Riley in Kansas, outbreaks were recorded in six other states, mostly affecting soldiers. The flu was given the code name, "the Spanish lady," in order to keep knowledge of it from the enemy on the European and Asian fronts, and the affliction became known as "the Spanish flu." Once across the ocean, the flu rapidly spread first to France and then to the rest of Europe and Asia, causing one of the worst pandemics the world has ever experienced (Fujimura 2003). Kahol analyzes the short, largely autobiographical novel *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, published in 1939, by Katherine Anne Porter, where she chronicles the effects of the Spanish flu on herself and her social milieu. Porter has left us, Kahol explains, a first-person witness account of the sheer social chaos and emotional despair in which the flu pandemic left thousands of people in the United States. The novel is named after an African American spiritual song which had the verse "Pale horse, pale rider done taken my lover away," which the protagonist asks her lover to sing with her. Kahol characterizes Porter as a romantic writer who left us a historical and artful mirror in which to see ourselves reflected after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another romantic figure we can glimpse against the backdrop of epidemics and pandemics is Yellapragada SubbaRow. Through his work on phosphorous and the abatement of anemia, he contributed toward improving human health, thus making people less prone to diseases. SubbaRow was an Indian-born biochemist who showed some promise as a scientist in India but did most of his research in the United States. With the help of his wife's father, who funded his voyage to leave India, he managed to travel to America and become a researcher at Harvard, where he eventually got his PhD. He left Harvard to work at Lederle Laboratories, where he continued his work on anemia and folic acid, also participating in the development of drugs for the treatment of cancer (Nagendrappa 2012). According to Avani Bhatnagar, who contributes an important chapter to this *RIAS* issue, SubbaRow was a romantic who did not think as a businessman, but rather as a man who was contributing to the improvement of human health at large. He could not find in himself the tycoon who beco-

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina
Autonomous University of Yucatan, Mexico
RIAS Associate Editor
and
Manpreet Kaur Kang
Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, India
Issue Editors

mes rich from the commercial value of his discoveries, but only the philanthropist who felt that he owed himself to the world.

Resonating with our post-COVID contemporary realities, Giacomo Traina reviews Viet Thanh Nguyen's novel *The Sympathizer*, published in 2015. Traina describes how the novel's character sees himself implicated in the erasure of the defeated when telling the stories of wars. The novel's main character is a communist double agent working for the Vietnam regime in charge of following the former South Vietnamese army abroad. He travels to California, and at some point, is hired by a Hollywood executive who is making a movie about the involvement of the US army in Vietnam. Nguyen uses his character to criticize the way in which the Vietnamese people are portrayed in American movies, and the many forms in which their history is systematically erased. Towards the end of the novel, he also finds himself tortured by his best friend, who is using CIA interrogation methods. The methods of war are global, and local troops everywhere are from around the globe, and so are the war's victims. Traina's sense of irony at this passage reminds us of the heterogeneous membership of combatants in today's wars. Some members of Al Qaeda, Hamas, and other groups of the global Muslim Jihad, were either born in Europe or the Americas, sometimes having embraced Islam in their adulthood, or were trained in foreign armies before joining Islamic terrorist groups. Also, volunteers from across the globe, including the Americas, have enrolled as volunteer soldiers in Ukraine.

After all these gloomy perspectives, fortunately, we can count on literature to show us pathways towards hope. One such path is Buddhism. Anita Pattterson and Daphne Orlandi write on an iconic American literary figure, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was exposed to Asian cultures, and particularly to Buddhism. This ancient philosophy infuses his work and, Patterson argues, has greatly influenced the work of his contemporary authors and of those who followed later. She intricately weaves together the threads of Emerson's affinity with Buddhism, its influence on Wright's haiku-inspired poetry, and the broader implications for the 20th-century philosophical traditions and literary developments.

Perhaps it is partly thanks to Emerson's prestige, which made Buddhism widely accepted as a philosophy and religious

viewpoint that continued to be esteemed through the decades that, in the twenty-first century, the influence of Buddhism has moved from the philosophical to the practical realm. Yoga and meditation, disciplines associated with Buddhism, have become very popular in the Americas and beyond. It is worth mentioning, in the context of this issue of *RIAS*, that during the COVID pandemic meditation and mindfulness apps experienced an unusual growth of users, the numbers of which fell when the life-threatening character of the infection subsided (Wetsman 2022).

Patterson elucidates Emerson's early encounters with Asian cultures, especially Buddhism, during his formative years. She details Emerson's exposure to Buddhist ideas through Victor Cousin's lectures in Paris and explores the significance of Eugene Burnouf's contributions to the study of Buddhism in the 1830s. Patterson suggests that Emerson's interest in Buddhism during this period laid the groundwork for his later philosophical development.

Moreover, she examines Emerson's doctrine of correspondence in connection with the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination. She discusses Emerson's ambivalence towards Buddhism, citing his aversion to what he perceived as an "over-rational quality" in it. She contends that, however, this perspective may have influenced Emerson's appeal to the intellectual quality underlying Buddhist thought. Patterson also highlights Emerson's explicit identification of Buddhism with Transcendentalism in his 1842 lecture, linking it to his belief in a universe where virtuous actions yield beneficial effects. There is an exploration of Emerson's recurring themes of selflessness and the nonego, with references to specific passages in his works that resonate with Buddhist concepts.

Patterson highlights the debate surrounding Wright's haiku-inspired poetry, questioning whether he departs from his earlier social and political concerns. She argues that understanding Wright's poetry requires contextualizing it within a twentieth-century Emersonian pragmatist tradition, involving scholars such as Cornel West, James Albrecht, and Douglas Anderson. The discussion emphasizes the East-West intercultural exchange, including John Dewey and Ralph Ellison, as crucial influences on this tradition. The latter part of her analysis delves into Richard Wright's engagement with Buddhism through the works of British haiku scholar

R. H. Blyth and Emerson's influence on Wright's haiku-inspired poetry. The analysis scrutinizes a specific poem, "I am nobody," suggesting multiple interpretations, including a pragmatic affirmation of Emerson's individualistic ethic. Patterson concludes by discussing how Wright's pragmatist poetics and interest in Buddhism shed light on Emerson's neglected contribution to T. S. Eliot's modernism in *The Waste Land*.

In the last essay of this collection, we find another article related to Emerson and Transcendentalism. Daphne Orlandi explores dissent's historical significance in shaping America, focusing on its role in religious and political movements, including migrations and the War of Independence. The essay then examines the link between dissent and Transcendentalism, questioning its portrayal as a source of American dissent, especially in Emerson's works. Orlandi argues that Emerson's reformative ideas, primarily aimed at individual transformation, also intend broader societal impact.

Highlighting the relevance of Emerson today, she notes ongoing scholarly debates on individualism and societal change. She underscores Emerson's emphasis on self-reliance and the reformist nature of Transcendentalism. She then delves into Emerson's reform theory, exploring the intersection of individualism and societal improvement. Despite focusing on individual growth, she argues that Emerson envisions a dynamic relationship between self-reliant individuals and society. Orlandi discusses key essays illustrating Emerson's evolving thoughts on reform and emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between individual development and societal change.

The conclusion highlights Emerson's belief that true self-reliance involves commitment to societal betterment. He envisions self--reliant individuals as intellectual powers contributing to enriching life for all. The essay positions Emerson's philosophy as a transformative force for significant social change when applied collectively.

We believe that this issue of *RIAS* is a good gauge through which we have taken the pulse of the American Studies scholarly community while we all recover, bodily, emotionally, and intellectually, from what the COVID-19 pandemic meant to us all. We can see the fears, duress, resilience, ingenuity, and reflections that it brought on, awoke and propitiated. Hopefully we are now

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina
Autonomous University of Yucatan, Mexico
RIAS Associate Editor
and
Manpreet Kaur Kang
Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, India
Issue Editors

ready to think of alternative futures beyond mortal pandemics and lethal wars. Cultural Studies, including *RIAS*, can help us see that glimmer at the end of the long tunnel where the pandemic put us and from which it is taking us so long to fully exit.

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina and Manpreet Kaur Kang
Issue Editors

Abstract: The world has recently experienced the ravages of the COVID-19 epidemic and new, terrible wars. The pandemic and the wars now being waged show us how fragile human life is on our planet. The facts that the COVID-19 virus came originally from one or more animals that are part of the human food chain, and that the viruses themselves are forms of life very different from plants and animals, have altered our perception of our place in the world. Wars fought in this changed biological context have also shown how precarious the balance of power is in what we have come to see as a global humanity. Scholars in the fields of Humanities and Cultural Studies have risen to the occasion by focusing on the cultural effects of biological and war-time violence-related catastrophes. In this issue of *RIAS* focusing on the Americas and their influence on the world, we look at the implications of pandemics and wars, and human reactions to similar threats in the past, such as the pandemic of the Spanish flu which decimated soldiers during World War I. And once again, literature comes to our rescue in the time of heightened angst, showing us paths of the mind already present in American literature that may nudge us in a better direction. Existential homelessness, Buddhism, and meditation, also appear here as "life matters," and that in the double sense: they are both *matters* of life and *signals* that life, and especially human life, must matter.

Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic, war, IASA, *RIAS*, introduction

Bios: Gabriela Vargas-Cetina is Full Professor and Researcher at the Faculty of Anthropological Sciences of the Autonomous University of Yucatan, where she coordinates the Laboratory of Sound and Acoustemology. She studies organizations and has done fieldwork in Canada, Italy, Mexico and Spain. She is interested in music and the arts, including their creation, production and presence in the digital world, and on the politics of representation in anthropology. Her publications include the book *Beautiful Politics of Music: Trova in Yucatan, Mexico* (U of Alabama Press, 2017) and the collection *Anthropology and the Politics of Representation* (U of Alabama Press, 2013). Her current fieldwork in Andalusia focuses on religious and musical organizations.

Dr. Manpreet Kaur Kang is Professor of English at the University School of Humanities & Social Sciences, and also the Director of Students' Welfare at Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi. She holds a PhD from Panjab University and her areas of interest include American Literature, Writing of the Indian Diaspora and Gender Studies. She has

a teaching and research experience of thirty one years, which includes teaching at the graduate and undergraduate levels. She was a Shastri Fellow at the Department of English, University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. 2009–10. She has four books and twenty research papers to her credit and is the Editor of a journal. She has been presenting papers at National and International Conferences regularly and has been mentoring PhD and MPhil scholars. She is the current Secretary, MELOW (Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the World) and a member of the IASA Executive Council.

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina
Autonomous University of Yucatan, Mexico
RIAS Associate Editor
and
Manpreet Kaur Kang
Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, India
Issue Editors

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LOVE, LABOR, AND LOSS

The Trans-Atlantic Homelessness of James Baldwin

John T. Matteson
John Jay College of Criminal Justice CUNY, USA
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3093-7561

"You don't have a home until you leave it and then when you have left it, you never can go back."

James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*

What becomes of a nation when it becomes dependent upon its own mythology? What happens when a country is so captivated by its invented self-image that it is unable to stare into the face of reality, even when such an honest confrontation may appear necessary to its survival? These questions, insofar as they apply to my own country, the United States of America, press upon my mind when I read, in particular, a diverse triumvirate of American authors: Herman Melville; F. Scott Fitzgerald; and the principal subject of this essay, James Baldwin. Melville was among the first American authors to explore the dangers of national delusions. Ahab's *Pequod*, an elaborate, ocean-borne microcosm of the American state, is guided by a man who has invincible confidence both in the moral righteousness of his position and in the power of the sailors under his command to purge the world of personified evil. Fitzgerald's Gatsby, equally confident in the power of wealth to dismiss all of the obstacles that stand between him and his idealized Daisy, learns a fatal lesson about the limits of the American Dream. Both Ahab and Gatsby become tragic victims of their illusions. Baldwin, of course, was no fictitious tragic hero. Emphatically real, he stood at a measured

and ironic distance from the unfolding catastrophe that he both experienced and prophesied. The salient tragic figure in his writings is no conjured individual, but the entire American society writ large. Baldwin labored tirelessly to free both himself and his nation from illusions. Consenting to become neither an Ahab nor a Gatsby, nor even an Ellisonian invisible man, Baldwin instead offered himself as a post-modern Jeremiah, chronicling the consequences of American blindness.

Baldwin's narrative position was a product of a complex consciousness. That consciousness was founded upon, but was not coterminous with, the double awareness that W.E.B. DuBois claimed for Black people in America. Baldwin echoed DuBois in his belief that, in order to survive in America, a person of color must understand herself or himself both inwardly, through one's own subjective view, *and* from the outside, provisionally adopting for the sake of better knowledge the judgments of the eternally scrutinizing but ill-comprehending White world.[1] Baldwin was among the aptest students of this duality. But Baldwin's indulgence in multiple perspectives had an additional, deeply enriching dimension. At the age of 24, fearing that his life in the United States might soon topple either into violence or a destructive self-contempt, Baldwin traveled to Paris, where he remained for many years. He also lived in both Switzerland and Turkey, but it was his time in France that most powerfully shaped his international character. In later years he divided his time between France and New York, eventually dying in St. Paul-de-Vence in 1987 at 63. In a superficial sense, Baldwin's transatlantic life afforded him two homes instead of one. Yet, as his writings confirm, Baldwin's experiences outside the United States convinced him that he had no true spiritual home anywhere. Deeply desirous of sense of place, seeking a point of geographical steadiness that might solidify his identity, he could not be truly, comfortably himself in either location. Baldwin endured, as James Darsey has very aptly termed it, a "cosmopolitan loneliness" (Darsey 1999:187).

More than a century ago, Georg Lukács posited that the hero of a novel almost necessarily suffers from a kind of "transcenden-

1. For DuBois's theory of the doubly conscious African American, see "Our Spiritual Strivings" (DuBois 1986: 364, et seq).

John T. Matteson
John Jay College of Criminal Justice CUNY, USA

tal homelessness"; there is no way for the novelistic protagonist to achieve harmony between his or her inner identity and outward surroundings (Lukács 1974: 41). It was Baldwin's first sojourn in Paris that made the author conscious of a similar, real-life dysphoria. He came to realize that his alienation was not based solely on race but was, in fact, fourfold. He endured isolation as a Black man, as a gay man, as an intellectual, and finally as an American who was both rejected by his homeland and incapable of becoming European. He was a creature of multiple misfit identities.

The word "American" has never been broad enough to communicate the complex realities that it purports to represent. I have not kept an accurate count of the number of times I have heard one of my countrymen or women, usually from the political right wing, complain when a hyphen has been attached to the "American" adjective. "African-American, Asian-American, Mexican-American," they grouse. "Why can't we all just be American?" Their lament, which purports to call for inclusivity, tends in fact to be rooted in staunch xenophobia. It seeks not to accommodate diversity, but rather to disparage and to abolish it. In addition, it voices a semi-articulate wish for an impossible simplification. The desire to be "simply" American is founded upon an impossibility, because the very concept of Americanness demands an acceptance of dissonance and multiplicity. The values that we have learned to call American do not endorse homogeneity and harmony. An authentic tolerance of free speech must anticipate and allow for sharp disagreement and boisterous debate. A thriving meritocracy—one that ignores race and religion and steadfastly rewards energy, intelligence, and originality—assigns a kind of holiness to competition and welcomes all comers to the fray. Not only people, but also ideas, must compete for ascendancy. Those who would insist that every inhabitant of the fifty states should become simply "American" yearn for a kind of whitewashed inertia. To pun upon an Orwellian title, they propose an Homage to Catatonia. To the absolute contrary, the very spirit of America is one of restless change, and the rate and trajectory of change is constantly being influenced by all of those populations to whom those dreaded hyphens attach.

But the call for a unitary American way of life is worse than unrealistic. It is also deeply and dangerously hypocritical. For the very people who call for a generic Americanness are those who labor most tirelessly to make sure that their idealized America will forever lie beyond the reach of millions of their fellow Americans. Tony Kushner makes the point succinctly when he observes that, in *The Star-Spangled Banner*, the word "free" falls on a note so high that the ordinary person cannot reach it (Kushner 2013: 230). The child who grows up in a New York City housing project, whose poverty likely condemns him to a poor diet and an education in inferior schools, has slim odds of ever taking part in abundant life that a well-fed, suburban conservative has always enjoyed and outside of which he has never felt the need to seriously think or honestly empathize. When we speak of any nationality, we presume that the category includes some and excludes others. I am an American. My dear friend from Sosnowiec, Poland, is not. But the inclusivity that goes with nationhood becomes far more complicated when, within its borders, the nation practices exclusion with regard to vast numbers of its own people. Through this partitioning, a paradoxical existence is born: the life, if you will, of the native-born foreigner. It seems evident that no nation on earth is free from exclusionary hierarchies. Indeed, the contours of a particular nation's hierarchies—its internal systems and protocols of exclusion—may possibly constitute, more than any other single feature, that nation's essential character. However, in the United States, whose founding documents are immersed in Enlightenment ideals of freedom and equality, these internal exclusions, while they are by no means as harsh and rigid as they were within living memory, are perhaps especially ironic and jarring.

As an essayist, a novelist, and an activist, James Baldwin contested the signification of America and dissected its destiny. The United States has spawned its share of controversial writers. Much more rarely, it has produced a resolutely discomforting writer, that is, a writer who will not accept the reader's complacency as a response. Such a writer is inherently suspicious of the reader's motivational stance, even in the seemingly harmless activity of reading. Such a writer, although seldom conventionally religious, has a powerful sense of her or his society's sins. She presumes

John T. Matteson
John Jay College
of Criminal Justice
CUNY, USA

the reader to be complicit in those offenses and refuses to let anyone off the hook. It is hard to be such a writer, and while many have tried to excite this kind of discomfort, the efforts of most have been blunted and outweighed by their stronger instinct to entertain. One may think, for instance, of Jack Kerouac and of Baldwin's friend and rival Norman Mailer. In the most unsettling pages of Kerouac and the most abrasively contentious passages of Mailer, it is possible to hear in the background a desire to be liked. By contrast, the truly discomforting writer does not give a damn whether you like him or not. Henry David Thoreau was such a writer. Sinclair Lewis may also qualify. Firmly in this category was Malcolm X, although he shot his poisoned arrows only at a single sector of humanity. Standing among the very best of America's discomfort-inducing writers, Baldwin possessed a quality that is practically unique. Whereas most of his partners in discomfort have trouble keeping their personal sense of moral superiority from creeping onto the page, Baldwin freely turned his consciousness of social sin back upon himself. Because of his humility, he could criticize without talking down. While most acutely conscious of the transgressions of white Americans, he was aware that the stains of American life are on every citizen's clothing, and the redemptive brotherhood that he imagined for the future was one that could come only in an atmosphere of humility, and only in the aftermath of a shared repentance.

And yet, even in imagining contrition and forgiveness, Baldwin knew that ultimate salvation was impossible. Deeply scarred and saddened by the estrangement he felt from living in America, he knew better than to believe in a cure, and knowing better saddened him all the more. Surveying Baldwin's life story, one can only be astonished at how deep and enduring these feelings were. Showered with prestigious fellowships and admiring accolades, enshrined well before his death in America's literary pantheon, Baldwin might have been expected at some point to tell himself, "Ah, at long last, acceptance!" And yet he never did. Baldwin's two chief sources of alienation—his sexuality and America's antipathy toward his race, have received elaborate attention. Yet he also felt keenly the gap that divided him, as an intellectual, from the unreflective mainstream of American society. Like quite a few other

thinking Americans, Baldwin felt less natural and at home in his native country than he felt overseas. Much of this sense of displacement was owing to his self-identification as an artist.

At the outset of his essay collection *Nobody Knows My Name*, Baldwin alludes to the complex fate of being an American. His source for this observation is an earlier American expatriate, but one of neither deeply pigmented skin nor limited social opportunities: that most aristocratic of American novelists, Henry James. That Baldwin chose to recall James's particular sense of peculiarity with regard to Americanness was strategic. White, impeccably educated, and the son of one of the wealthiest men in America, Henry James would seem to have had no claim to being excluded by American culture, despite his having spent much of his life in Europe. But James was an artist in whom intellect and aristocracy were uniquely blended, and it is precisely Baldwin's point that the American artist, of any color or background, feels the continual necessity of having to apologize for himself. And it was in comparing America with Europe that Baldwin was especially struck by this fact. He observes, "Whatever the Europeans may actually think of artists, they have killed enough of them to know by now that they are as real and as persistent as rain, snow […] and businessmen" (Baldwin 1998: 139). Baldwin's America, by contrast, harbored an abiding distrust of real intellectual effort. The artist in America, Baldwin advises, is a person under suspicion, perpetually obliged to flex his muscles and assure his (and Baldwin here expressly raises the issue of masculinity) fellow citizens that he is "just a regular guy" (Baldwin 1998: 139).

Is the American writer more popular among his neighbors if he at least to pretends to possess a love of beer, pickup trucks, and the Green Bay Packers football team? No data have been recorded, but one senses that Baldwin is, in the main, correct. And his accusation rings truer today than in his own time. While it is unquestionably true that the social standing and professional prospects of people of color and LGBTQ have improved since Baldwin published *Nobody Knows My Name* in 1961, it is evident that the status of the artist and the humanist scholar in America has declined and is continuing to erode. Baldwin was anxious about the position of the American artist even then. Nevertheless,

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John Jay College of Criminal Justice CUNY, USA

the college students in his era were essentially confident of their economic prospects. Never imagining that their future wellbeing might hinge on their choosing an allegedly "practical" course of study, they flocked toward liberal arts subjects like English, history, and philosophy. When stagflation shook the American economy in the seventies, student interest in the humanities plummeted, but, when the economy came back, so did the humanities departments. In the aftermath of the 2008 recession, humanities enrollments predictably sagged once more. This time, however, the collapse has lasted longer. In 2020, federal data revealed that the number of American graduates in the humanities had fallen for the eighth consecutive year. Depending on how one defines the humanities, the cumulative falling off lies anywhere between one in six and almost one in three. Fewer than ten percent of US college graduates now hold a degree in the humanities, broadly defined. If one excludes communications majors and sticks only to the traditional humanities, one finds that only one in twenty-five now graduates with a humanities degree (Barshay). This little statistical foray may seem like a digression from the discussion of Baldwin and the feeling of being excluded in one's own country. It is not. What Baldwin experienced in the fifties and early sixties as a daunting malaise—the idea that one might expect to be dismissed for being "only" a writer—has now become horrifyingly concrete. Baldwin noted:

> A European writer considers himself to be part of an old and honorable tradition—of intellectual activity, of letters—and his choice of vocation does not cause him any uneasy wonder as to whether or not it will cost him all his friends. But this tradition does not exist in America. On the contrary, we have a very deep-seated distrust of real intellectual effort. (Baldwin 1998: 139)

In our own time, not only is that tradition as far as ever from being founded, but Americans now flee from the very possibility of its being established. They do so, not merely because the arts and letters appear eccentric, effeminate and oddly threatening (although, to many, they do), but also that the typical American looks at these fields and sees in them the most fatal disease that a pursuit in America can suffer: an inability to make themselves profitable. In 2023, we have arrived at a sad and unavoidable truth:

in America, the writer, the artist, or the humanities scholar who does not consider himself or herself to some degree marginalized and scorned within the larger culture is either extremely fortunate, preternaturally self-confident, or spectacularly inattentive.

Baldwin also thought about the economic foundations of American exclusion. He knew—and it ranks as one of his deepest and most sympathetic insights —that the social atmosphere in America can be as destructive to a white person as to a person of color, and possibly more so, because the white person is not always aware that the degradation is happening. For it is just as much a damnation to become *merely* a white person in America as it is to become *merely* a person of any other shade.

And Baldwin understood as well the *pressure* of being American. This pressure is inseparable from the American obsession with economic status, coupled with the conviction, sometimes illusory, that status lies within one's own control. Baldwin writes:

> Europeans have lived with the idea of status for a long time. A man can be as proud of being a good waiter as of being a good actor, and, in neither case, feel threatened. And this means that the actor and the waiter can have a freer and more genuinely friendly relationship in Europe than they are like to have [in the United States]. The waiter does not feel, with obscure resentment, that the actor has "made it," and the actor is not tormented by the fear that he may find himself tomorrow, once again, a waiter. (Baldwin 1998: 139–140)

Even a perceptive American may not fully appreciate the psychological burden of Americanness until she or he has spent time, not merely as a foreign tourist, but as a person actually living overseas. Living abroad in the 2020s corroborates the impressions that Baldwin formed for himself more than a half century ago. One experiences a feeling that she or he is at pains to understand, much less express. Walking a foreign street, known to almost no one, one feels more inwardly at home than one has ever felt in one's own country. Becoming comfortable with the local language may present a challenge. And yet, to quote Joni Mitchell, such a sojourner may indeed feel "unfettered and alive" (Mitchell 1974). The feeling does not diminish even as the unglamourous requirements of ordinary life—doing the laundry, getting a haircut—settle over one.

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John Jay College of Criminal Justice CUNY, USA

The only explanation for this sense of release that comes to mind, though it may not be fully satisfying, is that life in America, familiar as it may be, requires a kind of performance, whereas overseas, no pretense is called for. Do your work well; you need not be or even expect to be a multimillionaire. Such is the pressure in being American that I have been struggling to describe. For an American always bears the expectation of success, and that success is defined by a degree of material wealth that few people, and certainly very fewer professional thinkers and artists, are ever destined to obtain. The dreams are both too extravagant to achieve and too enticing to walk away from. The rock critic Greil Marcus once observed, "Patriotism in America, as I understand it, is a matter of suffering, when the country fails to live up to its promises, or actively betrays them" (Marcus 2012) And probably no one feels this suffering in quite the same way as a thinking American. Baldwin observed, "A writer who is worried about his career is also fighting for his life" (Baldwin 1998: 269). His point applies equally to teachers, artists, and the various other preservers of culture. And we are all worried now.

Baldwin was a virtuoso of social alienation and existential loneliness—two related conditions that he considered universal among the severely disjointed human family. He mastered the discourse of these concepts as Isaac Stern mastered the violin, and one wonders where Baldwin and his work would have been without them. They were, artistically speaking, his bread and butter. And yet, as one surveys his creative career, which lasted over four decades, one finds scant evidence of his having used isolation as a mere trope or for a cheap effect. For James Baldwin took very seriously the dreadful influence of purposeful exclusion, not merely upon the one excluded, but equally upon the person who excludes.

The will to exclude has various origins. Baldwin returned incessantly to two of them: first is humankind's incapacity to confront itself honestly and without delusion; second is a loss of the capacity to love. These deficiencies are most starkly illuminated in Baldwin's commentaries on race, and these commentaries are copious and profound. Surprisingly, however, Baldwin was adamant that the root cause of these failings lay not in race at all. For he believed, quite correctly, that, even if human beings were all the same color,

people would still feel the need to ostracize some collection of others. They would still feel compelled to anathematize the excluded group, and to convince them that the reason for their exclusion was some ineradicable fault. Human beings would still create in their own minds the necessary threat and specter of the despised class. For much of America's existence, that class was described by an N-word. But societies are nimble in inventing other words to serve the purpose.

For professors of English and for writers, Baldwin's thoughts about the isolation of the American thinker and the American non-Plutocrat are a matter of personal concern. Such readers feel a natural kinship with him and a sense of common ground. But, as a matter of moral principle, it is more important for human beings to look for common ground where that ground is not so obvious. And so let us turn first to Baldwin's reflections on his other marginalizations—first those relating to his sexuality and then those pertaining to the color of his skin.

To reach the core of Baldwin's sense of exclusion, one must understand that America's attitudes toward the intellectual, the gender nonconformist, and the person of color are not strictly separable. Baldwin wrote and spoke more than once about the experience of, during one's childhood, going to the theater to watch a Western movie. Not knowing much about the cultural substrata of the images he saw, the young Baldwin rooted for Gary Cooper as he mowed down Native Americans. It was only later that he recognized that the Indians were he himself. Baldwin used both Gary Cooper and John Wayne characters as tropes for what, in the majority view, an American man was supposed to be: not only tall, athletic, and handy in the use of firearms; but also white, unrepentantly deficient in formal education, and overpoweringly virile. Because the most visible models of American manhood are so exaggerated, so cartoonishly unrealistic, it is difficult to seek one's own definition of masculinity without either submitting to the cartoons or making oneself into a countervailing caricature. The American masculine ideal, Baldwin writes, "has created cowboys and Indians, good guys and bad guys, punks and studs, tough guys and softies, butch and faggot, black and white. It is an ideal so paralytically infantile that it is virtually forbidden—as an unpa-

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John Jay College of Criminal Justice CUNY, USA

triotic act—that the American boy evolve into the complexity of manhood" (Baldwin 1998: 815).

In the late essay that he titled "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood," Baldwin's musings on the confused panic of the American male led him finally to focus on neither Cooper nor Wayne, nor indeed, any of the more affirming models he had known within the Civil Rights Movement. Instead, he ended by reflecting on Michael Jackson, who was at the time the cultural meteor of *Thriller* and not yet the accused sexual predator of Neverland. Baldwin was fascinated by the cacophony that surrounded the pop star. He thought the hubbub was not about Jackson at all, but rather "about America, as the dishonest custodian of black life and wealth; and the burning, buried American guilt; and sex and sexual roles and sexual panic; money, success, and despair—to all of which may now be added the bitter need to find a head on which to place the crown of Miss America" (Baldwin 1998: 828). Baldwin says of the American concept of masculinity, "there are few things under heaven more difficult to understand or, when I was younger, to forgive" (Baldwin 1998: 821).

Baldwin saw that race itself was only secondarily the problem with America—that race was essentially the handy target for American guilt and insecurity to flail against. This being so, one of his most compelling works with regard to isolation is a novel in which white characters overwhelmingly predominate. That book is *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin's extended reflection on homosexual love—its pursuit and its frequent evanescence—in post-war Paris. The narrator-protagonist is David, a heavy-drinking young American army veteran whose girlfriend Hella has departed for Spain to weigh the pros and cons of marrying him. David has settled in Paris in hopes that he will, in that strange American phrase that David understands as harboring a self-conscious deception, "find himself." More accurately, however, he is fleeing from himself, as fast as he can, only to discover that his self is waiting for him, however hard he tries to evade it. One should not regard David as Baldwin's idea of the quintessential white American man. He does, however, possess some of the traits that, for Baldwin, combine to constitute the tragic flaw of the White American psyche. One of these is a desperate and futile wish to believe

in and perpetuate one's own purity. David would like to believe that he is exempt from what he calls "the dreadful human tangle occurring everywhere, without end, forever" (Baldwin 2013: 62). But his lover Giovanni realizes that David's besetting fault is precisely his refusal to accept complications, to become hopelessly but happily entangled. He punctures David's illusion when, late in the novel, he yells at him:

> You will never give [your sex] to anybody, you will never let anybody *touch it*—man *or* woman. You want to be *clean*. You think you came here covered with soap and you think you will go out covered with soap—and you do not want to *stink*, not even for five minutes, in the meantime. (Baldwin 2013: 141)

David's desire for an impossible, eternal cleanliness is chiefly, if not entirely sexual. But it mirrors the wish of which Baldwin accuses White America, a wish for *historical* blamelessness. And the realization of this wish, every bit as much as the yearning for sexual purity, lies out of David's reach. In a literally reflective moment in the novel's first paragraph, as he gazes at his blond-haired image in a windowpane, David ruefully muses, "My ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past." Aliyyah I. Abdur-Rahman highlights this passage as the moment where Baldwin begins his work of "undoing whiteness" (Abdur-Rahman 2015: 168).[2]

This brief episode of ethnic self-accusation presages David's inwardly corrosive duality. He cannot, in good conscience, remain an unquestioning heir of a blood-stained historical past, but neither can he shed the ingrained cultural affinities and outward manifestations that are the badges of its corruption. Baldwin writes in his essay, "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy,"

> The thing that most white people imagine that they can salvage from the storm of life is really, in sum, their innocence. […] I am afraid that most of the white people I have ever known impressed me as being

2. Abdur-Rahman misquotes Baldwin's passage, substituting "which faced away *from Europe's darker past*" for "which faced away from Europe into a darker past." This oversight, which results in a muddled interpretation, mars an otherwise admirable article.

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John Jay College of Criminal Justice CUNY, USA

> in the grip of a weird nostalgia, dreaming of a vanished state of security and order, against which dream, unfailingly or unconsciously, they tested and very often lost their lives. [...] They put me in mind of children crying because the breast has been taken away. (Baldwin 1998: 270)

America's desperate insistence on its own innocence pervades the nation's character, whether it is expressed in racial attitudes, foreign policy, or in the complex repressions of sexual longing. And it circles back to America's distrust of serious thought and the fear that earnest intellectual labor will tear aside once and for all the mask and myth of American purity.

In *Giovanni's Room*, David is not so infantile as the suckling infant in Baldwin's essay. He is, however, Baldwin's foil for a scattered series of observations about the frivolity of Americans as a people. Americans, his characters say, are not serious; they "have no sense of doom, none whatever" (Baldwin 2013: 143). With more than a touch of melodrama, David's girlfriend exclaims, "Americans should never come to Europe. [...] It means they can never be happy again. What's the good of an American who isn't happy? Happiness was all we had" (Baldwin 2013: 165).

To exist as an adult—to exist as a sexually mature being—requires some psychological position other than an artificial, sanitized innocence. It is not for nothing that we politely refer to intercourse as "carnal knowledge." True, human loving requires that we *know*—not just that we understand the physical rudiments of sex but also that we seek to acknowledge and tenderly accept the living spirit of our partner. It is a matter of the utmost irony that Baldwin's David violates the trust of Hella, does so with a man, no less, and still hopes to consider himself somehow pristine.

David, divided as he is between Eros and the mirage of propriety and cleanliness that has bound and entranced America since its Puritan era, lacks the capacity to appreciate the moral conundrum of sex. He does not grasp the peculiar truth that, if the first question one asks about sexual conduct is whether it is clean or dirty, the answer will almost invariably be that it is dirty. The guilt resides in the very asking of the question. The question invites judgment, and the judgment begets alienation. David's *a priori* judgments about his sexuality render his desires instantly and irretrievably stained and sullied. In Baldwin's novel, David

refuses to accept this idea, even though his friend Jacques puts it to him in the most unflinching of terms. Having noticed that David's reaction to Giovanni's affection is mingled with fear and shame, Jacques offers perhaps the only advice that might save David and Giovanni from a tragic ending:

> Love him. […] Love him and let him love you. Do you think anything else under heaven really matters? And how long, at best, can it last? since you are both men and still have everywhere to go? Only five minutes… and most of that, *hélas!* in the dark. And if you think of them as dirty, then they *will* be dirty—they will be dirty because you will be giving nothing, you will be despising your flesh and his. But you can make your time together anything but dirty; you can give each other something which will make both of you better—forever—if you will *not* be ashamed, if you will only *not* play it safe. (Baldwin 2013: 57)

In a television interview given shortly before his death, Baldwin confessed that he found love terrifying. Yet, at the same time, he insisted that love is our only hope. He noted elsewhere, "In order to make the act of love, there has got to be a certain confidence, a certain trust. Otherwise it degenerates into nothing but desperate and futureless brutality" (Standley and Pratt 1989: 11). He saw clearly the deadly poison that lurks within one's habits of guilt, of self-accusation, of holding back. In the pre-sexual-revolutionary era that produced *Giovanni's Room*, when same-sex desire was widely considered a certain path to depravity, criminality, and social ruin, that poison seemed especially lethal for the homosexual. Baldwin's David is a man divided against himself—emblematic not only of the inner struggles of a gay man in an anti-gay world, but also of the divisions in the national soul of America, a nation that could neither honestly embrace its passions (both sexual and otherwise) nor safely turn away from them. George Shulman writes, "the political problem for Baldwin is not ignorance but disavowal" (Shulman 2017: 164).

It was Baldwin's position that, in the same way that David fears intimacy, the United States as he knew them feared history. For, in Baldwin's view, Americans were just like David in their unreasonable desire to stay clean. Baldwin was never a more thorough fatalist than when he considered American history, which he saw as a scathing and incessant accusation, leveled not only

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John Jay College of Criminal Justice CUNY, USA

against the nation's past, but also against its present and future. Indeed, Baldwin tells us, the life of the typical American would feel all but untenable if it did not include a perpetual evasion of historical truth. As Christopher Freeburg notes, Baldwin continually places the characters in his fiction "at a crossroads, allowing them to choose between freedom and innocence, love and hate, life and death" (Freeburg 2015: 192). Baldwin's characters stand at this perilous intersection because the author saw his country standing there as well.

One is brought back to Baldwin's allusions to Gary Cooper, the star of classic Western films—references that pop up in his work with surprising frequency. For Baldwin, the stoical, virile Cooper embodied more than America's fetishized ideal of masculinity, but also the comforting lies that its citizens tell one another about their mythic past. In his famous debate with William F. Buckley, Jr., at the Cambridge Union in 1965, Baldwin memorably spoke about the ways in which a Negro boy in America discovers his blackness:

> It comes as a great shock around the age of 5, 6, or 7 to discover that the flag to which you have pledged allegiance [...] has not pledged allegiance to you. It comes as a great shock to see Gary Cooper killing off the Indians and, although you are rooting for Gary Cooper, that the Indians are you. (Baldwin 1998: 714–715).

The additional point that Baldwin chose not to confess at that time was that, in addition to being the Indians, he was also Gary Cooper. And Groucho Marx. And Marilyn Monroe. He was all of them and many more besides by virtue of his being born American. Even a maverick and an exile participates in the identity of her or his nation. But Baldwin also was not any of them, for, as he painfully acknowledged, this country, the only one that he was entitled to call his, did not deign to accept him because of his skin color—an outer marking that caused him to be, in his words, "the most despised creature in his country" (Baldwin 1998: 335).

Much has been written, and still more deserves to be written, about the determination of the Hollywood filmmakers of Baldwin's youth to romanticize the near-extermination of America's native tribes and to classify Black Americans as docile, slow-witted "darkies"—images calculated to contain and minimize the perceived

threat of the racial Other and to weave a heavenly garment of moral sanctity around the aggressions of the then-dominant White population. But the current analysis addresses only what these tropes and images signified to Baldwin. They were, in his view, an effort to define Americanness away from the Black and the Brown—to communicate and reinforce symbolically that the United States had not, "in its whole system of reality, evolved any place for [the person of color]" (Baldwin 1889: 715). Nevertheless, Baldwin knew and tirelessly insisted that America was not a White country, had never been one, and most importantly could never become one. But, just as America could never become White, Baldwin could never become, to his satisfaction, American—could never truly claim his birthright—could never enjoy the status and stature of a fully fledged native son. And yet,—and the remainder of this essay will consider this problem—Baldwin, who was denied the power to become American, was also sufficiently American that he could not become anything else.

In 1946, Baldwin's best friend, Eugene Worth, committed suicide by jumping off the George Washington Bridge. Baldwin was certain he would be next. Two years later, at the age of 24, he left Harlem and the rest of the United States behind and settled in Paris, where he more or less remained until 1954. He was later asked countless times to state the specific reasons why he chose to leave the country. The answers he gave were various. He recalled feeling that he "couldn't write in the United States" (Baldwin 1889: 264). Near the end of his life, Baldwin told an interviewer (and I apologize for the harshness of the epithet that the quotation contains, but without which it lacks the impact that Baldwin intended):

> In France […] I was released from the hostile eyes of White Americans. […] The worst thing about that is that, first the world calls you a nigger, and then imperceptibly you begin to call yourself a nigger, you begin to react that way. You begin to confirm the world's judgment. And that was beginning to happen to me in New York. I was so touchy that I was like a spring, I began to invent insults and danger. […] I realized that I was doing it to myself. And so I had to get away and find out who I was, not what I was but who. (Baldwin, "Interview with Mavis Nicholson")

John T. Matteson
John Jay College
of Criminal Justice
CUNY, USA

In less guarded moments, Baldwin said that, if he remained in New York, "I knew what was going to happen to me. My luck was running out. I was going to jail, I was going to kill somebody or be killed" (Standley and Pratt 1989: 223). He said, "You can get to a place where you have been embattled so often, that's all you can do. […] Your world narrows to a kind of red circle of rage. And you begin to hate everybody, which means you hate yourself, you know. And when that happens, it's over for you" (Baldwin "Interview with Sylvia Chase"). One of the earliest of his statements about his defection remains one of the most succinct and incisive:

> I left America because I doubted my ability to survive the fury of the color problem […] (Sometimes I still do.) I wanted to prevent myself from becoming *merely* a Negro; or, even, merely a Negro writer. I wanted to find out in what way the specialness of my experience could be made to connect me with other people instead of dividing me from them. (I was as isolated from Negroes as I was from whites, which is what happens when a Negro begins, at bottom, to believe what white people say about him). (Baldwin 1998: 137)

Perhaps above everything else, the Baldwin who went to Paris hoped to understand himself as distinct from the environment that had hitherto formed him. What part of him, he wanted to know, was authentically himself, and how much had merely been the stamp of a hostile environment? Yet, paradoxically, in the act of separating, Baldwin also desired to *unite*. As he put it, "I wanted to find out in what way the *specialness* of my experience could be made to connect me with other people, instead of dividing me from them." He added parenthetically. "I was isolated from Negroes as I was from whites, which is what happens when a Negro begins […] to believe what white people say about him" (Baldwin 1998: 137).

But if Baldwin was seeking in France a different identity from his American one, his travels disappointed him, for Americanness was woven into his fabric. Indeed, in Paris, a curious thing happened. He writes, "I proved, to my astonishment, to be as American as any Texas G.I. And I found my experience was shared by every other American writer I knew in Paris. Like me, they were divorced from their origins, and […] they were no more at home in Europe than I was" (Baldwin 1998: 137). Ironically,

the common ground of Americanness that Baldwin discovered was a shared sense of estrangement. He reflected, "The fact that I was the son of a slave and they were the sons of free men meant less, by the time we confronted each other on European soil than the fact that we were both searching for our separate identities. […] We knew more about each other than any European ever could" (Baldwin 1998: 137–138). Strands of connection and feelings of disconnection intertwined. Baldwin was linked to other expatriated Americans by indescribable bonds, yet he was also denied the kinship of full Americanness and lacked the capacity to become a European. He might have seemed, from an outward perspective, a man without a country. But another surprise was in store for him. In Paris, he writes, he was "released from the illusion that I hated America" (Baldwin 1998: 138). From the viewpoint of more than three decades later, his perspective on the subject broadened. He declared in 1984, "I think that it is a spiritual disaster to pretend that one *doesn't* love one's country. You may disapprove of it, you may be forced to leave it, you may live your whole life as a battle, yet I don't think you can escape it. There isn't any other place to go" (Standley and Pratt 1989: 250).

Apart from the shared sense of displacement that he shared with his fellow American writers, Baldwin never succeeded in articulating what he meant by "American." For him, as for many of us, the word remained an impenetrable mystery. In *Giovanni's Room*, he makes perhaps his most intriguing attempt to peel back some of the layers of American identity, but the effort winds itself into a paradoxical tangle. Giovanni complains to David that the Americans who cluster around the Parisian office of American Express all look alike to him. David's reaction calls out for extended quotation:

> But they didn't look alike to me. I was aware that they had in common something that made them Americans, but I could never put my finger on what it was. I knew that whatever this common quality was, I shared it. […] When Giovanni wanted me to know that he was displeased with me, he said I was a "vrai américain"; conversely, when delighted, he said that I was not an American at all; and on both occasions he was striking, deep in me, a nerve. […] And I resented this: resented being called an American (and resented resenting it) because it seemed to make me nothing more than that, whatever that was; and I resented being called *not* an American because it seemed to make me nothing. (Baldwin 2013: 89)

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John Jay College of Criminal Justice CUNY, USA

In the paragraph just quoted, David perceives distinctions among his compatriots. But in the next paragraph, the supposed differences melt into a disturbingly homogeneous mass, both incapable of differentiation and surreally shattered into scattered details. Baldwin articulates a nightmare vision of both lumpish anonymity and incoherent fragmentation:

> I was forced to admit that this active, so disquietingly cheerful horde struck the eye, at once, as a unit. At home, I could have distinguished patterns, habits, accents of speech—with no effort whatever: now everybody sounded, unless I listened hard, as though they had just arrived from Nebraska. At home I could have seen the clothes they were wearing, but here I only saw bags, cameras, belts, and hats, all clearly from the same department store. [...] Yet I also suspected that what I was seeing was but a part of the truth and perhaps not even the most important part; beneath these faces, these clothes, accents, rudenesses, was power and sorrow, both unadmitted, unrealized, the power of inventors, the sorrow of the disconnected. (Baldwin 2013: 89–90)

"The sorrow of the disconnected": the phrase might be made to stand for all of Baldwin's work—the bitterness of exclusion, the search for love, the disheartened realization that people are too immersed in their own pursuits and subjectivities ever to appreciate the opportunities for brotherhood and sisterhood that daily pass us by. The passage is of a piece with Arthur Miller's characterization of Joe Keller in *All My Sons*: powerful in the act of material production but stunted and impoverished in all that pertains to community.

In 1956, when Baldwin published *Giovanni's Room,* the fractures in the American community were, from a racial perspective, deep, and those breakages were held in place by law. The desegregation order in *Brown v. Board of Education* was only two years old and had yet to take much practical effect. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was still nearly a decade away. The changes wrought by the Civil Rights Movement transformed American society for the better. Yet we must wonder whether Baldwin, who has now been dead for an unimaginable 35 years, would maintain that the condition of American society has improved since those times, or whether he would argue instead that American unity has become an even more soiled and tattered illusion. Baldwin's era saw the clashes at Selma and Montgomery. We have undergone

the shocks of Charlottesville, Virginia and Ferguson, Missouri. If the Sixties had august martyrs like Medgar Evers and Martin Luther King, Jr., we have buried more commonplace victims like Eric Garner and George Floyd.

Indeed, there are arguably more torn spots in the American social garment than in Baldwin's time. American society, once a model of economic mobility, is now more economically stratified than the European nations with which it is routinely compared. The gap between rich and poor yawns ever wider. One need only read the work of Tony Judt and Robert D. Putnam to appreciate the degree to which the values of trust, community, and a shared sense of national purpose have receded from the American landscape. Americans presume less and less that they can depend on their government or their neighbors for support. They look around themselves and conclude that the only security that will have is what they will be able to buy.

Baldwin repeatedly urged Americans to be more candid in the ways they confront and tell their history. He believed that, as long as the nation's illusions regarding its history remained intact, America could never achieve either real compassion or true maturity. In more recent decades, the country has, to some extent, heeded his advice. Both American information media and the academic establishment have gone a long way toward discrediting the idea of America as an heroic nation. For good or ill, our ideal conceptions of America's past, its present mission and its future prospects have vanished like a block of ice on a hot July day. Yet the ramifications of this lurch toward self-criticism remain in doubt. At the same time that one marvels at the American capacity for illusion, one also may wonder whether, given that those illusions have been so inherent in the country's sense of self, the nation will be able to sustain itself without them. For me, the most emblematic of American protagonists remains Jay Gatsby—a roughneck, a gangster, and an arriviste, whose accumulated grandeur has subsisted entirely in his ability to construct and believe in his own illusions. Stripped of those dreams and fantastic possibilities, he was simply floating in the swimming pool, waiting for the bullet. So it went with Gatsby. Whether nations follow a like trajectory is a question of some moment.

John T. Matteson
John Jay College of Criminal Justice CUNY, USA

The perils of evading the truth about one's country seem obvious. At the same time, however, an equally paralyzing dead end awaits those who, in acknowledging the sins of the nation, also permit themselves to be crushed by them. One must never imagine oneself to be cut off from redemption. Baldwin was insistent on this point:

> I'm not interested in anybody's guilt. […] I know you didn't do it, and I didn't do it either, but I am responsible for it because I am a man and a citizen of this country, and you are responsible for it, too, for the very same reason. (Baldwin 1998: 713)

The dissatisfactions that have arisen from the American refusal to own this responsibility—the suspicion between races, the contentions between classes, the fragmentation of community, the feeling that one's country is not one's own—were once felt most acutely among the nation's minorities. Now, far from diminishing, the discontent feels universal. If the alienation and feelings of disenfranchisement of the Trump voter in rural Pennsylvania differ from those of the tenant in a New York City housing project, one begins to fear that the difference is only a matter of degree—and the degree is growing smaller.

But perhaps there is a way out. As an antidote to the hero's isolation in *Giovanni's Room*, Jacques prescribes unreserved and reckless love. The surest way to fail, he insists, it to play things safe. Baldwin writes elsewhere, "Love takes off the masks. […] [L]ove […] not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace—not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth" (Baldwin 1998: 341). Might American society one day surrender its masks and become willing to be redeemed by an infinitely larger impulse of love? One feels far from confident. After all, love demands far more than justice, and we are far from justice as well. Those tender influences that can work miracles in an individual spirit seldom if ever move large groups of people, and it is no easier to educate people to be loving than it is to teach them to be reasonable. More than fifty years ago, Sir Kenneth Clark averred that the only remaining potent force in civilization was "heroic materialism" (Clark 1969: 347).

It was not sufficient then. It is even less sufficient now. Finding nothing outside of America in which to place his faith, Baldwin placed his profoundly reluctant confidence in the United States. Analogous to Baldwin, we must place our reliance in sympathy, forgiveness, and a rediscovery of common ground. We must, in short, rediscover love, for we, too, have no other place to go.

Abstract: How does an African-American writer experience Americanness? What does one do when one feels himself born an outcast in one's own country and then discovers that that country is the only one he can regard as home? Despite—or perhaps because of—his extraordinary gifts, James Baldwin viewed himself as a stranger in America, and his sense of exclusion was threefold, arising not only from his blackness but also from his homosexuality and his identity as an intellectual. At the age of 24, fearing that his life in the United States might soon topple either into violence or a fatal self-contempt, Baldwin traveled to Paris, where he remained for many years. In a superficial sense, Baldwin's transatlantic life afforded him two homes instead of one. Yet, as his writings confirm, Baldwin's experiences outside the United States convinced him that he had no true spiritual home anywhere. He could not be truly, comfortably himself in either location. This essay discusses how Baldwin's European sojourns served to confirm his Americanness—a confirmation he could regard only as bittersweet and tragic. Having observed White Americans both at home and abroad, Baldwin was able to reflect eloquently on the American need to regard itself as somehow exempt from the judgments that hang heavily over the rest of the world. He saw America's desperate insistence on its own innocence as pervading the nation's character, whether it was expressed in racial attitudes, foreign policy, or the complex repressions of sexual longing. And that need for exemption circled back to America's distrust of serious thought and the fear that earnest intellectual labor would tear aside once and for all the mask and myth of American purity. The failure of America, he believed, was a failure of honesty compounded by an incapacity to love. Finding nothing outside of America in which to place his faith, Baldwin placed his profoundly reluctant confidence in the United States. Like Baldwin, we must place our reliance in sympathy, forgiveness, and a rediscovery of common ground. We must, in short, rediscover love, for we, too, have no other place to go.

Keywords: James Baldwin, György (Georg) Lukács, national mythologies, transatlantic homelessness, estrangement, exclusion, Americanness

Bio: John Matteson (born March 3, 1961) is an American professor of English and legal writing at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City. He won the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for Biography or Autobiography for his first book *Eden's Outcasts: The Story of Louisa May Alcott and Her Father*. Matteson graduated with an AB in history from Princeton University in 1983. He then received a JD from Harvard Law School in 1986, and a PhD in English from Columbia University in 1999. He served as a law

clerk for US District Court Judge Terrence W. Boyle before working as a litigation attorney at Titchell, Maltzman, Mark, Bass, Ohleyer & Mishel in San Francisco and with Maupin, Taylor, Ellis & Adams in Raleigh, North Carolina. He has written articles for a wide variety of publications, including *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New England Quarterly*, *Streams of William James*, and *Leviathan*. His second book, *The Lives of Margaret Fuller* was published in January 2012 and received the 2012 Ann M. Sperber Biography Award as the year's outstanding biography of a journalist or other figure in media. It was also a finalist for the inaugural Plutarch Award, the prize for best biography of the year as chosen by the Biographers International Organization (BIO), and was shortlisted for the PEN/Jacqueline Bograd Weld Award for Biography. His W. W. Norton & Company annotated edition of *Little Women* was published in November 2015, featuring many exclusive photographs from Alcott's childhood home, Orchard House, as well as numerous illustrations and stills from the various film adaptations. Matteson's most recent book, *A Worse Place Than Hell: How the Civil War Battle of Fredericksburg Changed a Nation*, was published in February 2021. Matteson appeared in the 2018 documentary *Orchard House: Home of Little Women*. Matteson is a former treasurer of the Melville Society and is a member of the Louisa May Alcott Society's advisory board. Matteson is a fellow of the Massachusetts Historical Society and has served as the deputy director of the Leon Levy Center for Biography.

John T. Matteson
John Jay College of Criminal Justice CUNY, USA

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PEACE, WAR, AND CRITIQUE

There is no way to peace. Peace is the way.
–Gandhi

Giorgio Mariani
Sapienza
University of Rome
Italy
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8135-0330

Thousands of essays and books, indeed entire libraries have been written about the matter of peace and war, and yet from at least one perspective, our understanding of the relation between these two equally elusive terms has not advanced much beyond the oft-repeated Latin motto of my Roman forefathers: *Si vis pacem, para bellum*. If you want peace, you must prepare for war. While, like many classic Roman ideas, also this one can be traced back to a Greek root in Plato's *Laws*, its earliest Latin formulation occurs in the *Epitoma rei militaris* by the late fourth-century BC writer Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus, commonly referred to as Vegetius. *Igitur qui desiderat pacem, praeparet bellum*, that is, "Henceforth, those who aspire to peace should be ready for war" ("Si vis pacem"). Now, if we make a huge historical leap over to 1830, we will find Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, Napoleon Bonaparte's private secretary, playing upon this Latin motto in a deliciously perverse way: "Tout le monde connaît l'adage [...] Si Bonaparte eût parlé latin, il en aurait, lui, renversé le sens, et aurait dit: *Si vis bellum para pacem*" (De Bourrienne 1829: 84). Everyone knows the adage [...] Had Bonaparte spoken Latin, he would probably have reversed it and said, *Si vis bellum para pacem*. Napoleon, according to Bourrienne, understood that

the best way to plan a war was to have one's opponent lower his guard, thus rendering him more easily assailable.

Only two years later, another war theorist, Carl von Clausewitz, famously argued in his *Vom Kriege*, *On War*, that "war is the continuation of politics by other means" (Clausewitz 1984: 87). He too refused to see peace (that is, the world of politics) as truly separate from war. It is hardly surprising, then, that a century and a half later, we would find Michel Foucault cleverly reversing the Clausewitzian formula, by arguing that politics was the continuation of war by other means, highlighting what is already implicit in all these formulations, from Vegetius to Bourienne to Clausewitz. There is no such thing as "peace"—there's only war. As Foucault argues, "While it is true that political power puts an end to war and establishes or attempts to establish the reign of peace in civil society, it certainly does not do so in order to suspend the effects of power or to neutralize the disequilibrium revealed in the last battle of the war" (Foucault 2003: 15). In short, from Foucault's grim perspective, we may well delude ourselves that, in the absence of open warfare, we live in a state of "peace," but the conditions of that peace are largely if not totally dictated by war. Even though in fairness to Foucault it should be added that he considered the lectures collected in the volume *"Society Must be Defended"* (from which I have been quoting) only a provisional and tentative exploration of this topic, what matters here is that his argument has the merit of showing how very close we remain, a millennium and a half down the road, to Vegetius's formula.

The pressing question that emerges from this cursory overview is, obviously, how can peace be thought of as an alternative to war, if it is always, relentlessly, defined as the product of (or the precondition for) war? In his *1984*, George Orwell, as everyone knows, imagined "War is Peace" as one of the three slogans of the Ministry of Truth, but I think it can be easily proved that while this slogan may be an excellent example of the Newspeak common to all totalitarian states, it is actually also one of the key beliefs of democratic societies all the world over. Once that is understood, one begins to wonder whether it makes any sense to cry "Hypocrisy!" whenever the Nobel Peace Prize goes to people with a variable quantity of blood on their hands like Henry Kissinger

Giorgio Mariani
Sapienza
University of Rome
Italy

and Barak Obama, Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin, Muhammad Anwar el-Sadat and Menachem Begin. They were all believers in the notion that peace could be secured only through the use of force, faithful followers of the apparently ineradicable notion that, without war, you can have no peace.

I suppose I hardly need to stress that where the distinction lies between peace and war is far from being a merely academic, linguistic, or philosophical dispute. The question of whether peace can ever be extricated from a logic of war, is, *literally*, a matter of life and death. The current war in Ukraine, is, of course, a case in point. In what follows I will try to be as objective as possible, by presenting how each side constructs rhetorically its own version of reality, and therefore their own *casus belli*. In February 2022 the Russian army invaded a sovereign country but, like all nations that decide to wage war, Russia too claimed to be acting in self-defense. Russia is a peace-loving country, Putin argued, but at the prospect of seeing a key neighboring country like the Ukraine join NATO—that is, a military alliance that Putin considers inimical to Russia's geopolitical interests—he had to send in the army to "denazify" Ukraine and to bring peace to the Donbas region, where war between the Russian separatists and the Ukrainian army had been going on since April, 2014. Obviously, many would object that what Putin calls "peace" is simply another name for the political goals he pursues. However, questions must also be asked about how the other side construes its own version of "peace." Before the Russian invasion, there was nothing like "peace" in the Donbas region. According to UN sources, between April 6, 2014 to December 31, 2021, over 14,000 people had lost their lives in the conflict, with nearly a quarter of them being civilians. Moreover, an argument can be made, and indeed has been made, that Ukraine's military alignment with the West, was far from being a gesture of "peace" towards Russia, especially considering that Putin had many times expressed his opposition to the enlargement of NATO to the east. Finally, NATO too, as one can read on its webpage, has as its primary purpose to ensure "peace and security in Europe and North America," but it aims at doing so by both political and *military* means. NATO makes no mystery, then, that it firmly believes that if you wish to keep

the peace, you must be ready for war. And indeed, even though Ukraine at the time of the Russian invasion was not a NATO member, from the very start NATO provided military assistance to Zelensky. Of course, if that did not happen, the Russian army would have most likely sooner, rather than later, taken control of the whole country. But it is an objective fact that by providing the resistance with more and more weapons, NATO countries are instrumental in prolonging the war, and a longer war means more deaths. Of course, the Ukrainian response is that these regrettable deaths—which at the time of this writing total more than 70,000 on the Ukrainian side alone—are worth it, as the only other option would be to surrender to the aggressor.

While resistance against foreign aggression qualifies as an undisputable act of self-defense, it is also a use of force that falls within the perimeter of the *si vis pace para bellum* continuum. In fact, regardless of who may be right and who may be wrong, as I have insisted, both sides claim to be fighting for peace though regrettably, in order to achieve peace, they must resort to war. This is hardly surprising given that the historical record shows beyond any shadow of doubt that nations *always* go to war because they seek to realize what they choose to call "peace." This may be especially easy to see in the modern age, when nations need to justify their going to war by construing their decisions not only as acts of self-defense (for an infamous contemporary example, see the Anglo-American war against Iraq, with its never found WMD's) but as *moral* interventions (that's what the notion of "humanitarian warfare" is all about) to secure peace. No matter how obscene the claim of acting in self-defense might be—as in the case of the current genocidal attack of the Israeli "Defense" Forces on the population of Gaza—that is what all nations claim to do when they go to war. They claim to be "defending" themselves. But there is a deeper sense in which the object of war is always "peace." No country goes to war with the idea of being at war permanently. On the contrary, all wars are fought to bring about "peace," that is with the objective of forcing the enemy to accept a new social and political configuration. So, while Foucault may be extreme in claiming that politics is the continuation of war by other means, it would be much harder to deny that "peace"

Giorgio Mariani
Sapienza
University of Rome
Italy

is in the majority of cases the continuation of war: its inevitable byproduct. The fifty-year peace that Western Europe has enjoyed, for example, was the byproduct of World War II, just as the peace between North and South Korea is the byproduct of the stalemate reached at the end of the Korean war, or the peace reached in the Balkans is the outcome of the wars unleashed by the falling apart of the former Yugoslavia.

Now, to go back to the Ukrainian war, it is obvious that the "peace" sought by one side has very little to do with the one the other side is struggling to achieve. True enough, but what is shared by both camps is the notion that only through war (whether defensive or offensive) peace can be obtained. We are thus completely mired in a rhetorical paradox that perhaps few have analyzed more effectively than Kenneth Burke, one of the most intelligent students of rhetoric, literature, and culture of the twentieth century. As he wrote in his 1945 *A Grammar of Motives*, if the best that people who care about peace can do is to point to the horrors of war, we will continue to be stuck in a situation in which "what we [are] admonished against [would be] just about the only tangible thing there for us to be" (Burke 1945: 332). In other words, we want men and women to become peaceful, but all we can do is marshal written and visual narratives that show them practicing the art of war. Burke was talking about literature and rhetoric, but his point has clear political implications. Wars are fought in the name of peace, but in order to become peaceful we must first turn into warriors—we must, in other words, mimic the violence (real or imagined) we are confronted with by our opponent.

I know that at this point I could be accused of indulging in sophistry, ignoring that in a case like the war in the Ukraine, where many would argue there is a clear-cut distinction between an aggressor and a victim, there should also be an equally unambiguous difference between a "bad" versus a "good" violence. Or, if you prefer, granting that violence can in no circumstances deemed "good," one may wish to argue that in the Ukraine war a difference holds between an acceptable versus an unacceptable form of violence. But if, with Judith Butler, "we accept the notion that all lives are equally grievable, and thus that the political world ought rightly to be organized in such a way that this principle is affirmed by eco-

nomic and institutional life" (Butler 2021: 96), it should be clear that, no matter how justified or unjustified they might be in doing so, both sides are equally committed to the violation of what Butler identifies as "the radical equality of the grievable" (96). Like Butler, I too believe that it would be a mistake to consider nonviolence as an absolute principle and that there may be indeed cases where to defend oneself one may have to resort to violence. However, especially considering the way wars are waged today, the "just cause" (*jus ad bellum*) of a specific war no longer translates—if it ever did—into "just rules" (*jus in bello*). Modern warfare has made any subordination of the immorality of killing to the morality of a just cause increasingly complicated. The clearest example of this is that in contemporary wars the number of civilians killed exceeds by far the number of dead combatants.

So, where does all this leave us? It may well be that at the stage we have reached in this enfolding tragedy, all possible solutions will be unsatisfactory and riddled with several moral and political complications. This, however, should not exempt us from considering the matter from a wider historical as well as theoretical perspective—both for the sake of reaching a better understanding of the current crisis, and in the hope of establishing conditions under which such crises may not occur again in the future.[1] Therefore,

1. In such a brief essay, where my point is to investigate how "peace" continues to be inextricably tied to its purported opposite (war), I cannot discuss at any length what might have been practical, political alternatives, to the defensive war undertaken by Ukraine to repeal the Russian invasion. Was a non-violent, political defense of Ukraine possible? I happen to believe that it should have been tried. If Gandhi had never embraced non-violence to conduct his anti-colonial struggle, opting for the more traditional armed struggle that nearly all anti-colonial movements were embracing at the time, we would not have an example of what a non-violent mass movement could be like. To break the cycle of violence, a truly "heroic" choice must be made, and I don't think this would entail giving up the fight for freedom. I repeat, I cannot explore this issue here. But I do wish to point out that while NATO countries insist that the Ukrainian resistance must be provided with weapons to fight the Russian occupation, in the case of the more than 50 year-long illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, not only they have never been willing to provide any military assistance to the Palestinian resistance, but they have always insisted that Palestinian should renounce armed struggle and choose non-violence.

Giorgio Mariani
Sapienza
University of Rome
Italy

allow me to return to Judith Butler's book, *The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind*, published by Verso in 2021, from which I have already quoted. One of the premises of Butler's inquiry is that,

> To argue for or against violence requires that we establish the difference between violence and nonviolence, if we can. But there is no quick way to arrive at a stable semantic distinction between the two when that distinction is so often exploited for the purposes of concealing and extending violent aims and practices. In other words, we cannot race to the phenomenon itself without passing through the conceptual schemes that dispose the use of the term in various directions, and without an analysis of how those dispositions work…. To start down such a path, we have to accept that "violence" and "nonviolence" are used variably and perversely, without pitching into a form of nihilism suffused by the belief that violence and nonviolence are whatever those in power decide they should be. (Butler 2021: 25–26)

Butler is responding to a situation analogous to the one I have tried to sketch in my argument so far: stable semantic—as well as, I would like to add, practical—distinctions between violence and nonviolence, war and peace are difficult to formulate precisely because they are part of what conflict is all about. As Australian philosopher Nick Mansfield has put it in his *Theorizing War*, "the deployment of the term 'war' is inevitably a deployment of something else as well, the 'other' of war, something called variously peace, or civil society, or sovereign authority, or love or friendship" (Mansfield 2008: 2). This "other" of war is *not* "a simple opposite of war, something that we aim to protect from war or retrieve from it somehow" (2). This other—that is, "peace"—is what war needs to constantly refer to "in order to make sense at all" (3).

Thus, Western countries hypocritically choose to ignore that whenever Palestinians have embraced civil and largely non-violent protest they have met with violent repression. In the "Great March of Return," for example, according to Amnesty International over 150 Palestinians were killed, with over 10,000 injured. But the reason why Palestinian non-violence has failed lies not only with Israel's criminal behavior—it also lies with the Western countries' refusal to subject Israel to the kind of political pressure that would force the country to change its policies. As both Gandhi and King insisted, the moral outrage of public opinion is a *conditio sine qua non* for the success of non-violence—as long, of course, such moral outrage is translated into practical governmental actions.

I guess it should be clear by now that, while I concede the moral and political complications that such a choice entails, the argument I am trying to build here is an argument in favor of nonviolence. In this regard, let me quote Butler again: "In response to the objection that a position in favor of nonviolence is simply unrealistic [one should maintain] that nonviolence requires a critique of what counts as reality, and it affirms the power and necessity of counter-realism.... Perhaps nonviolence requires a certain leave-taking from reality as it is currently constituted, laying open the possibilities that belong to a newer political imaginary" (Butler 2021: 32). In other words, as far as the war in Ukraine is concerned, if we wish to contribute to the building of a peace that may be truly something else than an extension of the logic of war, we must be skeptical of what is presented to us as reality.

Make no mistake, I am by no means suggesting that the killings, the misery, the bombings, the unspeakable cruelties of the war are not real. What I am suggesting is that there is much more that escapes the eye of a viewer conditioned not only by what the media and most politicians construct as reality, but also by a hegemonic way of perceiving war matters that remains rooted in the understanding that only war can bring us peace. Now, what would happen if we set aside for a moment this often unstated but widely shared ideological premise, and adopted as our guiding principle the slogan launched by *Medecin sans Frontiers* at the beginning of the invasion? That slogan is, simply *Si vis pacem para pacem*—if you want peace, you must prepare for peace.[2] Or perhaps, even better, build peace. The etymology of the Latin verb *parare*, in fact, suggests that the verb refers to setting the conditions for something to take place, while another meaning associated with it is "to defend something" (as in the contemporary Italian phrase *parare un colpo*—to absorb a blow). To the question of whether any side in this war has prepared for peace, the only honest answer must be a resounding NO! Both NATO and Russia, in fact, have done just the opposite, because their respective political imaginaries understand military matters only in light of Bourrienne's preoccupations. They are

2. The slogan is just another way to say what the epigraph from Gandhi I chose for this essay says. True peace is achieved through peace, not war.

Giorgio Mariani
Sapienza
University of Rome
Italy

both committed to building up their arsenals because they fear that a peaceful stance will render them vulnerable.

This is, however, where we must engage in that leave-taking from reality as currently constituted that Judith Butler recommends. And here, too, is where a very important *American* tradition of what Albert Einstein would have called "militant," *aggressive* pacifism can be of great help. I will not try to summarize my understanding of the important intellectual and political achievements of this tradition that extends from Emerson and Thoreau to William James, Jane Addams, Richard Bartlett Gregg, Martin Luther King, and many, many others. I will only mention that one of the arguments of my 2015 book *Waging War on War. Peacefighting in American Literature*, is devoted precisely to showing that "peacefighting" is anything but the choice of the weak and ineffectual. As Emerson put it, "the cause of peace is not the cause of cowardice."

Rather than repeat what I have argued elsewhere, however, here I would like to call attention to how this issue of failing to build the peace was highlighted as setting the stage for war even before figures like Emerson and Thoreau took the stage. Long before Henry David Thoreau's impassioned argument on a standing army being only an arm of the standing government, and William James's warning, in his 1898 contradictory but fundamental essay "The Moral Equivalent of War," that "the intensely sharp preparation for war" *is* "the real war" (James 1898: 1283), one of the Republic's Founding Fathers, James Madison, stated that, "A standing military force, with an overgrown Executive will not long be safe companions to liberty. The means of defence agst. foreign danger, have been always the instruments of tyranny at home. Among the Romans it was a standing maxim to excite a war, whenever a revolt was apprehended. Throughout all Europe, the armies kept up under the pretext of defending, have enslaved the people" (Madison 1902: 317). Here, not only Madison warned that a standing army was the precondition for what, in another well-known statement, he defined as the evil "most to be dreaded, because it comprises and develops every other" (Madison 1997: 106)—that is, war—but he also stated in unequivocal terms that an overblown military arsenal was simply incompatible with democracy. "In war, too," he continued, "the discretionary power of the executive is

extended; its influence in dealing out offices, honors, and emoluments is multiplied; and all the means of seducing the minds are added to those of subduing the force of the people! No nation could preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare" (Madison 1997: 106–107).

Considering that since 9/11 the United States have been permanently at war one wonders what Madison would have thought about the state of contemporary American democracy. But there's more, of course. In 2001, the Pentagon Budget was $287 billion. In 2021 it had gone up to $782 billion. This year, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, it has reached $801 billion, accounting for 3.2 per cent of the US GDP. Of the 20 largest military spenders in the world, only Saudi Arabia (6.6) and Israel (5.2) spend a larger percentage of their respective GDPs to arm themselves. Russia, interestingly, invests only a tiny 0.1 percent less of its GDP than the US, though in absolute terms, both China and Russia—the two great competitors of the US on the world scene—account for only 14% and 3.1%, respectively, of the world's military spending, with the US reaching a staggering 38%.[3]

At this point it may be worth recalling the words used by a man who had certainly lived all his life believing that if you wanted peace you had to be ready for war. Dwight Eisenhower—a former World War Two general and US president from 1952 to 1960—in his famous "military-industrial complex" speech, argued that "Disarmament, with mutual honor and confidence, is a continuing imperative. Together we must learn how to compose differences, not with arms, but with intellect and decent purpose" ("Military-Industrial"). No wonder this text is featured in all the major anthologies of peace and anti-war writing published in the US over the last twenty or so years. Here, however, I would like to quote at some length a lesser-known passage from his address to the American Society of Newspaper editors: "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold

3. All data are from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2022 Fact Sheet (for 2021), as reported in "List of countries by military expenditures," *Wikipedia*, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_with_highest_military_expenditures.

Giorgio Mariani
Sapienza
University of Rome
Italy

and not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life at all in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron" ("The Chance for Peace"). *Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron*: if we continue to threaten war—if we continue, that is, to make of Vegetius' s motto the polar star of our thinking about political and military matters, all human beings will be facing crucifixion.

I don't know to what extent Eisenhower meant what he said or understood the implications of his statement, but let's forget for a moment that these were the words of an Army general, and stick only to what they say, or better, what they *do*. In my view, what they do, is offer us a fresh new "cognitive mapping" of the world. I use intentionally the concept that Fredric Jameson took from urban planner Kevin Lynch, to suggest that traditional military cognitive mapping has always privileged—and in many ways continues to do so—the space of the nation. This is to some extent hardly surprising. As Philip Wegner has usefully put, "It is what Benedict Anderson famously calls the 'imagined community' of the nation that unifies and draws together into a coherent ensemble the lived experience of individuals and the abstract economic and political realities of the newly emerging capitalist states" (Wegner 2014: 72). Military reality could only follow suit. However, in the post-modern, *post-atomic* age, this older cognitive mapping is no longer adequate. It may still work as far as conventional warfare is concerned, but it becomes useless when a nuclear superpower threatens to use its atomic weaponry. The old maps no longer help us in making sense of the world. We enter a truly global space where there's only humanity and the bomb, so to speak. But here, at this incredibly bleak juncture when apocalypse seems only a few minutes away, "a new and heretofore unimaginable politics" may begin to emerge. The threat of complete annihilation—a reality we cannot perceive unless we take leave from another, outmoded reality—sets the preconditions for a new form of cognitive mapping no longer based on the unit of the nation but on that of the planet. And in this new form

of cognitive mapping, the old Latin dictum must be discarded as an old rusty tool of a bygone era.

Since thus far I have hardly said anything about how literature may help us in our search for better answers to allay the sorrows of this wa and prevent those of future wars, I would like to conclude by quoting a passage that has always struck me as one of the most beautiful and poignant moments in twentieth-century American literature. It is a passage from Leslie Marmon Silko's 1977 novel *Ceremony*, where the protagonist Tayo, a traumatized World War Two veteran from Laguna Pueblo, is finally able to trace a pattern—a cognitive map, that is—in what thus far he has experienced as a series of disconnected and painful fragments.

> He had been so close to it, caught up in it for so long that its simplicity struck him deep inside his chest: Trinity Site, where they exploded the first atomic bomb, was only three hundred miles to the southeast, at White Sands. And the top-secret laboratories where the bomb had been created were deep in the Jemez Mountains, on land the Government took from Cochiti Pueblo: Los Alamos, only a hundred miles northeast of him now, still surrounded by high electric fences and the ponderosa pine and tawny sand rock of the Jemez mountain canyon where the shrine of the twin mountain lions had always been. There was no end to it; it knew no boundaries; and he had arrived at the point of convergence where the fate of all living things, and even the earth had been laid. From the jungles of his dreaming he recognised why the Japanese voices had merged with Laguna voices [...]; the lines of cultures and world were drawn in flat dark lines on fine light sand, converging in the middle of witchery's final ceremonial sand painting. From that time on, human beings were one clan again, united by the fate the destroyers planned for all of them, for all living things; united by a circle of death that devoured people in cities twelve thousand miles away, victims who had never known these mesas, who had never seen the delicate color of the rocks which boiled up their slaughter. (Silko 1986: 245–246)

What the novel identifies as "the witchery" may well be translated into the obscene military budgets of all nations, which not only pave the way to Armageddon, but daily deprive people of food, shelter, medical care—in a word deprive people of *peace*, in the name of a "peace" that reeks of war. But if we are "one clan again"—as I think we are—it is high time to say goodbye to Vegetius and prepare for peace because we want peace.

Abstract: This article offers a brief exploration of the contradictory meanings of "war" and "peace," beginning with the ways in which, paradoxically, one term is supposed to engender its opposite. Inspired by sources as diverse as James Madison, Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, and Judith Butler, the author tries to imagine what it would take to break the war-and-peace continuum.

Keywords: peace, war, America

Bio: Giorgio Mariani is a Professor of American Literature at the "Sapienza" University of Rome, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy. He has served as President of the International American Studies Association (IASA), from 2011 to 2015. His work has concentrated on nineteenth-century American writers (Emerson, Melville, Stephen Crane, and others); on contemporary American Indian literature; on literary theory; on the literary and cinematic representation of war. He has published, edited, and co-edited several volumes, listed below. His essays and reviews have appeared in many journals, including *American Literary History*, *Studies in American Fiction*, *Fictions*, *RIAS*, *RSA Journal*, *Stephen Crane Studies*. *Nuovo Corrente*, *Zapruder*, *Leviathan*, *Letterature d'America*, *A.I.O.N.*, *Acoma*, *Studi Americani*. With Donatella Izzo he edits the "American Studies" series of the Sapienza UP, and with Donatella Izzo and Mauro Pala he edits the series "Le Balene" published by La Scuola di Pitagora. He is co-editor-in-chief with (Donatella Izzo and Stefano Rosso) of *Acoma. Rivista internazionale di studi nord-americani*. His books published in English include: *Waging War on War. Peacefighting in American Literature* (2015), *Post-tribal Epics: The Native American Novel between Tradition and Modernity* (1996), *Spectacular Narratives: Representations of Class and War in Stephen Crane and the American 1890s* (1992).

Giorgio Mariani
Sapienza
University of Rome
Italy

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PLAGUE, PESTILENCE, PANDEMIC

Keywords for a Cultural Epidemiology of the Present

Djelal Kadir
IASA Founding President
Pennsylvania State University
USA
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3927-3167

Intemperate times, historically, have sought to salvage the present by redeeming the past. The present, especially the present in crisis, proves too amorphous and consuming. The future remains undefined and ungraspable. The past, then, becomes a default target—a desperate attempt to assuage the intemperance of the times by rehabilitating the past, or an illusion of it. The monumental and invariably iconic nature of the past leaves little recourse outside of iconoclasm for historic reformation, hence, the impulsive targeting of monuments, statues, place names, and sacred cows. Writers from Sophocles to Faulkner have perennially dramatized the fact that the past is never completed, no matter how much it is monumentalized. Nonetheless, those under duress in the crisis of the present, more often than not, fail to grasp the unfinished nature of the past, a past whose inexorable continuity they themselves embody.

The modern search for a lexicon that might be adequate to defining epochs of crisis dates from Raymond Williams' ground breaking work in cultural studies. Originally intended as appendix to his *Culture and Society 1780–1950* (Chatto and Windus 1958), Williams' *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* was published nearly two decades later (Croom Helm 1976). Williams was keenly aware that contextual historicization, especially at critical junctures when history itself emerges as an object of contention,

has been key to historical narrative since the Greek Herodotus (c. 484–c. 425 BC) in the fifth-century and his Chinese counterpart, Sima Qian (c. 145–c. 86 BC), in the second century BC. Both considered "founders" of historiography in their respective cultures, they instructed, by example, stressing adherence to observable specificity, what the ancient Greek dubbed "autopsis" ("I have seen"). In times of political crises their example and counsel become critical in the lexicon of cultural diagnosis and historical narrative. The particular nature of the present and its manifest symptoms call for a lexicon beyond received notions and existent vocabulary. The list of keywords presented below are cast for the specific conditions of the current historical moment.

Any redeeming of intemperate times proves an exercise in breakage, as iconoclasm suggests. Salvaging becomes a form of catastrophe re-creation whose objects of catastrophic mayhem are also the very subjects of the past's embodiment, that is, the very iconoclasts, or catastrophists, themselves. The ensuing destruction invariably proves to be forms of self-destruction, a process that finds its accelerant, or booster, in times of crises such as plagues, epidemics, war, and cataclysm. These are events that are most conducive to the paroxysms of historic flailing for self-redemption from what is perceived as the scourge of the past and its history. It is all done in the name of the future, an undefinable hypothesis that might lie beyond the abyss that is the intemperate present.

The present, suspended over that abyss between a problematic past and an uncertain future, has a sense of its own vulnerability, a sense that exacerbates the anxiety of the moment. Equally anxious are the seemingly spontaneous iconoclastic acts of inspirational fervor such as toppling statues and other monumental symbols, as well as systematic aspirational endeavors such as post-World-War-II Germany's self-remediation referred to as *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* ("working-off-the-past"). The first two decades of the twenty-first century have proved an inexorable intensification of such anxious predicaments. The threshold into the third decade of the century proves to be a critical breaking point exacerbated by the convergence of viral plague, the pestilence of political corruption, interminable war, and the virulence of global mayhem. The result of this confluence turns the pandemic

Djelal Kadir
IASA Founding President
Pennsylvania State University
USA

of the present into pandemonium. As with other epochs in crisis, then, the historical present is marked by violence, mendacity, and confusion.

PLAGUE AND IMPERIAL IMPLOSION

There are chronic maladies that become acute in a time of epidemics. We have early diagnoses of these conditions in Hippocrates' *Epidemics*, Bk.3, and in Galen's prolific opus, chiefly in his *Methodus Medendi.* Diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis in the 5th-century B.C. practice of Hippocrates and in the practice of his Greco-Roman successor, Galen, six centuries later in 166 AD, are symptom-based. They sought a medical practice founded on the natural-material conditions of the time, rather than on the supernatural and on divine intervention. *Epidemic*, as the etymology of the term avers, is what befalls a people (*epi* "upon" + *demos* "people"). Hippocrates and Galen sought to shift the explanation of what comes upon, or over, a society from the mystery of unknowable causes of supernatural origins. Those explanations invariably fell under the jurisdiction of religion and religious institutions.

Attempts to understand the causes or origin of epidemics have historically run up against the domain of religious authority. This has been true in the case of traditional, "pre-scientific" societies, and, *mutatis mutandis*, continues to be the case in our modern "scientific era." Notable in this regard at the epicenter of the latest pandemic during the Trump administration was the conferral of oversight for the government task force on this latest pandemic to an evangelical fundamentalist Christian, the vice president of the USA, under the aegis of the US president's son-in-law, an adherent to the orthodoxy of his own religious confession. The president himself demonstrated daily his aversion to science and his zealous devotion to the cult of Mammon. All made a point of flouting scientific norms and Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines in their personal lives, professional actions, and governmental policies.

As is the case with life in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, Hippocrates and Galen lived in intemperate times. Hippocrates (b. ca. 460 in Cos, d. ca. 370 BC near Thessaly) lived through the Plague of Athens of 430–426 BC that killed one third

of the population of that city-state. The ravages of the epidemic were not insignificant in the outcome of the Peloponnesian War, with Athens' capitulation to Sparta in 404 BC. Hippocrates' book on epidemiology, *Epidemics,* Book 3, dates from ca. 410 BC and consists of case studies focused on the disease itself rather than on the patient. Hippocrates sought to understand the nature of the disease. His stated aim was to demystify the origin of illness by seeking physical, as opposed to divine causes. In his book on epilepsy, *On the Sacred Disease*, he writes: "Men regard its nature and cause as divine from ignorance and wonder […]" (Hippocrates).

Claudius Galenus (Greek-Roman, b. 130 AD in Pergamon–d. 210 in Rome) was the personal physician of Roman emperors Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (starting in 169) and of his son and successor Commodus (as of 180). The Antonine Plague, also referred to as the Galen Plague, 166–180 AD, because it was chronicled by Galen in his treatise *Methodus Medendi* [methods of caring/healing/curing], was truly a pandemic that killed an estimated five million people and affected the two major empires at the time: Rome and Han China. Its origin is still a matter of speculation and mutual recrimination. But, like the Plague of Athens in 430 BC that changed the history of that city-state, the second-century AD plague altered the history of Rome and of China.

The Emperor Marcus Aurelius, a Stoic philosopher, wrote his *Meditations* on the basis of daily observations. He noted at one point, with a perspectival acumen centuries ahead of its time, "Everything we hear is an opinion, not a fact. Everything we see is a perspective, not the truth." (Aurelius, "Truth") In our time, that complex epistemological insight becomes perverted into the shrill shibboleth of "fake news," if the perceived reality does not accord with one's own convictions. In Book 9, section 2 of his *Meditations* he gives us a glimpse into the political turmoil he witnessed. There, Marcus Aurelius laments that even the pestilence that plagues the empire is less deadly than the falsehood, corruption, evil behavior, and lack of understanding that he witnesses:

> A wiser man's part had been to go away from men without tasting falsehood, hypocrisy, luxury, and pride; a second-best course is to breathe your last filled at least with distaste for these things. Or is it your choice to sit down with wickedness and does not your experience even yet per-

Djelal Kadir
IASA Founding President
Pennsylvania State University
USA

suade you to flee from the plague? For corruption of understanding is much more a plague than such a distemper and change of this environing atmosphere; for this is a plague to animals, as animate beings, that is a plague to men, as human beings. (Aurelius, *Meditations*)

Marcus Aurelius was destined to endure the political "wickedness" he describes for another decade and a half, until his demise in 180 AD, likely from the plague that was given his name. Like Thucydides (c. 460–c. 400 BC), a victim of the Plague of Athens who survived to chronicle it, Marcus Aurelius sees the pandemic through the double lens of what he terms "the pestilence" itself and the plague of social disintegration and human corruption. Thucydides, considered the "father of scientific history," had pointed to this duality six centuries earlier, noting the breakdown of law, religious piety, and social order as a correlative of the plague. He sought to apply the Hippocratic method of chronicling physical symptoms and conditions of human nature. He saw attribution of events to divine intervention as expedient and somehow always convenient and timely, as the times required. Significantly, Thucydides' *History* would be translated into English in 1628 by the political philosopher Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes' own 1651 opus, *Leviathan,* written during the English Civil War (1642–1651), reprised the prescient blueprint for the demise of democracy and the realization of the nightmare of Thucydides about the future of Athens as a democratic society. The premonition of the Athenian historian and the philosophical prognoses of his English translator resonate with eerie accuracy in the pandemic and pandemonium of the twenty-first century.

Whether in ancient Athens or Rome, as with our own historical present, what is most often obscured or elided is the origin of the plague. When a divine cause was to be sought, the impiety that angered the gods to inflict such disaster upon the city state or empire must have originated with the outsiders and non-believers within the city-state or empire. If the disasters were attributed to natural causes, they must have originated in contamination and contagion from outside the city or the empire. Thus, for the Athenians, it was an Ethiopian plague imported through Egypt and Libya; for the Romans, it was a Chinese plague

imported through the trade across the Indian Ocean. The Chinese, for their part, attributed the pandemic to contagion from Rome.

The legacy of these early medical practitioners skewed the practice of medicine in a salutary way, teaching us to pursue natural explanations for plagues and pandemics. But it has also guaranteed a primacy for the study of symptoms, rather than their causes, especially in times of catastrophic pestilence and epidemics. The science and practice of medicine, even today in what defines itself as the scientific age, continues to be symptom-centered. There are religious, political, and now, more than ever, economic reasons for the predominance of what turns out to be a non-causal epistemology. Despite the claim that Hippocratic practice focused on actual symptoms rather than supernatural dispensation, the study of symptoms continues to trump the investigation of their causes. As an oncologist confessed to me at one point, "there is no money in aetiology." In a wholly monetized society there is reason to fear for the cause, or causes, and the understanding of their origin. And there could well be certain disincentive for their eradication.

Like Thucydides, Marcus Aurelius perceived the redoubled vicissitudes of the pandemic that struck the Roman empire. He saw the "pestilence" as natural and medical. He considered what he termed "the plague" as symptom of social and political corruption. He considered both dangerously corrosive to human health and to the sanity of the body politic. What is salient in this redoubling of disease are the risks for those who would focus and, per chance, actually divulge, the causes of pestilence and plague. As a Stoic philosopher, Marcus Aurelius clearly understood the risks of aetiology, or the discovery of causes. Thucydides (460–400 BC) had paid dearly, in part, for broaching the origin of the Plague of Athens, what he claimed not to be doing, a retribution clouded by the official reason for his exile—his failure to save Amphipolis from falling during his admiralty. The epidemic coincided with what might be an early version of wars of choice, the Peloponnesian War launched by Athens against Sparta in the second year of the Plague. He had ample time to reflect further on that double predicament of pestilence and politics during his twenty-year exile that ensued. That was when Thucydides wrote the history we have

Djelal Kadir
IASA Founding President
Pennsylvania State University
USA

of that war-plagued era and plague-riddled wars that accelerated the downward spiral of the Athenian city-state. If the nuances of this counterpoint between symptom- and cause-based knowledge sound familiar in our current history of plague, pestilence, and perpetual war, there might well be good reason.

In the course of human history, as in the history of the present, what Marcus Aurelius calls human pestilence proves to be endemic. Medical plagues end up becoming epidemic and, now, more efficiently than ever, given humanity's enhanced mobility, burst into pandemic. And precedent demonstrates, as well, that the distance between epidemiological pandemic and sociopolitical pandemonium becomes easily traversed. Historically, then, the causes of these conditions have been obfuscated and elided. If the origin of the plague is deemed to be divine intervention, the priestly class has a vested interest in safeguarding itself against any liability by foreclosing on any investigation that might divulge the failure of religious institutions. If the causes are deemed to be natural, the political class obfuscates any understanding of those origins, lest they disclose the failure of governance. The duality of the divine and the natural takes on a third dimension now that human scientific technologies possess the capability to manufacture the elements of epidemic contagion. This is the anthropogenic cause, and the obfuscation of origin or possible cause, understandably, takes on added urgency. In a time of war, especially hybrid warfare that could deploy any conceivable combination of weaponry, including biological and viral agents, any possible scrutiny beyond symptoms broaches a very dangerous domain. The combination of natural and anthropogenic causes of pandemics has a long history, documentable as early as 1346 and the origins of the Bubonic Plague, commonly referred to as the Black Death (Wheelis 2002: 971–975). When human agency is implicated, aetiology is not only an inconvenience but a threat that must be neutralized, preemptively, if possible, by any means. Disclosure and understanding of cause and origin would threaten not only the technical artificers. In a time such as the present, when virology, contaminant and antiviral, operates on an industrial scale, the tracing and exposure of epidemic origins becomes a threat not just to governing institutions, but also alarming to the military

industrial complex entangled with those institutions, especially in a war-dependent economy.

Under natural and supernatural circumstances and what they might bode, placating the gods that visited the plagues by scapegoating the expendable people within the city-state or empire, or attributing contagion to exogenous infection, as the Athenians, Romans, and Chinese did, now seems like a rather anodyne reflex. In a manufactured pandemic the originators of anthropogenic pestilence would not be likely to find immunity from their own artifice. In their dire predicament they would be likely to seek impunity, or any self-exculpatory means in dealing with what is called blowback. Athens eventually buckled under the weight of its Plague and saw no alternative but to recognize the futility of its hubris in instigating the Peloponnesian War. And Rome rattled on in imminent expectation of the barbarians after the decimation of the second-century pandemic. The prospects at the end of the current pandemic might be no less foreboding. Humanity finds itself, once again, at a transformative juncture in which both elements of the common good are in peril, with the common slipping away from what might be good, and the good becoming progressively less common.

KEYWORDS FOR A SYMPTOMATIC TIME

Here, then, is a list of key terms that correspond to the constellation of maladies concurrent with this latest pandemic and its attendant socio-political pandemonium in the context of the United States of America. In an obvious nod to the American writer and Civil War veteran Ambrose Bierce,[1] this minimal lexicon has been dubbed "Kadir's Devil's Medical Dictionary" by my Oregonian neighbor and autodidact classicist Stephen John Cuffel. The incisive Bierce, who took the measure of America from his precarious perch as reporter for William Randolph Hearst's *The San Francisco Examiner,* disappeared into the fray of Pancho Villa's Mexican Revolution at the end of 1913, not long before America's entry into World War I, the war that would purportedly end all wars and that coincided in its last year with the Spanish flu pandemic

1. I refer to Bierce's *The Devil's Dictionary* (Bierce 1909–1912).

Djelal Kadir
IASA Founding President
Pennsylvania State University
USA

of 1918. He would resurface as the protagonist of *Gringo Viejo* (*The Old Gringo*), a best-selling novel by one of Mexico's most cosmopolitan writers, Carlos Fuentes (Fuentes 1985). These keywords, then, name discernible conditions that, as in earlier pandemics, are notable for their manifest symptoms and for the mystery of their unaccountable causes. As with any cultural epidemiology, the apparent symptoms of this latest pandemic take precedence over any possible discernment of their causes or of their origin.

The legacy of Hippocrates and Galen teaches us that a diagnosis must correspond to the symptoms of a malady as they manifest themselves in observable reality. These are terms that are made possible by the agglutinative potential of Greek and Latin that has traditionally furnished medical diagnoses a language for identification and description of maladies. The Greek "anthropos"—"man" and the Latin "vir"—"man" can translate each other, and, in that transcription, "virology" as "the study of man" and, by phonetic extension, the study of its homonym, the *vir* of the slimy *virus*, resonate enharmonically, lexically, historically, and politically. This language and keywords aim to correspond to the historical present, to the particular nature of the current pandemic and its distinct cultural manifestations in the USA, a lexicon for the real-time history of what could be called the *COVIDian Age*:

Agnosiosis: belligerent ignorance, incredulous disbelief (cynicism); unshakable self-conviction (righteousness). Agnotology syndrome: In political history, this condition manifests itself as virulent partisanship such as practices of the nineteenth-century US Know Nothing Party and its vestigial twenty-first-century avatars (Kadir 2017: 117–131). In intellectual history, the symptoms morph into what might be called "academiatosis," an affliction in a toxic bubble whose chronic manifestation is a reflexive self-differentiation through contrariness that perverts Coleridge's "suspension of disbelief," turning that poetic principle into righteous credo and assertive self-conviction. It is a systemic auto-immunity disorder manifested through such terms as swerve, turn, antithetical, pivot. Knowledge, and any truth, invariably, become destined to lie elsewhere and/or otherwise. The struggle between knowing what might be true and what might be

false results in abstention from knowledge and the possibility of knowing altogether. Knowledge, then, becomes relegated to the realm of conviction or of disbelief. In either case, knowledge finds itself derogated to the irresolvable zone between what might be true and what might in fact be the case, with neither truth nor fact having any purchase on what is known. Teaching and learning under these circumstances devolves to a pursuit of corroboration of whatever one happens to think is known or knowable, with any disconfirmation encountered in that pursuit deemed tendentious and invalid.[2]

Agoramania: exhibitionism, virtual and mediatic (Facebook, Instagram, Blog, Tweeter, TikTok, Meta). Compulsive self-display.

Aleatorisis: acute incidentalis summed up in "Whatever…" Uncontrollable epistemic contingency, a chaotic scramble of cause and effect. Social spasms, fitful ideologies, political paroxysms whose acute instability perpetually evade diagnosis and bedevil prognoses.

Anamania: obsessive repetition, memic iteration, relentless redundancy, narcissistic multiplication, spectral echo chamber, proliferation of "selfies," ricocheting identities in endless contest with time and in contention with morphing circumstances.

Autostasi: paralysis, freezing in place/time, cataleptic seizure as hedge against being found (or being found out), avoidance of necessary self-transformation, dread of conversation. Becoming one's own East German (DPRG) Stasi—the surveillance state and the internalization of the secret police. Servility to invisible and undefinable masters. Freezing in place, self-dumbing into silence. Defensive "playing possum," or as the Spanish idiomatic expression would have it, "hacerse el sueco" ("to pretend to be Swedish").

2. Cf. Henry David Thoreau's concept of "Useful Ignorance" in *Walking* (Thoreau 1851); see also Jacob Bronowski's reflection on absolute knowledge as deadly ignorance in his *Ascent of Man* (Bronowski 1975).

Djelal Kadir
IASA Founding President
Pennsylvania State University
USA

Self-imposed muteness. Cryogenic public discourse, political quietism—fertile ground of totalitarianism.[3]

Apeimeiosis: malady of virtual simulation, consensual attribution of reality to online simulacra; the expedient hyperbole of turning absence into presence, presenting the virtual in lieu of the actual. Telework, remote sensing, imaginary sentience, haptic embrace, online teaching, distant learning, telecast, simulcast, outcast. Virtual immunity. Vanishing community. Metaverse.

Apochondria: unremitting hypochondria, perpetually unwell, symptom of undefinable illness as default state; chronic malady as inevitable side effect of any treatment.

Catamorphia: progressive, acute de-formation with toxic effect; *identity* in entropy—a rampant id- without its -entity, eager for its target. Serial engendering of compromised autoimmunity. Eviscerated, denatured, inorganic, deracinated, "conventional" identities and forms. Counter-morphogenesis. Chick (self-)derision. Excarnation—ectoplasmic projection as avatar proliferation of self-multiplicity.

Chronalgia, or dischronia: panic time for "just-in-time" optimizers. Having transitioned from analogue to digital chronometrics, the actuaries have discovered that a stopped watch is no longer ever accurate, not even twice a day; the clock's face now a blank, an empty page on which any yearning for another time—past, present, or future—can inscribe its own always-timely, delusional narrative. In a time of crisis—epidemic, racial, economic, governmental—the public conversation becomes diverted from the actual, real-time present to the symbolic, other time of residual reality and its historical iconography. A shift of focus from the critical condition that is the legacy of chronic malady in the history of the present to history's monumental vestiges—statues, toponyms, ceremonial rituals, the flag, documentary and mythological narratives. Gaslighting the present with sanctities (icons) of the past.

Clastiospasmosis: uncontrollable social spasms of iconoclasm periodically targeting historical symbols, institutional names,

3. See Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Arend 1951: 77).

and national monuments. Rampant in times of utter futility. Often a desperate last resort against stone statues and street names that do not fight back.

Cyborgopathy: perpetual morphing into androids, humanoids, tweeters, telectronic automatons, memeable avatars, wireless Zoombies and wired Zoombinos, aggregates of algorithms, mutant faces on Facebook and FaceTime; cybernetic stubs;[4] haptic avatars; cingling singularity that shrink wraps Homo Sapiens leading to anesthetized character and homogenized personality. Neutered iterations, androgynous memes.

De-dementiachondria: relentless assertion of one's sanity, compulsive declaration of one's superior intelligence, obsessive claim to greater wisdom.

Deontolysis: no obligation, no responsibility, no liability, bleached out accountability; beyond duty; banished imputability; implosion into militarism's war-time default alibi of "cluster fuck"; deontology in crisis: from the golden rule to pragmatic tropism; from creditable virtue to virtual credit; from gold standard to malleable plastic—all duty-free.

Disfornia: decontextualized priapism, untimely projection, assertive miscue, shrill ejaculation—verbal and otherwise. Gendered (masculine, feminine, complicated) toxicity contaminating public body, space, and discourse with indeterminacy and undefinable (dis-)morphing. Manifested most often as defensive-aggressive shiver.

Efficiosis: techno-dystopia as Human Resources Department. The sharpest minds in charge of the Metaverse. Commodification of the efficiently managed that turns the efficient managers into instrumental commodity. See cyborgopathy, above.

Elefteriasis: malignant freedom, individual liberty as purely instrumental solecism, personal sovereignty as everyone for him/her/it self, Hobbsian uni-verse or "state of nature"; university as autistic dystopia. Resentful hope / ambivalent

4. For more information, see William Gibson's *Agency* (Gibson 2020).

Djelal Kadir
IASA Founding President
Pennsylvania State University
USA

expectation of a preemptively despised, but imminently awaited, Leviathan savior.

Endoektosis: when an organism, organ, organization, or nation turns the afflictions of its pathologies on itself; inside-out illness, imperial inversion, self-invasion, or imperial militancy turned on the empire itself, hegemonic aggression inflicted on other peoples of the world now self-directed.[5] Home as "the battle space," e.g., "Operation Diligent Valor" in Portland, OR, 2020; "Operation Legend" (in other US cities). "Proactive policing"—homeland invasion and preemptive occupation by Homeland Security militias. Regime change come home: sanction, siege, subversion, sabotage of inconvenient election outcomes. Yet another instance of national self-unmasking (see *Prosopopathy*, below.). Shakeup at Pentagon, purge of top civilian leadership, altering of military chain of command, elevating Special Operations Command to par with Army, Navy, and Air Force (pro forma first step for military coup, "color revolutions"—Bolivia, Honduras, Brazil, Venezuela, Egypt, Georgia, Ukraine—and "civil" wars—Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, Yemen). 2020 presidential election: Trump's refusal to accept the outcome and concede, Lt. Col. (ret.) Michael Flynn's recommendation to declare martial law, suspend the constitution, and have military re-run the election—a reflexive response to election outcomes around the world the US didn't like and proceeded to do exactly what the army Lt. Col., the indicted, convicted, and pardoned National Security Council advisor Mr. Flynn recommended to Trump should occur at home what so often has been perpetrated abroad. Impunity brought home. Breaching of the Capital by Trump militants on 6 January 2021 as the congressional certification of 2020 presidential election results in a joint session of congress is underway. Postponement of the congressional session, suspension of the constitutional process, however temporary. Yet another unmasking, *gratia plena* to Mr. Trump, of what has been standard operating procedure

5. See O. Henry's "The Admiral," for the realm of Anchuria and the coinage "banana republic," in his *Cabbages and Kings* (O. Henry 1904).

abroad whenever the election outcomes in other nations prove unsuitable for the USA.

Epidemiosis: virulent ailment—sick not only with, but also of the epidemic. A convergence of disease and its symptoms in mutually reinforcing progression. A synergetic convergence and transition of the chronic and the critical from symptoms to syndrome. Anomie—public health and private illness, private health and public illness: insoluble conflict. Dissolution of consensus—political, discursive, scientific, ideological. The pathology of non-negotiable dissensus as meta-epidemic, e.g., the election of Congressional Speaker of the House, January 2023.

Facilitropathy: gradual easing of conscience; shifting from personal responsibility to self-absolution; leaving the caring for the vulnerable to institutionalization; at its most acute, a turn from empathy to apathy, from mindfulness to mindlessness. Shades of "goblin mode," not coincidentally, the 2022 "word of the year."

Factophoria: ecstatic attachment to facts, occupational factoid, devotional factotum, incurable ipso facto.

Financiosis: speculative monetary value as index of worth and as transactional criterion. Synonym for cryptophoria, or enraptured, hush-hush mock-money, most serviceable as campaign contribution and pol-purchase currency. Political culture as money laundering machine. Disclosure of FTX Cryptocurrency Company in 2023 as source of political contributions in bi-partisan munificence.

Genitaphoria: telegraphed as "it's complicated," trans-hysterical. Fluid gender as floating fulcrum—me first; me, me meme. Epistemic and cultural disembodiment. Transactional biology as social forum and political agon. Echoed anagram—Cis/Trans/Cistrans/Transcis.

Gerantofagia: opportunistic targeting and consumption of the elderly, especially the more vulnerable and the well-heeled. Standard operating procedure prevalent among elderly-care magnates, big pharma marketeers, insurance companies, and online scam artists.

Djelal Kadir
IASA Founding President
Pennsylvania State University
USA

Glossaphasia: multilingual speechlessness. Rebarbative babbling devoid of meaning, mediatic white noise, ghosted political discourse. Lexical anomie. Unsound silence. Mute scream. Deafness to reasoned, meaningful discourse.

Hypernoxia: reflexive impulse to give offense, to do harm, to cause injury; compulsive sadism; random cruelty; tactical violence for nefarious ends; political or military strategy in sectarian, national, and international provocation plots; harming for the sake of harming others; baiting offense to advantage.

Informapathy: information bulimia (from the Greek "bulimia," literally, "eating the bull"; figuratively, swallowing wholesale mis-/disinformation, "cooked," "spun," and "spiked"; the attendant side effects of such unsavory consumption that consumes one, in turn. A condition leading to Infomachia, or information war, with social media and news media as echo chambers and theaters of information war/production, from right wing QAnon to righteous Hasbara megaphones seeking to incorporate propaganda spun as "news" into mainstream discourse and political culture. "Fake news" becomes a pleonasm akin to "true religion."

Juristenia litigiosa: inordinate recourse to legal action; the quotidian as judgement day; judgmental predisposition; constant perception of self on trial; the world viewed as jury; perpetual self-indictment; confessed guilt as self-absolution.

Machiomania: war as obsession, as panacea, as reflexive default action, as perennial template of national history and cultural self-definition: war on poverty, war on drugs, war on terror, cold war, proxy war, culture wars, economic war, information wars (see *informapathy*, above).

Manicoflexia: hyper-flexing and disproportionate reaction; reflexive mania; defensive-aggressive automatic response. See triggeritis, below.

Mathemalgia: knowledge sickness—sick of what is known, sick of not knowing, diffuse epistemic pain felt but unknowable. Unreliable origin, sense, intent, motive, or authenticity of objects of knowledge. Whatever is to be known, from news to data, meta- and mega-data, packaged and marketed

on an industrial scale, more often than not for profit. Marketing and brand management as foremost specialties in all media and institutions—private, public, academic, civilian, and military.

Mendaciosis: obsessive-compulsive truth bending. Immersive fabulation. Improvisational reality construction. Expedient truth management, immune to actuality. Self-convinced, self-validating, self-serving pragmatism. The chronic penchant of political figures and institutional operatives to expediently overlook certain facts.

Metastatic ergolapsis: virulent jumping to conclusions; chronically precipitous "therefore"; conviction in the guise of rational outcome; naturalization of prejudice as logical judgement; enthymeme as wholesome and unassailable syllogism. Meme paraded as original, inevitable, and unique result.

Metromania: compulsive "bean counting"; obsessive calculation and measurement. Uncontrollable syndrome of statistical neurosis.

Mnemotropy: dis-remembering/dismembering, proactive and injunctive amnesia ("forget it!"); passive-aggressive memory spin ("who cares?"). Beyond entropy, re-collection as constantly emergent occasion yoked to unpredictable expediency as opportune disengagement, dissociation. Forms of chronic acedia—cognitive and performative—that become acute when recollection coincides with self-collection. A rich field for the work of anamnesiologists; a boundless storehouse and natural laboratory of what is being / has been forgotten, inadvertently or deliberately.

Monetasiosis: the relentless monetization of everything, everyone, everywhere. Monetary value, actuarial and virtual, as supreme and universally defining trait. See financiosis, above; optimania, below.

Optimania: Compulsive recalibration of everything (and everyone) for maximal pricing and profitability. Transformation of all management and administrative personnel into relentless value adjusters. Old snake oil in new cyber bottles—NFTs; private and iniquitous equities—FTX; haptic shakedown; com-

Djelal Kadir
IASA Founding President
Pennsylvania State University
USA

modification of and by untouchables, political and intimate. E.g., Gwyneth Paltrow's Goop Brand, 2020: "This Smells Like My Vagina Aroma" (instantly sold out), followed by "This Smells Like My Orgasm Aroma" (prime); Former President Donald Trump's superhero NFT cards of himself in heroic guises in December 2022 (sold out within 24 hours). See monetasiosis, above.

Orthomania: truth-obsessed; genuine obsession; obsessed truth.[6] "Veritas" (motto of Harvard University, dating from 1647), "Lux et veritas" (motto of Yale University, dating from 1701): foundational shading from absolute truth to shades of truth by the shadow of light. Obsessive fact checking. Facticity, truth brigades, factoids, factions, and factotums. End result in times of pestilence, viral and political: a shifting from shades of truth to ulterior motives hiding in the shadows, regimes and regiments of manic mendacity, aberrant lexes and weasel words, e.g., "truthy," "truthiness," "jew-ish" (one of plague-ridden-politics' unimpeachable Everyman Representative George Santos' self-characterizations)—language that subverts meaning and veracity through blatant stealth and bad faith (see prosopopathy, below).

Paranoiphobia: the fear of being fearful. A secondary dread in a world perceived as irreparably dreadful and inescapable.

Performania: "always on," histrionic, perpetual stand-in, anxious supernumerary; always "in the act" with no meaningful role. Improvident improvisation.

Postisis: "post-" sickness/ pre-posterous oscillation. Acute anxiety about what we are after, and about what/who might be after us. Proliferating tags and Post-its for bloggers and imposters. The end of (post-)history and the pursuit of historic ends.[7]

Precariatosis: chronic vulnerability, rampant precariat; acutely transmissible condition, highly infectious, incurable. Endemic

6. See Sherwood Anderson, "the grotesque" in his "Introduction" to *Winesburg Ohio* (Anderson 1947).

7. Ingmar Bergman's film *The Seventh Seal* features a scene in which a Squire speaks to the Knight on posteriors: "Remember, Sire, no matter which way you turn, your rump is always behind you" (Bergman 1957).

insecurity and industrialized security apparatuses, in accelerating inverse ratio. Security machinery efficiently productive of insecurity. Security loop–vicious circle.

Prosopopathy: face-off, defacing, and facial (mis-)recognition. Biometric carnivalization. Masked, unmasked, and masquerade–the trauma of masking, unmasking; weapon used as binomial of "conspiracy theory," deployed as prophylactic shield and preemptive conspiracy parading as unmasked self-disguise; guise, disguise; persona and impersonation. Explicit face-offs and implicit mass defacement (of self and of others). A mask eventually becomes the face, and the unmasking inevitably leaves one faceless (Spanish: "desenmascarado"/"descarado," i.e., "shameless"). Trumpism as dread paradigm of the unmasking of America in the eyes of the world. Exemplary manifestation of this effect is the case of Congressman George Santos, if indeed that is his real name, elected in November 2022 to the US House of Representatives from the third district of New York, a suburb of Long Island. See trumpotoxicosis, below.

Quiqumquaria: whoever / whomeverness; to whom it may concern. Indeterminate subject, unidentifiable object predicate, transitive action in search of a plausible target, in the absence of which the target is manufactured.

Realitosis: summed up in "really…?" and "no, really!"; slippery psycholepsis, or reality tv as the dinkum real. Too real to be true, too true to be real, reality is perpetually mooted. Alt- as paradigm and as template. Alt-reality as default position. Unreal substance as reality pretext. Pretense in the guise of impregnable and unimpeachable common sense. Denial and non-negotiable assertion detached from reality. Flight into Metaverse, aka Web3.

Resmoria: madness of/for things. Immaterial objectification, fungible commodification, rampant materialism. Reified dysphoria mirrored in ecstatic and uncontrollable euphoria.

Somatosis: anti-homeostasis, systemic disequilibrium, unstable body and tri-polar body politic in 4D resolution on compulsive public display: political culture consisting, symbiotically,

Djelal Kadir
IASA Founding President
Pennsylvania State University
USA

of "the Deplorables," "the Depraved," and "the Deranged," broadcast, commented, and profitably hectored by "the Despicable" (corporate media, MSM, social media platforms, professional lobbyists, career sycophants).

Systematosis: succumbed to systems. The "modeling" paradigm, inescapable algorithms; endemic mayhem as systemic chaos—obsessive, perpetual disordering of the world into the next new world order.[8]

Triggeritis: locked and loaded and ever-ready to be triggered, or turn into a trigger. Collective neurosis that can only see the world and its history from the barrel of a gun. Secondary symptom in a world, and world order, built and maintained by the gun; endemic and incurable condition of a perpetual war economy. See *manicoflexia*, above.

Trumpotoxicosis: airborne malady transmitted by psychotropic noxious gases, leading to a personality disorder of total self-absorption and blockage of capacity for human empathy. True to its etymology ("to trump" is a Scottish verb for passing odorous gas, "to fart"), the toxicity of these gaseous emanations lead to forms of psychosis that afflict the affected subject and are highly contagious to trailing sycophants and devout ideologues (e.g., Republican Party congressional representatives—126 members, or nearly two thirds of the Congressional House Republicans, as well as 18 Republican state attorneys general from around the country join Texas State appeal to the Supreme Court on overturning 2020 presidential election results). The Trump phenomenon is no anomaly. It is of greatest danger to the nation and to the world not because of the lies it might perpetrate, but because of the truths it unmasks (see prosopopathy, above) and symptomatically represents—inconvenient truths earnestly proclaimed to the world with unabashed, righteous, viral, venal, and vitriolic candor. Trumpotoxicosis is especially virulent in times of epidemic; pestilence is its natural environment.

8. On "system" as the quickest way to becoming foolish, see John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon* (Salisbury 1159).

Ubiqumquariatosis: whereverness, rampant dislocation. Unmoored flotsam condition. Geo-spatial indeterminacy, geopolitical disorientation. Beyond the last frontier. Shifting and shifty borders. Undefinable ubiquity, voracious territoriality. Inescapable confinement in a loop of self-absorbed Meta- world.

Ubistrophia: pervasive spinning, ceaseless turning, being neither here nor there. No there there, no here here. The endless "turn"; the pointless pivot. Common isolation, precise solitude, solipsistic swerve, cutting-edge loneliness, blunt/blank togetherness. Vapid inanity of marketable common cause—"we are in this together."

Vaxxolimia nervosa: compulsive hunger for and hoarding of antiviral vaccines by affluent institutions and nations that would rather over-acquire and discard expired lifesaving doses of vaccine than share them with the rest of the world.

Veritosis (see *orthomania*, above).

Virophilia: an unnatural attachment to pandemic plague as expedient instrument of political grandstanding, defended with virile élan, or as opportune platform for paranoid rejection of common cause against a common danger. In either case, a more contagious viral condition than the virus itself. Often reduced in the transgendered vulgate to "toxic masculinity."

Abstract: The COVID-19 era presents yet another instance of the symbiosis between viral pandemic and pestilence in the political culture of the moment. Through a brief reprise of plague-riven history dating from antiquity, this article explores the symptoms of the current epidemic and offers a number of keywords that characterize the current maladies as viral plague and as political pestilence. The coupling of the viral and the political dates from the third century Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius who took the measure of the plague and political corruption of Rome during his reign. The lexical compendium offered here could constitute a study in cultural epidemiology that defines the exhibited symptoms of pandemic disease in its concurrent medical and sociocultural manifestations.

Keywords: aetiology, anthropogenic, viral, catastrophe, iconoclasm, epidemic, pandemic, pandemonium, symptomatology, contagion, war, truth, prevarication, facticity, immunity, impunity, simulation, dissimulation, haptic, chronic, algorithms, implosion, syndrome, mask, masquerade

Djelal Kadir
IASA Founding President
Pennsylvania State University
USA

Bio: Djelal Kadir is the Edwin Erle Sparks Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature at Pennsylvania State University. He is the Founding President of the International American Studies Association and former Editor of the international quarterly *World Literature Today*. His authored books include: *Juan Carlos Onetti* (Twayne, 1977), *Columbus and the Ends of the Earth: Europe's Prophetic Rhetoric as Conquering Ideology* (University of California Press, 1992); *The Other Writing: Postcolonial Essays in Latin America's Writing Culture* (Purdue UP, 1993); *Questing Fictions: Latin America's Family Romance* (University of Minnesota Press, 1987) and *Memos from the Besieged City: Lifelines for Cultural Sustainability* (Stanford UP, 2011). He is the Co-editor of the *Routledge Companion to World Literature* (2012; 2023), the Co-Editor of *Literary Cultures of Latin America: A Comparative History* (Oxford UP, 2004), of the *Longman Anthology of World Literature* (2004), and Co-Editor of *Literature: A World History* (Wiley Blackwell, 2022). He has authored over one hundred articles and has developed and taught a number of graduate seminars ranging from classical literary theory of Greek and Latin antiquity to colonial and contemporary American literatures to comparative modernisms and postmodernism. He is a founding Board member of Synapsis: The European School of Comparative Studies, a Senior Fellow and Executive Board member of The Stockholm Collegium of World Literary History, and a member of the founding Board and teaching faculty of the Institute for World Literature (Harvard University).

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CONTEXTUALIZING ANTI-VACCINATION MOVEMENTS

The COVID-19 Trauma and the Biomedicalization Crisis in the United States

Tomasz Burzyński
Inst.of Literary Studies
University of Silesia
in Katowice
Poland
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3780-0020

INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, the system of healthcare in the United States is an issue that provokes numerous disputes and overtly political tensions. On the one hand, the USA is a global leader in the biotechnology and pharmaceutical industry, investing billions in the development of the most sophisticated 'hospital-industrial complex,' to quote Wendy Simond's (2017) apt term. On the other hand, the American healthcare system is inefficient in terms of its social inclusiveness and the general affordability of high-tech solutions in biomedicine. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss these problems in greater detail, our argument begins with an insight into a process that paved the way for the current character of the American healthcare system. The process of epidemiologic transition focuses our attention on the pivotal role of modernization processes in the prevalence of certain types of diseases and the overall character of challenges that a healthcare system faces (Omran 1971). The notion has been coined to conceptualize a developmental leap from societies in which infectious and parasitic diseases are the main sources of health-related concerns to societies whose major source of health anxieties is the increasing prevalence of chronic and degenerative diseases, such as cancer, cardiovascular diseases, or autoinflammatory diseases.

Post-transition healthcare systems are organized to effectively cope with chronic medical conditions, which requires the use

of sophisticated biotechnology, life-long treatment schemes, society-wide disease prevention plans, and the popularization of health-related issues via mass media. At the same time, processes of epidemiologic transition eradicate many imminent dangers (e.g., poor sanitary conditions, reoccurring epidemics) and focus individuals' attention on imperceptible health risk factors (e.g., cancerogenic substances in food, maladaptive gene mutations). As a consequence, post-transition societies are susceptible to processes of biomedicalization; that is, the extensive colonization by biomedicine and biotechnology. Processes of (bio)medicalization are socially and culturally productive in a way that they promote, to refer to Neil Postman's (1993) terminology, a kind of 'technopoly' in which the discourse of biomedicine fosters new forms of normative regulation and individual and collective identities, thusly redefining communities in overtly biological terms.

This article aims to discuss the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of structural tensions implicit in the system of biomedicalized healthcare in the United States. Rather than focusing on the political polarization of American society in the wake of the outbreak, the paper sees the pandemic as a trigger of previously latent tensions which now threaten to destabilize the discourse and the organization of healthcare in the United States. The salient role in this process is attributed to anti-vaccination movements that abuse the pandemic situation to subvert the principles of biomedicalization.

THE BIOMEDICALIZED STATES

The process of epidemiologic transition defined our understanding of biomedicine as a science and practice of mass-scale prevention. In this sense, biomedicine is not only interested in managing present medical conditions but also in the eradication of health risk factors due to life-long disease prevention and universal education. Biomedicine has become an instrument of social engineering, delineating expected (i.e., normal, healthy, rational, or politically correct) trajectories of human existence.

This regulating character of biomedicine became an important theme of American sociological perspectives in the sociology of health and illness (Weitz 2007). Since Talcott Parsons's 1951 for-

Tomasz Burzyński
Inst.of Literary Studies
University of Silesia
in Katowice
Poland

mative study of the 'sick role,' American sociologists have invested considerable resources in regarding diseased or maladaptive states of the human body in terms of one's inability to conform to social or economic expectations. Medical conditions, consequently, were seen from a perspective of society's functional integration in which the individual sickness is also a matter of throwing the entire social system out of balance. Predictably, the role of biomedicine was to restore balance by intervening in the patient's corporeality.

The functionalist perspective reverberates in contemporary American sociology as two interrelated theoretical systems postulated to conceptualize biomedicine in terms of a mechanism that regulates, redefines, and reorganizes individual identities, social interactions, and institutions. The theories of medicalization (Conrad 2007) and biomedicalization (Clarke, et.al. 2010) have been devised to provide a coherent sociological narrative of the US 'hospital land;' that is, the network of practices and institutions permeated by biomedical policy and the economy of health and illness: "Hospital Land is an alternate universe within the world of the living, focused on the bodily problems that interrupt and that can, ultimately, end life. In Hospital Land, sickness never ends" (Simonds 2017: 15).

Traditional sociologies teach us that human societies regulate themselves by developing axiological and normative systems. It is a correlation of values (i.e. socially legitimate objectives) and norms (i.e. socially legitimate means of achievement) that prevents individuals from disorientation and stops collectivities from disintegrating. The idea of medicalization points to biomedicine as a new agent of social control and axio-normative regulation: "'Medicalization' describes a process by which nonmedical problems become defined and treated as medical problems, usually in terms of illness and disorders" (Conrad 2007: 4). The theory of medicalization sees biomedicine as an agent of control that delineates spheres of normality and abnormality in all walks of social life by referring to physical maladies or dysfunctions. Consequently, biomedicine claims its jurisdiction over traditionally non-medical domains of social life, becoming a universal remedy for personal or social ills, a means that may potentially substitute education, upbringing, or family-related considerations.

Though it pays its intellectual debts to Conrad's formative insight, the theory of biomedicalization goes beyond the aforementioned regulative function and emphasizes the transformation of social practices, social relations, identity patterns, public perceptions, and social structures by the extensive penetration of biomedical knowledge and their subsequent dissemination by the digital mass media:

> The crux of biomedicalization theory is that biomedicine broadly conceived is being transformed from the inside out by densely elaborating technoscientific interventions and the coproduced social arrangements that allow their implementation. These include computer and information sciences as well as all the biosciences and technologies such as molecular biology, genetics, genomics, biotechnology, pharmacogenomics, nanotechnologies, and medical technologies including those of visualization. Along with our growing and largely individualized responsibilities for our biological /somatic citizenship [...], these technosciences both allow and provoke new kinds of interventions in health, illness, healing, the organization of medical care, and ultimately how we think about and live 'life itself.' (Clarke and Shim 2011: 177)

Medical practices, clinical research, patient identity, health risk management, and the formation of medicine-related knowledge in wider public are now thoroughly transformed by the massive use of technoscientific means, chief among which are genetic biotechnologies, advanced technologies for diagnostic imaging, and the use of computer systems for gathering and manipulating with statistical data concerning the population's wellbeing. As a result, the aforementioned factors contribute to the invention of new diagnostic categories, innovative insights into acute and chronic diseases, and the intensification of technological intrusion into the sphere of everyday life choices.

BIOMEDICALIZATION AS INDIVIDUALIZATION

Technological and scientific inventions have fueled biomedicalization processes, opening new windows of opportunity for biomedicine to intervene in an individual's life and the public sphere. Advancements in medical diagnosis, best epitomized by the use of genetics and genomics, have shifted our attention from present medical conditions to the management of health risk factors: "In the biomedicalization era, the biosciences (including

Tomasz Burzyński
Inst.of Literary Studies
University of Silesia
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the new genomics) and the will to know and transform oneself, one's body and one's future are mutually constituted and co-produced, creating new conditions of possibility" (Clarke, et.al. 2009: 24). The narrative of risk, in turn, contributes to the transformation of individual identities which are now formed on the basis of individual susceptibility to given medical conditions. Consequently, everybody becomes a patient; even a potentially healthy individual is a 'patient-to-be;' namely, a person whose thoughts and actions are dominated by the unnerving presence of health risks that need to be assessed, diagnosed, and eventually managed. The discourse paves the way for the idea of individual responsibility, resourcefulness, and agency in the context of imminent and distant health risk factors:

> Since 1985, dramatic, largely technoscientific changes in the constitution, organization and practices of contemporary biomedicine have coalesced into the biomedicalization era, the second major transformation of American medicine [...]. Biomedicalization practices emphasize transformations largely through immediate high-tech interventions not only for treatment but increasingly also for health maintenance, enhancement and "optimization"—the growing sense of individual obligation or responsibility to literally "make the best" of oneself [...]. The pervasiveness of biomedicalization practices—their ubiquity in the USA today—has recently been described as "the biomedicalization of society" [...] (Clarke and Shim 2011: 180).

In a very American way, the narrative of self-optimization points towards the ideology of individualization understood as self-reliance, resourcefulness, and entrepreneurship. In this sense, the future-oriented nature of risk narratives lays great stress on the individual agency and its central role in coping with health-related contingencies. The narrative encourages us to treat our bodies as projects *in statu nascendi* that need to be managed and perfected upon. The body becomes a reflexive body-self; that is, a self-made construct experienced in the context of one's autobiography in terms of actions undertaken against facilitating (or constraining) the character of healthcare systems and related cultural repertoire of norms, values, discourses, or ideologies.

The self-reliant character of patienthood in the era of biomedicalization is underscored by the doctrine of 'patient empowerment.' The idea, as the World Health Organization's guidelines teach us,

is a medical equivalent of self-reliance which is defined as "a process through which people gain greater control over decisions and actions affecting their health" (WHO 1998). In this way, the clinical model of scientific biomedicine in which the patient is merely a 'sick body' gives way to the understanding that patients are agents who deploy their knowledge and skills in pursuit of health and wellbeing. In turn, medical professionals are in a position to encourage patient participation, for instance, by acknowledging the patient's experiences of disease and treatment.

TRAUMATIC EFFECT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic is a major traumatic event on a global scale. By severing interpersonal interactions, it shattered the social and cultural foundations of late modern societies by undermining well-entrenched patterns of cooperation and socialization based on unrestricted participation in public spaces. By disrupting global and regional supply chains, the pandemic crippled globalization processes, reverting them in certain areas. The outbreak is a major problem for the healthcare system around the world. The sheer increase in the number of new clinical cases and the concomitant growth in the number of patients with life-threatening complications were more than enough to paralyze even the most technologically sophisticated systems of healthcare. With 102,417,985 confirmed cases and 1,113,229 deaths, the USA was no exception to this rule (WHO 2023).

The outbreak was almost immediately followed by many negative consequences experienced in all aspects of American civic life, chief among which was the radical polarization of the affected population and its subsequent division into "diametrically opposed groups with similar in-group constraints" (Toelstende 2022: 279). It was symptomatic of the US society to observe the wholesale scale of post-outbreak polarization as the disrupting tendencies affected citizens, members of the legislative body, mass media, and even professional medical personnel:

> Americans have been divided in their perceptions of the government's response, confidence in scientists, and support for protective actions. For example, 83% of Republicans rate President Trump's response to COVID-19 as good or excellent, whereas only 18% of Democrats do so.

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in Katowice
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> In addition, the public is polarized on perceptions of scientists and actions to respond to the pandemic. While in 2019 Democrats had greater confidence than Republicans that both medical scientists and scientists in general would act in the best interests of the public, this difference dramatically widened in April 2020, especially with respect to medical scientists, as Democratic confidence increased while Republican confidence remained flat. With regard to protective actions, a minority of Republicans, compared to a majority of Democrats, felt that social distancing was helping a lot to slow the spread of coronavirus, that there was insufficient testing for coronavirus, and that more people needed to follow social distancing guidelines (Hart, Chinn, Soroka 2020: 680).

The sheer scope, intensity and magnitude of catastrophic consequences for individuals, collectivities, and institutions qualify the COVID-19 pandemic as an instance of *cultural trauma*. The notion suggests that sudden changes in social or natural environments jeopardize the taken-for-granted character of social reality, undermining one's sense of agency as well as trust vested in other individuals and institutions. Cultural trauma destabilizes axio-normative systems, leaving individuals disabled when it comes to managing their own lives, or outsourcing risks related to the future:

> The career of the concept of trauma as applied to society begins with the realization that change itself, irrespective of the domain it touches, the group it affects, and even irrespective of its content, may have adverse effects, bring shocks and wounds to the social and cultural tissue. The focus shifts from the critique of particular types of change to the disturbing, destructive, shocking effects of the change *per se*. [...] It is countered with the hypothesis that people put value on security, predictability, continuity, routines, and rituals of their lifeworld. (Sztompka 2004: 157)

The discourse of cultural trauma lays great stress on predictability and certitude understood as foundations of human ontological security (Giddens 1991). The experience of ontological security has structural and personal aspects. First, it relies on a natural belief that social life follows its well-established structural patterns, institutions are robust, and organizations are effective. The same applies to individuals who are perceived as trustworthy due to their willingness to observe norms, behavioral routines, or values. Hence, to cope with the reality outside, individuals are in a position to develop a sense of universal reliability, the general-

ized expectation that risks and contingencies of the environment could be, to use the phenomenological nomenclature, bracketed off.

The disruptive potential of the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the biomedicalized system of healthcare in the USA. As predicted by the theory of cultural trauma, the outbreak disturbed the system of American healthcare, revealing hidden structural tensions implicit in it. The tensions emerged from the confrontation between omnipresent biomedicalization processes (i.e., focus on patient's agency, life-long disease prevention, individualization of health, the role of health in mass media) and the post-outbreak intensification of risk-related sentiments in the American society; most notably, technophobia, dramatization and subsequent amplification of technological risks, and erosion of trust vested in the emancipatory powers of science.

In a way, the pandemic has merely amplified tensions and conflicts typical of late modern societies. These tensions are indicative of larger social processes, which have already been a matter of considerable debate (Giddens 1990; Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; Beck 1997; Beck 1999; Beck 2016; Furedi 2006; Furedi 2007), are best understood as 'break within modernity' (Beck 1992: 9); that is, a split in the model of modern society characterized as the increasing separation of its major institutional subsystems (i.e. biomedicine, science, education, technology) from the sphere of emotions, perceptions, and beliefs that fill up the contents of everyday social life.

ANTI-PUBLIC DISCOURSE AT WORK

When seen from a perspective of a biomedicalized society, a viable solution to a viral epidemic is the use of its biotechnological know-how and organizational superiority to introduce and manage a mass-scale immunization strategy with a concomitant deployment of preventive countermeasures (e.g., social distancing, sanitation of public spaces, or obligatory use of face masks). Biomedically and technologically, the pandemic is merely a managerial challenge: available resources should be defined, deployed, and administer to prevent excessive mortality and morbidity.

The pandemic, however, is also a socially traumatic experience that evokes fear, disorientation, and eventually distrust towards regulatory institutions, together with a sharp increase in skepti-

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cism towards the emancipatory powers of biomedicine. Predictably, the large-scale implementation of vaccination policies showed a large degree of social resistance, most notably the mobilization of antivaccination movements (Hotez 2022; Liao 2022). The social unrest involved bitter polarization of American society, the spread of anti-scientific discourse, the dissemination of misinformation, and the depletion of confidence in the legislative, executive, and judicial institutions. (Toelstende 2022).

It is a sociological commonplace to see large-scale social processes as powered by individual or collective forms of agency which function as vehicles of ideology and facilitators that convert individual resentments into organized social activism. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, anti-vaccination movements were disseminating misinformation and anti-vaccination sentiments, effectively channeling the public's dissatisfaction with the implemented methods of crisis management. In this interpretative context, anti-vaccination movements are inscribed in the confrontation taking place between dominant biomedicalization tendencies and public risk perceptions that cannot be effectively assimilated by the official system of biomedical rationality. The confrontation gestures toward the lack of fit between historically accumulated expectations of the effectiveness of modern healthcare systems and the actual experiences of health-related risks and other existential uncertainties that characterize individuals who live in the media-saturated reality of contemporary society.

Methodologically, the workings of anti-vaccination movements could be perceived as an incentive to redefine the role of voluntary associations in our understating of democracy in the United States. Traditionally, the role of collectivities, especially social movements and other grass-roots forms of social activism, has been underscored as a significant element of American political culture since Alexis de Tocqueville's (1998 [1840]) formative text *Democracy in America*. The constructive power of grass-roots activism is especially emphasized by the Tocquevillian tradition of 'civic republicanism' which "underscores the idea of citizenship as a mode of social agency within the context of pluralistic interests." (Dahlgren 2006: 269). This activist concept of citizenship reverberates in numerous conceptualizations of social capital under-

stood in terms of accumulated values and habits of cooperation, activism, reciprocity, and trust that facilitate taking coordinated activities (Fukuyama 1995; Putnam 2000). It is the virtue of social capital that fosters cooperation and communication in the world of dissimilar economic interests, political affiliations, and beliefs, effectively fostering the development of deliberative democracy.

The politically disruptive potential of grassroots activism has traditionally been discussed in relation to countercultural movements or overtly criminal associations, such as the mafia. Such organizations are hidden in the hinterlands of public life, supplying resources or services that could not be tolerated by the mainstream system of norms and values. The situation changes with the advancement in mass communication and the subsequent formation of the digital, all-inclusive public sphere whose networked nature knows no sense of marginalization. The internet network is a space where every agent is allowed to voice their perspective, regardless of its potentially disturbing or overtly destructive character. This, in turn, has facilitated the institutionalization of anti-public discourses in the mainstream of public life:

> Anti-public discourse [...] offers an explicit counter-hegemonic challenge to 'basic values of democratic culture'. [...] Such discourse in general understands itself as being engaged in an ideological war, expressed through its extreme hostility to democratic processes and institutions and their managerial 'elites' who are regarded not as democratic adversaries but as enemies to be vanquished. (Davis 2018: 4)

In our case, the challenge to the basic values of democratic culture is the decrease in the conversion of grass-root associations' propensity for collective action into the society-wide stock of public goods (e.g., generalized trust, reciprocity in pursuing common objectives, or public health).

BIOMEDICALIZATION CRISIS

Anti-vaccination movements deploy a specific type of anti-public discourse that could be characterized by abusing the pandemic circumstances to subvert biomedicalization processes. Paradoxically, the subversion is rendered possible by strict adherence to the idea of health individualization. In this way, anti-vaccination

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movements make use of the main assumption of biomedicalization (i.e., individualization of health and wellbeing) and use it as a missile against this very model of healthcare.

Individualism, agency, civil liberty, and democracy all seem to be at the heart of anti-vaccination rhetoric (Kata 2010; Hotez 2022; Liao 2022). Customarily, antivaccination movements reside "at the very center of wider public debates over the extent of government intervention in the private lives of citizens, the values of a liberal society, and the politics of class that were taking shape at a key moment in the reconfiguration of the meanings, forms, and boundaries of the nation and the polity" (Durbach 2005: 6). Predictably, immunization pressures are seen in terms of conspiracy theories as an act of violence committed by the state and sponsored by the Big Pharma. As in the case of other preventive measures available in the biomedicalized market of biotechnologies, anti-vaccination movements regard immunization as a matter of one's independent decision taken in the pursuit of health and well-being.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, disrupted this individualist perspective through the collectivization of health-related outcomes in which individual well-being is no longer a matter of personal undertakings but becomes a matter of collective risk-reduction practices. Best epitomized by the pro-vaccination metaphor of 'herd immunity,' the collectivization of health and illness shows that health is no longer an individual asset but becomes a public good. The lack of fit between bio-individualization and the policy of herd immunity gestures towards a specific 'lumpenliberal' attitude in which the pursuit of individual outcomes (i.e., personal liberty and individual agency) forgets that one's private success may depend on the collectively undertaken effort to sacrifice one's share of personal liberty for the sake of public good accumulation.

This type of 'lumpenliberalism' is reinforced by the abuse of the patient empowerment doctrine. Biomedicalization aims to construct a knowledgeable patient who deploys skills, information, and available biomedical technologies to actively struggle for health and well-being. By postulating the centrality of human experience to any form of health-related judgment and disseminating disbelief in official biomedical rationality, anti-vaccination

movements promote a deranged version of patient empowerment in which the individual is emancipated from any type of regulatory discourse. At the same time, anti-vaccination activists criticize traditional biomedicine as an institution that executes its own 'knowledge monopoly' delivering Big Pharma's totalitarian, logocentric message:

> Postmodernism does not accept one source of 'truth'—a philosophy adopted by the anti-vaccination movement. Vaccine objectors reject the 'facts' presented to persuade them towards vaccination; for the anti-vaccination movement, 'misinformation is simply their version of information. (Kata 2010: 1715)

The demise of the universal biomedical truth has also a structural aspect related to pathological networking processes within a social system of biomedicine. In this interpretative context, the focus is on the shared repertoire of discursive practices as well as communication channels used to disseminate textual and iconic (i.e. memes) messages among the community of vaccine objectors. It is the communication network whose nods comprise atomized internet oglers, celebrity influencers, self-made physicians, and self-appointed gurus who share fragmented bits and pieces of information which they all believe to be leaks from databases kept in top secret by Big Pharma corporations, insurance companies, and a plethora of state regulators. In a way, to borrow from David Riesman's (2001) sociological output, individuals taking part in such an antivaccination network come to create the 'lonely crowd' of contemporary healthcare systems, the aggregate which is atomized to such an extent that even non-human agents are able to operate amongst human users, causing additional disinformation and damage (Broniatowski, et. al. 2018).

IN PLACE OF CONCLUSIONS

The role of anti-vaccination movements in subverting the system of biomedicalization in the United States has shown that biomedicine is not only a combination of knowledge and technology. Biomedicine exists in the reality of social expectations, public perceptions, and well-entrenched habits. At the same time, professional knowledge coexists with discourses of culture: myths, urban

Tomasz Burzyński
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in Katowice
Poland

legends, and popular media representations. Perhaps, the biggest weakness of biomedicalization is its totalitarian character that aims to exert medical jurisdiction over non-medical spheres, often disdaining social and cultural considerations. The post-outbreak biomedicalization crisis calls for the socialization and acculturation of biomedicalization processes to postulate a conceptualization of biomedicine as a social system.

Understanding biomedicine in terms of a social system goes well beyond the standard definition of biomedicine as a discipline of medical science that seeks to implement biological, biochemical, and physiological principles and theories to broadly understood clinical practice. In the social system of biomedicine, economic resources, technology, scientific expertise, prestige and authority, trust, and reciprocity are all invested in and converted into the accumulation of values of human health and wellbeing. When perceived from a purely agential perspective, the social system of biomedicine is an all-inclusive entity as it comprises physicians and other healthcare professionals, patients and their families, insurance agents, and brokers, representatives of diversified government regulatory bodies, members of NGOs, authors writing on medical issues, as well as YouTubers, influencers, trendsetters, and other Internet gurus interested in producing and disseminating information of human health and wellbeing. When observed from a more systemic-structural perspective, the social system of biomedicine comprises diversified types of value commitments, ideologies, communication channels, norms, and resources that originate in a plethora of social environments, starting from the rigid hierarchy of institutional academy to the egalitarian networks of internet users.

Abstract The paper outlines a sociological perspective on the healthcare system in the United States from a perspective of biomedicalization processes. Methodologically, the argument pays its intellectual debts to the American tradition in the sociology of health and illness in which problems of healthcare and individual well-being are discussed in the functionalist context of axiological and normative regulation. Our article focuses on the biomedicalization crisis as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak is conceptualized as a trigger of structural tensions already implicit in the American system of biomedicalized healthcare. Rather than focusing on the political polarization of the US society in the wake of the outbreak, the paper sees the pan-

demic in terms of *cultural trauma* and related political conflicts which threaten to destabilize the discourse and organization of healthcare in the United States. The salient role in this process is attributed to anti-vaccination movements which abuse the pandemic situation to subvert the principles of biomedicalization. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, anti-vaccination movements are disseminating misinformation and anti-vaccination sentiments, effectively channeling the public's dissatisfaction with the implemented methods of crisis management and undermining the pivotal principles of biomedicalization.

Keywords: anti-vaccination movements, biomedicalization, COVID-19, risk, trauma.

Bio: Dr. Tomasz Burzyński, an academic at the University of Silesia in Katowice, holds Master's degrees in Psychology, Literary Studies, and Sociology from the same university. He earned his Doctoral degree in Humanities in 2009. His research spans cultural studies, sociology of risk, theories of trust, and discourses of health and illness. A lecturer in Sociology, Media Studies, and Cultural Studies, Burzyński has contributed significantly to academic literature, with notable publications in the field of cultural theory and risk management. His works include "Systemic Intertextuality: A Morphogenetic Perspective," co-authored works on the sociological aspects of automotive heritage, and studies on public management of technological risks, among others.

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Inst.of Literary Studies
University of Silesia
in Katowice
Poland

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PALE HORSE, PALE RIDER

A Modern Allegory of an Encounter with Death

Navdeep Kahol
Government College, Dera Bassi, Punjab
India
https://orcid.org/0009-0003-7490-2680

INTRODUCTION

Katherine Anne Porter's literary prowess, earning her the title of "a writer's writer" for her stylistic mastery, has consistently garnered critical acclaim. Darlene Unrue's seminal works, *Truth and Vision in Katherine Anne Porter's Fiction* (1985) and *Understanding Katherine Anne Porter* (1988), encapsulate this critical attention, linking Porter's life to her thematic explorations of regionalism, female characters, trauma, and modern age motifs, including alienation, paralysis, apocalypse, sexuality, war, and death. This article delves into the allegorical treatment of death in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, examining its rich tapestry of archetypal symbols, from Biblical motifs to Freudian figures, gaining renewed relevance amidst the COVID-19 pandemic's recontextualization of literature on disease and mortality.

The recent health crisis has prompted a retrospective analysis of historical pandemics. Notably, the Black Death (1348–1720) is estimated to have claimed 50 million lives. The 1918 Spanish flu, with recorded deaths of 20 million and actual figures likely higher, infected nearly half of the then-global population. Characterized by its high infection and mortality rates, the flu wreaked havoc before the advent of vaccines and antivirals in the 1940s. Compounded by a shortage of medical staff due to World War I, it escalated into a grave public health crisis. The pandemic's impact, often overshadowed by World War I narratives, remains under-

represented in historical accounts. Davis notes that the influenza's toll on soldiers was greater than combat-related fatalities, yet its significance is frequently diminished in war histories: "The history of World War I overshadows the history of the pandemic, and many histories of the war ignore or downplay the virus's impact on the war even though more soldiers died of influenza than combat wounds" (Davis 2011: 63).

Pale Horse, Pale Rider by Porter, a modernist writer, attempts to make sense of these twin tragedies of humankind continuously weighing one against the other in the narrative. "*Pale Horse, Pale Rider* connects the reader to the pandemic, and in contrast with historiography, it renders the story of the pandemic into aesthetic forms at the same time that it also documents the pandemic by recording one individual's personal experience" (Davis 2011: 62). The novel resonates with the elegiac (or mourning) spirit of the age—a dismal worldview and general barrenness of life signifying a spiritual vacuum, fragmentation of the mind and the consequent broken narrative structure. In articulating the concerns of her age, Porter is more in league with T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce who are the major precursors of Modernist literature. Porter greatly admired her contemporaries Woolf and Joyce, as stated in her interviews and their work bears many similarities to hers. But her materials can be traced to her Southern roots, family tradition and the maladies afflicting America. Porter never fails to show ownership and original technique while placing her characters in the American context. She deftly uses modernist tools to articulate her close encounter with death as her consciousness oscillates between sleep and wakefulness. Her extraordinary gift to perceive larger patterns in the affliction of mankind and her tragedy elevates *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* to the status of a modern allegory of man's journey from this world to the other world. *Pale Horse* is the third in the eponymous series of three novellas including *Old Mortality* and *Noon Wine*. Although the novellas exhibit continuity in theme and characters, *Pale Horse* is unique because of Porter's use of an introspective, psychological protagonist and beatific visions.

PORTER'S UNUSUAL LIFE AND OBSESSION WITH DEATH

A masterpiece of craftsmanship and modern narrative technique, this short novel offers a glimpse into Porter's extraordinary

Navdeep Kahol
Government College, Dera Bassi, Punjab India

life and the consequences of her near-death experience. Porter's obsession with death can be traced back to the "Miranda cycle," where, in one of the stories—"The Fig Tree"—the child protagonist, Miranda, invents her own burial ritual for a dead chick. Eversince, death, in its various aspects, is omnipresent in Porter's works. The young Miranda of the *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* dreams of her ancestral house where "too many ancestral bones are propped up on the mantelpieces" (Porter 1939: 180). Porter's close shave with death makes her particularly sensitive, and thereby also uniquely equipped to examine the mystery and rituals of death. The novel dives deep into her experience of making it through the influenza pandemic and World War I itself, thus rendering her vision relevant to the perceptions of the post-pandemic years.

The fear of the unknown illness, shortage of hospital beds, fever-induced hallucinations, phobia of the contagious plague and violence of World War I stayed as a repressed memory in Porter's mind until she moved to Basel in the 1930s. This painful memory of Porter's assumed a cosmic significance during her stay in the heart of Europe. According to Jewel Spears Brooker, Porter's stay at Basel was significant as she found ample Medieval and Reformation-time material to translate her nightmare into a narrative (Brooker 2009: 215). Basel itself stands for the coexistence of the past and the present, the Medieval and the modern. It inspired Porter to look back and reorient the events in her personal—and global—history into a larger, meaningful, pattern that led Porter to believe that only art and religion could save the world. Her novel *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* (first published in 1938), is a tragic, surreal, and striking portrayal of being faced with death during a tragic pandemic and a testimony to a painful period of American history that had already been scarred by the immense death and devastation of World War I.

WHAT IS MODERN IN LITERATURE?

Porter's short novel, demonstrably, employs a variety of devices from the "modernist toolset" to address human trauma. As is well known, modernism is a general term applied retrospectively to a wide range of experimental and avant-garde trends in literature and other art forms of the early 20th century. Mod-

ernism rejects the 19th-century literary tradition of a consensus between the author and the reader. The writer deliberately foils the expectations of the reader by adopting a variety of complex forms and styles. Modernist writing is predominantly cosmopolitan, and often expresses a sense of urban cultural dislocation, along with an awareness of (then still new) anthropological and psychological theories.

Analyzing *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, one should also bear in mind that throughout Modernism, techniques such as juxtaposition, multiple viewpoints, and fragmentary forms challenge readers to derive coherence in meaning. Porter's use of medieval symbols in her novel exemplifies T.S. Eliot's concept of the historical sense, which entails recognizing the interconnectedness of past and present literature. Eliot emphasizes the importance of this sensibility in writing, suggesting that "[…] the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order" (Eliot 1962: 294).

The consensus among scholars is that Modernism, which thrived in the early 20th century, reflects a cultural crisis that was both exhilarating and disconcerting. This period introduced new realms of human potential, challenging established methods of conceptualizing and assessing ideas. Modernism is distinguished by its experimental nature, particularly in form manipulation, and by an acknowledgment that knowledge is not definitive. The fiction of this era is characterized by its focus on consciousness, including both the subconscious and unconscious aspects of the human psyche. Hence the structure of external "objective" events […] is almost completely dissolved, in order to make room for introspection, analysis, reflection and reverie" (Lodge 1977: 45). Eliot's observation on Joyce's technique in "Ulysses," as referenced earlier, emphasizes the primacy of the *method* over the *material*, which may be ordinary. In the same vein, Porter juxtaposes modern psychology with medieval history to create a verbal equivalent of her experience of illness. The outcome is a brilliantly

Navdeep Kahol
Government College, Dera Bassi, Punjab India

synthesized paean to pain and human suffering. The above notwithstanding, she also succeeds in manipulating the modernist tools in the articulation of her near-death experience, interspersing it with memories of her traumatic childhood. This Porterian touch earns her a recognition for her distinct, experimental, style.

A RIDE THROUGH PAST AND PRESENT

The narrative traces Miranda's multi-layered, conscious and subconscious journey, as she goes through a crisis. Here the distinction between the past and the present is blurred, and the reader, too, embarks on an Odyssey of confusion and epiphany. The reader accompanies Miranda in her peregrinations leading to the final stage of truth, however painful it should turn out to be, which is possible because Porter deflects from the convention of realism by going beyond the details of her personal experience and focusing only on the intense moments of revelation. This enables her to put her experience into a larger context.

In the narrative, Miranda Gay, a bright yet prematurely disillusioned reporter at Denver's *Blue Mountain News*, is deeply attuned to global events, notably the concluding phase of World War I and the burgeoning influenza pandemic. Her world-weariness, a reflection of living through historical turmoil, finds a brief respite in her intense but fleeting romance with Adam Barclay, an army officer on extended leave, who will, eventually, have to resume his duties. The name "Adam" subtly foreshadows the fate of their relationship. Amidst their love, both Miranda and Adam are acutely conscious of the futility and despair underlying their connection, mirroring the broader existential desolation of their era. "There was only the wish to see him and the fear, the present threat, of not seeing him again; for every step they took towards each other seemed perilous, drawing them apart instead of together, as a swimmer in spite of his most determined strokes is yet drawn slowly backwards by the tide" (Porter 1939: 219). Engrossed in her routine amidst the wartime turmoil, Miranda navigates through her days, engaging in activities like promoting liberty bonds and visiting wounded soldiers. Yet, she remains oblivious to a more imminent threat–the looming influenza pandemic. Her discomfort and persistent headaches, precursors to the impending health

crisis, go unrecognized as harbingers of the real danger ahead. "Her heart," Porter writes, "was a stone lying upon her breast outside of her; her pulses lagged and paused, and she knew that something strange was going to happen […]" (Porter 1939: 179). From the very start, there is a sense of impending doom drawing closer. The narrative is marked by an atmosphere of apocalypse and intrigue, and the inconsequential nature of events reflecting the spirit of Modernism.

The narrative begins with a dream that Miranda is having while lying in her boarding house bed in Denver. In this instance, she seamlessly juxtaposes her childhood trauma and troubled present with the help of Biblical symbols. The narrative voice emphasizes, "Too many have died in this bed already, there are far too many ancestral bones propped up on the mantelpieces" (Porter 1939: 180). She sees herself dreaming in her childhood bed in her old ancestral home when she is awakened from the dream within a dream by Death on a grey horse, accompanied by the Devil. Miranda, however, refuses to go along with Death: she chooses Graylie, the pale and weak horse, who mirrors her own fragile state, to outrun both Death and the Devil. Jewel Spears Brooker observes,

> She [Porter] incorporated references to the Middle Ages and the Reformation and, within these, references to biblical archetypes. More specifically, she built into her narrative a running analogy to Dante's *Divine Comedy* and to two works by Dürer, the first—*The Knight, Death and the Devil*—focussed on the individual's journey through life, and the second—the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*—on the larger sweep of history. (Brooker 2009: 215)

Upon awakening, Miranda confronts the harsh realities of her current historical context. Yet, her dream (a motif, notably, akin to that in Dante's *Divine Comedy*), reflecting a preoccupation with death and echoes of her past, also foreshadows her impending challenges. As Brooker observes, "Porter signals her artistic intent by including in the dream within the dream an allusion to Dürer's engraving about the soul's progress from this world to the next" (Brooker 2009: 216), which ties it to a scene from *The Apocalypse of St. John*, thus further enriching the narrative's symbolic tapestry. Porter's medievalism becomes even more evident in Miranda's direct allusion to the pestilence when, while roam-

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Government College, Dera Bassi, Punjab India

ing the streets of Denver with Adam, she encounters a shocking number of funerals along the way. Commenting on the strange phenomenon, Miranda remarks: "It seems to be a plague, something out of the Middle Ages" (Porter 1939: 200). Fusing the past with the present by means of mythological narratives, Porter converts Miranda's personal journey, and implicitly her own experience, into an event of cosmic dimensions, which places her among the leading Modernists of her age.

Throughout the story, Miranda's past, present and future keep impinging on her subconsciousness. The novel unfolds as Miranda experiences four more illness-induced dreams and hallucinations. Porter aesthetically weaves all the threads into the narrative with the help of Miranda's dream visions, indicating Freudian influence. *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* thus bridges the consciousness of the individual with the nightmare of contemporary history:

> The modernist use of "stream of consciousness," with its reliance on Image association which was often supposed to be driven by the unconscious), is basic to all the arts. It aims at a greater fidelity to private psychological processes, often with the characteristics stressed by Bergson, concerning the flexibility of our experience of subjective time (dure´e) as opposed to public time. (Butler 2010: 51)

The modernist narrative aims to provide a textual equivalent to the stream of a fictional character's consciousness as if the reader is eavesdropping on the flow of conscious experience in the character's mind. This narrative technique mastered by T. S. Eliot, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf has a variety of stylistic forms. Katherine Anne Porter's narration bears a close resemblance to Joyce's *Dubliners* and Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, which is further confirmed by Jamie Colwell: "One of the most subtle reminders of Joyce's style in Katherine Anne Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* series exists in the powerful narrative voice. Both Porter and Joyce use the narrator to undermine character dialogue and seduce the reader to trust narration" (Colwell 2007: 14).

Katherine Anne Porter's mastery in "quoted-stream-of-consciousness" is evident in her writing. This technique artfully renders a character's internal monologue as silent inner speech, essentially a stream of verbalized thoughts, sometimes without the use of quotation marks. This approach seeks to replicate the natural,

unstructured flow of human thought, capturing the intimate and spontaneous nature of inner speech. It is a powerful tool that brings characters' silent self-dialogues to life, offering readers an unfiltered glimpse into their internal experiences. In *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, the writer uses interior monologue alternatively with the third-person narration and dialogue. Her quoted-stream-of-consciousness technique is perhaps best illustrated by a scene, in which Miranda visits a hospital and accidentally bumps into a soldier, who turns out to be as resentful of such visits as Miranda is:

> It is like turning a corner absorbed in your painful thoughts and meeting your state of mind embodied, face to face, she said. "My own feelings about this whole thing, made flesh. Never again will I come here, this is no sort of thing to be doing. This is disgusting," she told herself plainly. "Of course, I would pick him out," she thought, getting into the back seat of the car she came in, "serves me right, I know better." (Porter 1939: 193–194)

Even outside of her dreams, Miranda's engagement in an ongoing internal monologue is a key element of Porter's narrative. The novel's action springs from the protagonist's memories, imaginings, and visions, propelling the narrative through her consciousness in a non-linear and enigmatic manner. Amidst the engulfing chaos of war, which dominates her life and relationships, including with Adam, Miranda's internal struggles to resist the overwhelming frenzy are thus poignantly portrayed. The war has taken over every aspect of her life—her mind, her bond with Adam and the world around her.

The gong of war sets the apocalyptic tone of the novel. Miranda grudges having to pay dearly for the liberty bonds to help the cause of war, she sees herself raging against the highhandedness of war "pedlars," and it is only her encounters with her love that serve as brief respites in a broader human tragedy. Adam, prepared to go to war without questioning its rationale, without resentment, without revolt, is portrayed as an innocent "sacrificial lamb." He admits that he wouldn't be able to look himself in the face if he did not go to war, which renders the union of the protagonists, differing in their worldviews, impossible. The conflict's personal cost thus adds to the global toll, emphasizing the drama of the human condition.

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Through her protagonist's eyes, Porter lets the reader into a vast "wasteland." Miranda can read fear and suspicion in the expression of all the eyes around her, reinforcing her own angst. Whether embodied in the war or manifest in the flu, death haunts her constantly, and Miranda is overwhelmed by fatigue: "There's too much of everything in this world just now. I'd like to sit down here on the curb [...] and die, and never again see—I wish I could lose my memory and forget my own name... I wish—" (Porter 1939: 214). And soon enough, the unsettling premonition, her ominous dreams, finally assume shape when she gets infected with the Spanish flu.

The novel's climax is infused with a distinctly Modernist touch. Miranda, considered beyond hope, hovers in a liminal state of consciousness. Her mind's landscape, mirroring the narrative style, is fragmented and surreal, oscillating between delirium and clarity. Floating in the twilight zone, Miranda drowns in the whirlpools of delirium and hallucinations. As her condition deteriorates, she alternates between fever and chills. Fortunately, Adam is by her side, looking after her with tenderness and devotion. When he leaves to fetch medicine and food, Miranda, feverish, slips into a dream. She derives comfort from the sublime vision of the white peaks of the Rockies, and soon drifts into a warm jungle, where a wide tranquil river dispels her chills. A ship is moored near her bed; she runs over the gangplank and to the deck only to watch her own figure waving goodbye to herself. When Adam returns, Miranda suggests that they sing an old African American work song, "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," whose lyrics bemourn the loved ones, snatched by death one by one. Foreshadowing his own demise, Adam chants: "Pale horse, pale rider done taken my lover away," yet Miranda's assertion that Death always leaves one singer to mourn symbolizes her refusal to surrender. In the context of the scene, the song—alluding to St. John's apocalyptic vision—also epitomizes Everyman's journey, and by virtue of its symbolic charge, energizes questions about the essence of the human condition. Tired, Miranda falls asleep again, dreaming of an "angry dangerous wood full of inhuman concealed voices." A flight of arrows hits Adam in the heart and he falls in front of his lover. Soon enough, however, he rises again, unharmed and alive. This sequence of death and resurrec-

tion is repeated once more, and then, the when the third time comes, Miranda stands between her beloved and the volley of arrows to shield him.[1] The arrows go straight through her heart, piercing Adam's body. Strangely, Adam succumbs to the arrows this time while Miranda is still alive. Miranda wakes up from her dream in horror. Hysterically running about the room, she resists Adam's attempts to pacify her fears. Yet, in spite of all of his efforts, Miranda ends up in hospital.

In her fourth vision, Miranda lies in the hospital bed, surrounded by whiteness. White sheets, white curtains, white walls, and white-robed doctors—all serve to enhance the novel's symbolics of color. Porter's palette, dominated by pale, green, white, and gray, reflects her protagonist's changing states of mind. "What is this whiteness and silence but the absence of pain?" Miranda asks, suspended between life and death (Porter 1939: 247). In her liminal state, she watches another patient being taken away. Relapsing into a dream, Miranda experiences a vivid and haunting vision where an elderly man, pleading for mercy, is forcibly taken away by white-clad executioners. The man's hopeless struggle to shun death resonates with Miranda's own resistence; surrounded by whiteness, both refuse to willingly embark upon the journey towards the afterlife, a journey fraught with distress and agony. However, in her next dream vision Dr Hildesheim, treating her at the hospital, comes into the room carrying a naked infant writhing on the point of the bayonet—the stone white of the surroundings adding to the horror of violence. In the aftermath, Miranda succinctly describes her feelings, asserting that: "[t]he road to death is a long march beset with all evils, and the heart fails little by little at each new terror, the bones rebel at each step, the mind sets up its own bitter resistance […]." And yet, she finishes the sentence with a rhetorical question: "and to what end?" (Porter 1939: 249).

In her final dream, Miranda confronts death intimately, which experience questions the very possibility of her precarious journey back to life. Her brush with death challenges the conventional, inherited, notions of life and death—such as eternity or oblivion—

1. Fisher argues that in this vision Porter alludes to Saint Sebastian, a Christian martyr who had borne the assault of arrows and earned his recognition as the patron saint of all those affected by the plague (Fisher 2012: 128).

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with which she, and the whole humanity, grapples. Miranda comes to realize that "[o]blivion […] is a whirlpool of grey water turning upon itself for all eternity […]" while eternity itself "[…] is perhaps the distance to the farthest star" (Porter 1939: 251). She sees herself lying on a narrow ledge over a bottomless pit, leaning against a granite wall, her childhood dream of safety. Death is death, she feels, unlike granite walls, stars, and whirlpools, which are things. The narrative flows and ebbs along with Miranda's stream-of-consciousness, fusing one image with another, without any pause, without any rest. The protagonist, who has nearly descended to farthest bottom of life, shuns death when a "particle of her being," representing her stubborn will to live, grows into a radiance. The radiance curves into a rainbow—an apocalyptic symbol signifying the portal of a new life—beckoning to a bright landscape of sea and sand. Miranda enters the portal with "serene rapture," and soon finds herself among the living. Familiar faces give her peace, yet soon a vague apprehension disturbs her tranquillity. She has an uncanny feeling of a loss. "Where are the dead? We have forgotten the dead, oh, the dead, where are they?" (Porter 1939: 255). Miranda regains consciousness after the vision ends, and, having been administered medicine, wakes to the smell of death. Ironically, however, at the same time, the air at the hospital is filled with excited screams of people rejoicing the news of the Armistice that marks the end of the war. Overwhelmed by the odor of death, however, Miranda remains unaffected by the spirit of jubilation: having received a letter informing her of Adam's death due to influenza at the camp hospital, Miranda feels cheated. Far from jubilant, she comes to terms with being alive, but it is a shadow of a life that she cripples back into. She feels that her body has turned into a body of a monster, one in which she can never feel at home. She also realises that something in her has permanently transformed. No more war, no more plague, only the dazed silence that follows the ceasing of the heavy guns; noiseless houses with the shades drawn, empty streets, the dead cold light of tomorrow. Now there would be time for everything (Porter 1939: 264).

The novel's conclusion, while seemingly anticlimactic, signifies a profound moment of insight for Miranda, and by extension,

Porter, into the enigma of life and death. This realization enables Miranda to come to terms with her current state. Porter's own experience of alienation after recovering from influenza, which notably altered her appearance with silver tresses, reflects a deep personal transformation. In an interview with Barbara Thompson she acknowledged that the illness represented a pivotal division in her life, marking a distinct before and after, profoundly shaping her identity and perspective. "The plague of influenza […] simply divided my life, cut it across like that. So that everything before that was just getting ready, and after that, I was in some strange way altered" (Porter 1987: 85).

CONCLUSION

This study begins by setting the stage with the novel's autobiographical roots and its embodiment of modernist elements, followed by an insight into the author's narrative techniques and, on the basis of close reading of selected passages, also into the centrality of the existential themes of life and death. It establishes *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* as a notable modernist narrative, adeptly capturing the human experience of agony and trauma amidst death and disease. Utilizing a rich tapestry of symbolism, biblical references, and mythological elements, Porter transforms her personal confrontation with mortality into a profound exploration of life and death. The novel transcends its autobiographical confines, offering an allegorical journey through the thresholds of the otherworld. It extends beyond Porter's individual *story* to engage with the broader human *history*, reflecting on the profound impacts of wars and pandemics as seismic shocks, whose scale transforms a personal tragedy into the turning point in the growth of civilization. As a literary piece, *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* adeptly encapsulates the magnitude of global catastrophes, standing as an exceptional work in the canon of war and pandemic literature.

Navdeep Kahol
Government College, Dera Bassi, Punjab India

Abstract: The novella *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, authored by Katherine Anne Porter and published in 1939, is set against the backdrop of the 1918–1919 Spanish flu pandemic towards the end of World War I. It narrates the dual story of individual and societal trauma and survival amidst the pandemic, contributing to the cultural memory of that era in American history. The narrative draws heavily on autobiographical elements, with the protagonist Miranda's experiences closely reflecting Porter's own. As Miranda battles a life-threatening flu, her delirious mind traverses past, present, and future, blurring the boundaries between them. This paper examines Porter's employment of modernist techniques such as dreams, visions, archetypes, biblical allusions, and stream of consciousness to articulate Miranda's harrowing yet transformative passage through a liminal space between life and death. Porter's novelistic approach is distinctly modern in its exploration of mortality and the portrayal of Miranda's near-death experience, aligning her with modernist contemporaries like T. S. Eliot and James Joyce, who also eschewed traditional literary forms to depict the profound dislocations of their time. The enduring appeal of *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* lies in its rich symbolism and psychological depth in addressing themes of death and illness.

Keywords: Spanish flu, modernism, pandemic, symbolism, dream, death, war

Bio: Dr. Navdeep Kahol serves as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Government College in Dera Bassi, Punjab, India. Her research focuses on the life narratives of Middle Eastern Muslim women. In her 2022 book, *Beyond Harems and Veils*, Dr. Kahol challenges prevalent stereotypes surrounding Muslim women, offering insights into their contemporary self-representation. Additionally, she has authored two other works: a collection of poetry entitled *Seasons of Reflection* and *Tree Treasure of Chandigarh*, the latter being a collaborative effort exploring the avenue trees of Chandigarh, often referred to as the City Beautiful. Dr. Kahol's scholarly contributions include numerous papers published in international journals and as chapters in edited volumes. Prior to her academic career, she worked as a sub-editor for *The Tribune*, a leading daily newspaper.

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HUMAN BODY, EXISTENCE, AND DESIGN:

An Insight into Yellapragada SubbaRow's Philosophy

Avani Bhatnagar
Dyal Singh College
University of Delhi
India
https://orcid.org/0009-0000-7409-196X

INTRODUCTION

Fig. 1. Pablo Picasso, *Science and Charity*, 1897. Oil on canvas, 197 cm × 250 cm (78 in × 98.2 in). Reprinted by permission of Museu Picasso, Barcelona, Spain.

Pablo Picasso's masterpiece, "Science and Charity," was created during a tumultuous period marked by a cholera outbreak in his native Malaga, Spain. This work is notably one of three thematically linked paintings focusing on disease, a subject that held personal significance for Picasso, as his own sister succumbed to the illness in her infancy. The painting is a testament to his artistic response

to personal and communal tragedy, encapsulating both the sorrow of loss and the resilience in the face of widespread suffering.

The painting was conceived during an era when advancements in science were burgeoning, offering new hope in combating diseases. This period saw science emerging as a focal point of public and personal interest, a theme reflected in Picasso's work. The artist's personal anguish over the loss of his sister, a casualty of inadequate medical resources despite available treatments, is palpable. This experience, accentuated by the family's inability to afford a proper burial, profoundly influenced Picasso's artistic journey. His art became a medium for social commentary, as epitomized in a poignant quote from one of his later works: "At the end of the road death waits for everyone, even though the rich go in carriages and the poor on foot" (Katz and Khoshbin 2016).

In periods of crisis, artists often shift their focus to human struggles and emotions. Picasso's painting skillfully contrasts two figures: an authoritative, detached medical professional and a compassionate, empathetic nun. The doctor, absorbed in clinically assessing the patient's condition, represents the advancements and heightened status of medicine during an era with limited effective treatments. Conversely, the nun embodies emotional support and care. This juxtaposition highlights the essential role of medicine in enhancing human health and quality of life, and the deep-seated trust society places in medical intervention during health emergencies.

While the cholera outbreak at the end of the 19th century affected limited aread, during the COVID-19 pandemic the world grappled with a health crisis of an unprecedented scale. Medicine, historically humanity's bulwark against disease, was suddenly confronted with a novel and formidable challenge: the global outbreak of an unknown virus. The unexpected nature of this crisis stretched the capabilities of the medical industry, primarily functioning as a preventive measure, whose efficacy was under scrutiny. The virus's rapid mutation and poorly understood behavior resulted in widespread chaos in hospitals and homes alike, underscoring the criticality of the medical industry's response. In this era, dominated by the forces of finance and technology, a significant shift in societal reaction to such emergencies was

Avani Bhatnagar
Dyal Singh College
University of Delhi
India

observed, which in itself gave rise to diverse and complex crises. In India—but quite possibly in numerous other countries—some of the problems aggravating the situation could be summed up as follows:

- India, along with other nations, confronted the pandemic's challenges. It was noted that in an effort to alleviate public panic, there was a tendency to expedite medical research processes. This situation led to compromises in the rigorous standards typically upheld in medical research. The urgency to address the crisis at hand necessitated swift action, which impacted the depth and thoroughness of research protocols.
- The imposition of unrealistic deadlines by administrative bodies during the pandemic potentially weakened certain preventive measures. This pressure led to the pharmaceutical industry condensing the duration of their clinical trials. Such acceleration, while expediting product availability, also raised concerns about the thoroughness of the testing process. This situation was further complicated by the potential for increased profits, which may have influenced the industry's willingness to hasten these trials.
- During the pandemic, the market witnessed a surge in the sale of numerous unregulated supplements and products, marketed as "immunity boosters." However, the veracity of such claims remained unverifiable due to the absence of a standardized measure of immunity in modern medicine. This lack of a definitive benchmark to assess immunity levels rendered the efficacy of these products uncertain and open to question.
- The lack of stringent regulation over alternative medicines and health supplements became notable. This situation allowed some manufacturers and distributors to exploit consumer vulnerabilities, often making exaggerated health claims in media advertisements. These claims, lacking robust scientific validation, capitalized on the public's urgent desire for health protection and solutions, raising concerns about the ethicality and credibility of such marketing practices.

- The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) exercised unprecedented authority during the pandemic, granting 'restricted emergency use' authorization to several drugs for treating the disease. This marked the first instance of such powers being deployed. However, the scientific community has raised questions about the criteria used for these approvals. Critics have further voiced concerns regarding the persuasiveness of the manufacturers' data on the efficacy of these drugs, suggesting that the evidence presented to support their effectiveness remains unconvincing.
- In the clinical evaluation of Remdesivir, a broad-spectrum antiviral medication, some efficacy was observed in patients with moderate to severe forms of the disease. While there was a trend indicating potential reduction in mortality, this observation did not achieve statistical significance. These findings provided a basis for considering the use of Remdesivir in clinical settings, albeit with recognition of its marginal benefits and the consideration of its high cost.
- The deployment of the drug Remdesivir in clinical practice was carried out without the backing of a sufficient number of clinical trials, leading to its unrestricted use. Additionally, there have been reports suggesting the occurrence of illegal trading of this drug, highlighting the complexities and challenges faced in the distribution and regulation of pharmaceuticals during the pandemic.
- There were allegations that certain human clinical trials for COVID-19 treatments commenced even before the completion of requisite animal trials, a practice that contravenes numerous ethical standards. This deviation from established research protocols raised significant concerns regarding the safety and ethical implications of such accelerated clinical testing.

The COVID-19 pandemic inadvertently created a scenario where various industries capitalized on the crisis, driven by a relentless pursuit of technological advancement and financial gain, often at the expense of responsible action. This technological surge has mechanized our interactions with life, overshadowing the humane

Avani Bhatnagar
Dyal Singh College
University of Delhi
India

aspects of existence. Human experiences, once richly biological and personal, are now often reduced to mere medical encounters. Our empirical tools and methods in study and growth, while propelling development, risk detaching us from the fundamental, evolutionary essence of human life. The predominant focus on linear development and economic growth as benchmarks of national progress has led to a diminished emphasis on the humane side of living. Science, often perceived as a strictly objective discipline, ideally should blend scientific rigor with a sensitivity towards life's nuances, fostering a more compassionate and holistic approach to progress.

In his novel *Being Mortal*, Atul Gawande offers the readers an extensive exploration of human anatomy and of the complexities within medical sciences. Gawande critically examines the transformation of doctors into medical professionals who may perceive their patients more as cases than as individuals with lives. A significant focus of the book is on medicine's approach to aging and death, highlighting its limitations in situations where diseases are incurable. The author argues that in such scenarios, medical practices can sometimes veer into inhumanity, straying from the noble ideals of service traditionally associated with the profession. The book poignantly addresses the challenges of maintaining dignity for those nearing the end of life, emphasizing the responsibility of doctors in this sensitive process.

The advancement of modern medical science, while technologically empowering doctors, has also introduced a human disconnect in the practice. This paper seeks to advocate for a more empathetic healthcare system. It does so by exploring the life and work of Yellapragada SubbaRow, an Indian-born biochemist who studied and worked in the United States. The paper intends to illustrate the notable, almost romantic leaps he made in his field, reflected in an American author's tribute: "Yet because he lived, you may be alive and well today. Because he lived you may live longer" (Gupta 1998: 5). Exploring the intersections of science and humanism in SubbaRow's life, I attempt to reignite the 'romance of science' and foreground a more empathetic scientific outlook in medical practice.

The initial section of this essay, titled "Ethical Design," emphasizes the significance of ethics in both humanizing a discipline and enriching life. This part will explore the crucial role humane aspects play, adding a layer of depth to the rational and linear perspectives of life. It will particularly examine how Yellapragada SubbaRow's ethical stance was a vital element in rendering his life noteworthy, meriting a biographical record. In this section I delve into how SubbaRow crafted an ethical framework through his consciously sensitive choices, and the impact of these decisions on his professional and personal life.

The second section, "The Irrational Romantic," positions Yellapragada SubbaRow as a scientist whose romantic inclinations led him to significant contributions in biochemistry, driven by a collective concern for humanity. This section will focus on the romantic beliefs that shaped SubbaRow's scientific identity. It will explore his journey beyond the confines of narrow logic and reductionist boundaries, viewing the human body as an intricate system characterized by dynamic interactions and dependencies. This approach argues for a non-linear understanding of the human body, recognizing it as a complex interplay of mass and matter, necessitating a creative and holistic response to life.

THE ETHICAL DESIGN

John Heskett, in his work *Design: A Very Short Introduction*, posits that design embodies a fundamental aspect of the human condition, serving as a pivotal determinant of life's quality. He asserts, "one of the basic characteristics of what it is to be human, and an essential determinant of the quality of human life" (Heskett 2002: 2). The term "design," while frequently employed in a broad spectrum of contexts, transcends any singular definition. Heskett elucidates this notion by drawing an analogy to the word "love," stating, "it is rather like the word 'love', the meaning of which radically shifts depending upon who is using it, to whom it is applied, and in what context" (Heskett 2002: 3). This comparison highlights the fluidity and subjective interpretation inherent in the concept of design. With such a view in mind, my inquiry then extends to the specific nature of design as conceptualized by SubbaRow in his lifetime. An examination of his actions, when analyzed in a coherent man-

Avani Bhatnagar
Dyal Singh College
University of Delhi
India

ner, reveals the emergence of distinctive patterns, which have subsequently established certain standards that merit rigorous scrutiny, academic study, and practical application in life.

If one adopts the thesis that the concept of design, when viewed through an ethical and philosophical lens, transcends mere human expression, imbuing existence with a deeper, more nuanced dimension, they will also agree that lives that are guided by ethical principles inherently possess aesthetic significance, suggesting that the realm of design is intimately connected with moral and ethical considerations. Richard Eldridge, in his scholarly article "Aesthetics and Ethics," articulates this intersection by suggesting that both disciplines engage extensively in "various strategies for locating and identifying the relevant special facts that are tracked by judgements of value, pre-eminently judgements of beauty and artistic goodness, and judgements of duty and goodness of character" (Eldridge 2003: 722). This perspective prompts a reflective inquiry into the ethical decisions made by SubbaRow, and into how these choices intricately wove an aesthetic tapestry throughout the fabric of his life.

The essence of design, as argued here, is not confined to its tangible instruments or structural manifestations; rather, it represents a dynamic interplay between subjective human choices and cognitive processes, significantly enriching the aesthetic quality of life. This notion is explored in Robert Frost's poem "Design," where he delves into a meditation on the existential themes that bind the living world. Frost's vivid depiction of a "dimpled spider, fat and white" (Frost 2016: 207), ensconced upon a white heal-all and clasping a moth, serves as a metaphorical lens through which he examines life's complex patterns. Through these evocative images, Frost seeks to decipher the underlying "dark design"—be it the inevitability of death or the natural predation cycle—thereby endeavoring to uncover the interconnectedness of life's greater forces and the overarching philosophical design that governs existence. Frost observes:

> What brought the the kindred spider to that height,
> Then steered the white moth thither in the night?
> What but design of darkness to appall?—
> If design govern in the thing so small. (Frost 2016:207)

Here, the poet underscores the omnipresence of design, even in the minutiae of nature, suggesting a deliberate orchestration behind seemingly random events. This reflection sets the stage for a deeper exploration of Yellapragada SubbaRow's life choices, particularly his unwavering commitment to the collective advancement of scientific knowledge, prioritizing ethical implications and societal welfare over personal or commercial gain. His journey from an initial curiosity about the divine and its connection to humanity to a more profound ethical responsibility towards his fellow beings marks a significant evolution in his worldview. This transition underscores a shift from a purely speculative inquiry to a more actionable, ethically driven approach to science and life. Sikharam Prasanna Kumara Gupta, in his biographical account of SubbaRow, delves into this transformation, critically assessing the decisions and motivations that guided the latter's contributions to science and humanity. Gupta's analysis thus extends beyond biography, seeking not only to chronicle SubbaRow's achievements but also to understand the ethical framework within which he operated, thereby offering insights into the complex interplay between personal beliefs, scientific inquiry, and ethical responsibility. Gupta opens his insights into SubbaRow's philosophy by asking several fundamental questions:

> What did he want to get out of life and to what end should he devote his life? What should be, as he put it, the "prime" motive of his life? The political emancipation of his people, the treatment of the sick, the acquisition of the highest knowledge to share it with fellow beings? But should not one have a thought for oneself? How about making millions like Henry Ford? Why not just marry a nice girl, have no children and lead a peaceful contented life? (Gupta 1998: 15)

The journey of life, replete with its manifold dilemmas, necessitates that individuals navigate through a labyrinth of choices. Which road one takes is of primary importance. SubbaRow "took the one less travelled by / and that has made all the difference" (Frost 2016: 133).

For instance, in examining the professional dynamics between Yellapragada SubbaRow and Lederle Laboratories, a nuanced understanding emerges, revealing a complex interplay between the biochemist's altruistic aspirations and the commercial imperatives of the pharmaceutical industry. Despite maintain-

Avani Bhatnagar
Dyal Singh College
University of Delhi
India

ing a positive rapport with the administrative echelons of Lederle, SubbaRow frequently encountered ideological divergences, particularly in relation to his profound commitment to advancing medical science for the betterment of humanity. This dedication often led to conflicts with the company's strategic objectives to solidify its market presence. The issue of patent rights, customarily attributed to the inventor in the name of the corporation, serves as a focal point of contention. SubbaRow's principled stance on inventorship is emblematic of his ethical convictions, as he consistently disavowed personal recognition for his innovations, asserting, "I do not consider myself an inventor [...] Don't put my name on unless the attorneys think it's going to help something" (Gupta 1998: 120). This statement underscores SubbaRow's disinterest in personal accolades and highlights his primary concern for the broader application of scientific discoveries. Furthermore, the paucity of documentary evidence substantiating SubbaRow's contributions accentuates the challenges in fully acknowledging his scientific legacy. The ambivalent commentary on one of the patents, describing SubbaRow as "a genius" in his scientific endeavors yet "poor" in business acumen (Gupta 1998: 120), encapsulates the prevailing perception of his persona within the industry.

This dichotomy reflects the broader discourse on the intersection of scientific innovation and commercial viability, a theme that is particularly important in the context of SubbaRow's career. His profound comprehension of the intricate dynamics prevalent within the industrial sector underscored his critical awareness of the inherent tensions between corporate objectives and intellectual autonomy. He recognized that the industry's imperative to monopolize ideas and innovations for its own proliferation often clashed with the broader ethos of scientific inquiry and discovery. SubbaRow's stance was encapsulated in his critique of the prevailing corporate culture, where he posited, "The philosophy of control over the worker's ideas had bad implications" (Gupta 1998: 128), thereby highlighting the detrimental consequences of such an approach on creative and intellectual freedom. His professional engagement with Lederle Laboratories exemplified a departure from conventional corporate relationships, eschewing formal agreements in favor of a "friendly arrangement" that allowed him

the flexibility to maintain his academic affiliations, notably with Harvard (Gupta 1998: 105). This arrangement underscored SubbaRow's commitment to a collaborative ethos that transcended the rigid confines of contractual obligations, fostering an environment conducive to scientific exploration and innovation. He left Lederle to work further, with half the former salary, but more funding for research.

Upon his departure from Lederle, SubbaRow's reflections, "What do I care what label you put on a bottle? That is of no interest to me" (Gupta 1998: 105), encapsulate the ideological rift between his scientific aspirations and the commercial priorities of the pharmaceutical industry. This split reflects the broader struggle faced by researchers in reconciling the pursuit of knowledge and scientific advancement with the capitalist imperatives of profit maximization. SubbaRow's decision to continue his research endeavors with reduced remuneration but increased funding for research signifies a deliberate choice to prioritize the intrinsic value of scientific discovery over financial gain, thereby embodying the quintessential conflict between academic integrity and commercial interests in the realm of scientific research.

Scientific discoveries transcend the efforts of individuals, embodying the collective spirit of humanity's pursuit of knowledge. This principle is exemplified in the collaborative work of SubbaRow, who, alongside his team, built upon the foundation laid by prior discoveries, leading to innovations he humbly never claimed as solely his own. The film *Ek Doctor ki Maut* [A Doctor's Death], directed by Tapan Sinha, illustrates this notion through the character of Dr. Deepankar. Faced with obstruction by the Health Department, which resulted in his relocation to a remote village, Dr. Deepankar finds himself estranged from the essential collaborative network and resources that were available in Calcutta, which hinders his research capabilities. In a candid conversation with his wife, Seema, he asserts: "Research *kisi ek admi ka kaam thodi hai*. It is teamwork"—"research is not the endeavor of a lone individual. It is teamwork" (Sinha 1990: 01:12:45–01:12:55). This narrative underscores the inherent communal nature of research and innovation, which relies on the synergistic contributions of diverse minds and talents.

Avani Bhatnagar
Dyal Singh College
University of Delhi
India

In his monograph *Truth and Beauty: Aesthetics and Motivations in Science*, Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar invokes a citation from Godfrey Harold Hardy, who, in his *A Mathematician's Apology*, addresses the collaborative nature inherent in the scientific community's quest for truth (Chandrasekhar 1992: 14). In a self-demeaning fashion, Hardy delineates the characteristics of an authentic scientist, emphasizing the communal and altruistic motivations that underpin scientific inquiry thus:

> The case for my life, then, or for that of anyone else wha has been a mathematician in the same sense in which I have been one, is this: that I have added something to knowledge, and helped others to add more; and that these somethings have a value which differs in degree only, and not in kind, from that of the creations of the great mathematicians, or any of the other artists, great or small, who have left some kind of memorial behind them. (Hardy 1967: 151)

In *Everything is Relative: And Other Fables from Science and Technology*, Tony Rothman elucidates the concept that scientific progress is not the achievement of isolated individuals but rather the culmination of collective efforts from numerous researchers. Rothman metaphorically describes those perceived as the primary contributors to scientific advancements as an "optical illusion" (Rothman 2003: xiv), challenging the notion of singular achievement in the realm of science. In the Preface, he articulates this thought thus: "We remember only he who carries the torch past the finish line. But, unlike a race tracker, the course of science is not straight, or even circular. As every researcher knows: You Only Get the Right Answer After You've Made Every Possible Mistake" (Rothman 2003: xiii). Furthermore, Rothman posits that "Scientific success cannot always be translated into commercial profits" (Rothman 2003: 128), highlighting the distinction between academic achievements and their potential economic implications.

Discussing his perspective on wealth, he remarked, "I was born with nothing and I shall die with nothing. Each year I try to give away all I make so that at the end of the year my books are cleared" (Rothman 2003: 268). His ambition extended to financially supporting the educational and other essential needs of four individuals, reflecting a commitment to prioritizing scientific advancement and communal welfare over personal accumulation of wealth. This

inclination towards altruism, before delving into the profound inquiries about humanity's spiritual connections, underscores a profound sense of duty towards the collective well-being of society.

The prevailing contemporary viewpoint might interpret such actions as philanthropic gestures, a perspective shaped by the compartmentalized view of life dominant in modern society. However, in SubbaRow's actions, we discern a fundamental obligation inherent in our collective human existence, suggesting that such ethical conduct is not merely optional but an integral aspect of being. This contrasts sharply with the prevalent ethos of hyper-individualism, which often eschews ethical considerations in favor of personal gain, leading to a disconnect from our intrinsic identification with the human race as a unified entity. Yet, in the times when quantification, logic, reason, and measurable parameters have become the tools of verification, the unseen beauty of ethical design struggles to survive.[1]

Embracing the beauty of the human mind and the moral substratum of human existence, SubbaRow affirms the notion of people as entities capable of intricate thought pattern, thereby underscoring the significance of autonomy within the spiritual collective. He elucidates this concept thus: "In this church each of us has perfect freedom of thought. There is no creed but a common dedication to serve mankind. We do not agree to think alike, but we all alike agree to think" (Gupta 1998: 262). This statement encapsulates SubbaRow's vision of individual cognition coupled with ethical accountability, shaping his life's philosophy. He advocates for the nurturing of independent thought processes, anchored by a collective moral obligation towards the betterment of humanity, thereby crafting a blueprint for living that harmonizes personal intellect with communal service.

1. In his *Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*, Simon Blackburn posits that rational discourse holds little sway in the realm of ethics, highlighting a contemporary challenge where the tangible metrics of logic, reason, and quantification dominate our validation processes, often overshadowing the intangible yet critical aspects of ethical principles. He underscores the struggle for ethical considerations to maintain their relevance and influence in a landscape increasingly governed by empirical verification and individualistic values (Blackburn 2002).

Avani Bhatnagar
Dyal Singh College
University of Delhi
India

A life imbued with romantic zeal underscores the significance of poetic sensibility, which is essential not merely for a specific discipline but for the enrichment of life itself. Shakespeare, poetry, love, and romance constitute integral threads of life's aesthetic fabric. It was SubbaRow's poetic sensibility and his deliberate navigation through a romantic trajectory that lent a distinctly scientific dimension to his endeavors in the realm of science. Life, in its essence, is a philosophical pursuit actively engaged with passion in the search for truth. When philosophy is applied in practice, it transcends into the realm of romance, characterized by its capacity to embrace irrational leaps.

The philosophical underpinning is deemed essential for navigating the romantic endeavors that characterize the seemingly irrational journey of humanity. This section endeavors to examine the unconventional choices made by SubbaRow, which elude logical justification through reason alone and represent preferences that transcend the normative understanding of his era. As Keats suggests in "Ode to a Grecian Urn," "beyond reason lies the realm of unheard melodies" (Keats 1900: 234). SubbaRow's journey, transcending reason, becomes an expedition of poetic sensibility and scientific fervor, and thus his choices align his intellectual trajectory with the essence of romanticism.

The artificial demarcations imposed by humans, which delineate boundaries, stand in contrast to the inherent unity of the human race. Robert Frost, in his poem "Mending Wall," interrogates these man-made barriers that serve to claim or exclude territories, voicing his doubts in the famous line: "Something there is that doesn't love a wall" (Frost 2016: 15). Acts of transcending these fabricated divisions enable one to connect with others beyond the confines of societal constructs. The pandemic illustrated how the scientific pursuits of various nations transformed into a race to achieve medical breakthroughs first, thereby fostering a sense of national triumph at the expense of collaborative research efforts. SubbaRow, in his actions, repudiated such divisions, opting instead to transcend geographical and religious boundaries in pursuit of a more inclusive and unified approach to scientific inquiry.

Philip Martin's film *Einstein and Eddington*, set against the backdrop of World War I, narrates the compelling story of two eminent scientists who transcended national confines in pursuit of universal scientific truths. In the tumultuous milieu of warfare, the collaborative ethos of Einstein and Eddington resonated more profoundly than the discord of conflict. Einstein, resisting political coercion, declined to endorse a manifesto aligning German scientific endeavors with military objectives. Eddington went even further when he declared before the scrutinizing committee that "[w]hatever [they] might think of German military action. It has got nothing to do with German science" (Martin 44:15–44:22), thereby defending the autonomy of scientific inquiry from political and military affiliations. He further asserted: "The perceived truth of science takes us beyond hatred. It is the best of us" (Martin 1:00:09–1:00:22), emphasizing the transcendent and unifying capacity of scientific discovery.

Eddington, man of reason, renowned for his precision in measurement, and Einstein, an ideational romantic, celebrated for his conceptual ingenuity, together forged a pivotal synthesis within the spatio-temporal domain. Notably, it was Eddington who played a crucial role in empirically validating Einstein's theory of relativity, a fact that is not widely acknowledged. Eddington encapsulated the essence of their scientific pursuit by stating, "we will be scientists at work. We'll be looking at the poetry of existence" (Martin 1:40–1:47), highlighting the beauty of scientific exploration and the intrinsically poetic dimension of existence.

Possessing a scientific mindset often confines one to a realm of certainties, yet SubbaRow perceived the necessity to explore beyond conventional boundaries, postulating that life might have originated from extraterrestrial sources animating liquid crystals. This contemplation led him to reflect on the "Will of the Infinite" (Gupta 1998: 261), which idea rendered his awareness of the constraints of scientific endeavor even more palpable. SubbaRow states clearly that "[b]eing a scientist is discouraging at times. We only prolong life—we don't deepen it" (Gupta 1998: 264). This philosophical inclination propelled him to investigate the human body beyond mere causal relationships, recognizing that its existence defies rational explanation, with uncertainty and approximations serving as the primary means of understanding.

Avani Bhatnagar
Dyal Singh College
University of Delhi
India

Upon his arrival in America, SubbaRow encountered the challenges of being perceived as an outsider in a land renowned for its opportunities. As Gupta reports, Dr. J.C. Aub of Massachusetts General Hospital observed that SubbaRow was "a foreigner at a time when Americans were very American [...] and did not appreciate foreigners" (Gupta 1998: 34), highlighting the social barriers he faced due to his ethnicity. Despite these obstacles, SubbaRow's dedication to scientific inquiry enabled him to transcend these 'unnatural boundaries,' but throughout his life he aspired towards an ideal world devoid of racial hierarchies, envisioning a future where "the whole world feels as one, and the superiority and inferiority of races disappear" (Gupta 1998: 39).

In Honoré de Balzac's *The Unknown Masterpieces*, Frenhofer, the protagonist, shares a profound insight into the essence of artistic creation, stating that "[d]rawing gives you the skeleton, the anatomical framework, the color puts life into it" (Balzac 2000: 26). This assertion metaphorically extends to the concept of romance, which imbues the mere physical essence of human beings with vitality, transcending a purely mechanistic interpretation of life. Thus, engaging with reality through a dynamic—even if physiological—lens renders the human experience a *romantic experience*, as opposed to mere *anatomical existence*.

SubbaRow believed in the inner beauty of existence. Faith, globally, held a significant place in the intellectual landscape of this thinker-scientist. He expounded on this subject in one of his letters. "[To] me," he wrote, "religion is a dynamic subject rather than a static code of established principles. To me it is an internal experience, a sort of unfolding self-revelation piece by piece" (Gupta 1998: 265). This perspective emphasizes his personal, and ever-evolving, relationship with faith, energizing introspection and gradual self-discovery, rather than adherence to a rigid set of dogmas. His understanding of human existence went beyond the five senses. SubbaRow resists the scientific logic of the post-Descartian West by leaping into faith in the unseen and unproven *inner sense*. He accepts that, "at one point it was hard for me to conceive that man acquired an inner spirit and nature and transcending himself, while science assumed that he is just another step in evolution" (Gupta 1998: 266). As the scholar's biographer asserts, "SubbaRow had to be and was like a maestro

who divided his time conducting several orchestras which played not just one kind of music but the whole range from classical symphonies to jazz improvisation" (Gupta 1998: 150).

Comparable to Johann Sebastian Bach, a musician of unparalleled prowess renowned for his timeless and universally revered compositions, SubbaRow's contributions hold a universal significance. Bach, celebrated for his mastery over the organ and his ability to conjure harmony from every piece, is acclaimed for his natural creativity. His captivating fugues garnered widespread admiration, earning him respect and honor. Once could posit that "the natural" in the German master's art, affecting his concept of *composition*, is a manifestation of the *design*, integral to human evolution, embodying transcendence. Figures like Bach and SubbaRow, whose art is fueled by the power of an engaged and conscious mind, exemplify the dynamic interplay between creativity and the pursuit of abstract concepts, be it transcendence or entropy.

In the realm of science, as in music, there occurs a creation of enduring combinations, where the artist seeks to achieve a form of immortality through their work. This endeavor to transform the transient into the eternal is the essence of creativity, bringing with it profound joy. The pursuit of alleviating human suffering and pain transcends the here-and-now to yield outcomes that are celebrated by civilizations. Whether in music, arts, or science, the impact of creative endeavors on the betterment of humanity is always profound—as is that of human indifference.

The poem "Musée des Beaux Arts" by W.H. Auden, which draws inspiration from Pieter Bruegel's painting *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, poignantly addresses the apathy displayed by individuals towards the suffering of their peers. Bruegel work, capturing the erosion of empathetic responses among humans, resonates with Auden's sensitivity. In his poetic insight into society's detached demeanor, Auden critically reflects on the dispassion of the modern era, lamenting human indifference through his verse:

> About suffering they were never wrong,
> The old Masters: how well they understood
> Its human position; how it takes place
> While someone else is eating or opening a window or just
> walking dully along; (Auden 1991: 1–5)

Avani Bhatnagar
Dyal Singh College
University of Delhi
India

Fig. 2. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, ca. 1560. Oil on canvas, 73.5 cm × 112 cm (28.9 in × 44 in). Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

The contrast between those who endure suffering and those who remain apathetic towards it engenders a division in their respective stances, thereby amplifying the disparity in societal sensibilities. In referencing Bruegel's depiction of Icarus's demise, Auden expands upon the theme by illustrating the prevalent disregard as an emblematic trait of a degenerating society. The ploughman, who might have been a witness to Icarus's fall, exhibits a detachment, indicative of a narrow-minded outlook. Similarly, the passing ship overlooks the event, and Icarus, being swallowed by the sea, is shunned by the self-absorbed populace. Paradoxically, while mythological discourses celebrate the allegorical dimension of Icarus's tragic death, the individual (human) tragedy seems to be, at best, of secondary importance.

Auden invokes the wisdom of the "old masters," or artists from bygone eras, to reflect on the nature of human suffering, positioning the tragedy of Icarus not as an isolated incident but as a lamentable commentary on the society and the human condition. The decline of moral values becomes apparent when individuals begin to valorize the darker aspects of human nature, accepting them as inborn characteristics, thereby undermining human dignity. This moral ambiguity complicates ethical considerations surrounding human existence, relegating inherent goodness

to a subordinate role. Through his poem, Auden underscores this notion, suggesting a pervasive indifference towards the fundamental value of life, and the decline of empathy. And, despite that, life goes on:

> Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
> Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
> Scratches its innocent behind on a tree (Auden 1991: 47)

In contrast to the unassuming nature of animals, men and women who live self-absorbed lives, confined by their own limited perspectives or by the consequences of their egotistic choises, are "the torturers," culpable for depriving existence of its inherent beauty, of the romance. Both Auden and SubbaRow understand that the imperative for individuals to transcend their personal confines and to dedicate themselves to the broader welfare of humanity is the *sine-qua-non* condition of a harmonious, rewarding, life.

CONCLUSION

Yellapragada SubbaRow's philosophical framework appears to posit the notion of an "irrational romance" as an integral facet of human existence, advocating for an engagement with life that transcends conventional, quantifiable experiences. Within this paradigm, rigidly defined systems are viewed as inadequate for encompassing the infinite and profound dimensions that sustain the continuity of life. For SubbaRow, conventional endpoints are merely the inception for exploring the boundless possibilities of existence. His perception of the human body and life finds resonance in Walt Whitman's "I Sing the Body Electric," where the poet challenges conventional understandings of the human condition and inquires into the sense of human existence. Whitman queries:

> And if those who defile the living are as bad as they who defile the dead?
> And if the body does not do fully as much as the soul?
> And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul? (Whitman 1933: 81)

Like in Whitman, also in SubbaRow's philosophy the evolution of the human civilization cannot be reduced to a mere linear

progression and perhaps this is the reason why, like Whitman-the-poet, also SubbaRow-the-biochemist, prioritizing the well-being of people whom his work serves over the monetary interests of the pharmaceutical industry, invites one to perform a profound ontological examination of the human condition. Especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which, as a global crisis, has laid bare the limitations of rigidly structured systems, Yellapragada SubbaRow's thought seems to provide guidelines for the 21st century world facing the complexities and uncertainties inherent in such challenges. The COVID-19 experience also demonstrated the tangibility of the imperative of embracing a more holistic and adaptable approach to life—one recognizing the interconnectedness and indeterminacy that underpin the continuity of human existence. This iterative process of learning, adaptation, and resilience mirrors SubbaRow's perspective on life as a journey of infinite exploration, in which science may mark new beginnings in the continuous struggle for a meaningful, poetic, existence.

Avani Bhatnagar
Dyal Singh College
University of Delhi
India

Abstract: In his eponymous poem, Robert Frost conceptualizes design as a fundamental aspect of human existence, exploring the interplay between life's grand forces and the underlying philosophical structure of existence. This notion is paralleled in the human body, viewed as a living embodiment of design, encompassing both external appearance and internal complexity. Biomedical science, particularly significant during the pandemic, has reshaped our comprehension of the human body, influencing lifestyle and societal perceptions. Yellapragada SubbaRow, an Indian-born American biochemist, made groundbreaking contributions to medical science, including the development of methotrexate for cancer treatment, the application of folic acid in prenatal care, and the creation of a versatile antibiotic. These advancements, alongside the pandemic-induced shift in societal outlook, have altered the approach to human health and wellness. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has drawn the world's attention to the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of biomedical practice, SubbaRow's contributions may serve as excellent exemplars of integrating scientific innovation with philosophical inquiry, advocating for an approach that harmonizes scientific rigor with ethical integrity to foster civilizational progress. The study contends that design transcends mere tools and structures, embodying the fusion of human perception and intellect, which drives creativity and innovation essential for human evolution. Through examining SubbaRow's philosophy, this article seeks to elucidate the post-pandemic paradigm shift in human existence and its ethical implications.

Keywords: human body, design, ethics, human existence, Yellapragada SubbaRow

Bio: Dr. Avani Bhatnagar presently holds the position of Assistant Professor at Dyal Singh College, affiliated with the University of Delhi, India. Prior to this role, she served for four and a half years as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at the Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies, under Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Delhi, India. Dr. Bhatnagar was awarded her PhD in 2019, and her scholarly endeavors primarily explore the thematic presence and influence of Romanticism within literature and across various fields of knowledge. Her research aims to delineate the romantic narratives associated with figures identified as Radicals and Revolutionaries, extending across diverse intellectual landscapes.

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Avani Bhatnagar
Dyal Singh College
University of Delhi
India

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PERVERSE THEATERS AND REFRACTED HISTORIES

Violence and (Anti)realism in Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer*

Giacomo Traina Sapienza
University of Rome, Italy
University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland
http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2104-323X

A permanent installation catches the eyes of visitors of the Asian Garden Mall (Phước Lộc Thọ), the most recognizable Vietnamese shopping center of Southern California. This two-story building, home to dozens of businesses, shops, and restaurants, is a landmark of Orange County's Little Saigon. Leaning on the wall running along the western flank, a freshly installed metal sculpture stands out as a marker of a shared past. Four giant digits loom over the crowd of shoppers making their way through the parking lot. They indicate a date—1975—that holds a painful place in the hearts of hundreds of thousands in the local community. This was the year in which the Vietnamese civil war, a fratricidal struggle that lasted decades and saw involved a variety of state and non-state actors, culminated with the defeat of the American-backed Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). In 1975, Vietnam was reunified under the red banner of the communist North. The ensuing years of poverty and repression ignited a mass refugee exodus that displaced nearly a million people. The new rulers soon imposed their own version of history through statues, museums, and school syllabuses that erased any trace of their vanquished foes. Roughly at the same time, Hollywood started to turn war trauma

into spectacle with the release of high- and low-budget movies that retold the conflict as a multiple act, all-American tragedy in which the Vietnamese were mostly sidelined if not altogether erased from the picture. In the newly formed diaspora, a culture was born out of nostalgia for a lost country, while scores of exiled opponents formed parties and ragtag armies bent on infiltrating the homeland and leading impossible counterrevolutions.

This crossfire of memories is the foundation upon which the plot of Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* (2015) is built. It is no accident that the Pulitzer-winning novel's action begins in the year 1975. *The Sympathizer* does not deal with the war in Vietnam as much as with its afterlives in memory. It is not about war as much as about war narratives and the power rationales that allow for their (unequal) dissemination. *The Sympathizer* is a multi-faceted literary object– a sharp indictment of the power mechanisms underlying the industries of memory, thinly disguised as a piece of genre fiction. It is a vitriolic satire, rife with intertextual references, written with the aim of challenging the way in which the Vietnam War has been fought again in memory. The after-effects of the American military involvement in Southeast Asia are the backdrop against which the plot is set. The history and the enduring legacies of the conflict are distorted into a feverish waking nightmare from which the unnamed narrator/protagonist tries in vain to wake up. The book tells the story of a communist double agent, 'the captain,' whose mission is to follow abroad the defeated remnants of the South Vietnamese army on the eve of the country's collapse. Upon his arrival in California, 'the captain' finds himself entangled in refugee diaspora politics, reluctantly becoming a political assassin in order to protect his cover. Then, the story takes unexpected turns. Halfway through the novel, the narrator is hired as a consultant by an egotistical Hollywood auteur determined to craft a Vietnam War movie that "will […] shine so brightly it will not just be about the war but it will be the war" (Nguyen 2015: 172). In the Philippines, where the movie is being shot, 'the captain' manages a group of Vietnamese extras recruited from a local refugee camp. A helpless cog in a well-oiled (war) machine, he has no choice but to watch his fellow countrymen being reduced to props, nothing more than colored stains on a lush matte painting. Then, the narrator decides to go back to Vietnam

Giacomo Traina
Sapienza
University of Rome, Italy
University of Silesia
in Katowice, Poland

along with the counterrevolutionaries whom he was originally tasked to spy upon, but the group is ambushed in the border jungle and he ends up being taken to a reeducation camp. Here, in the most surreal section of the novel, his best friend and handler, of all people, tortures him with CIA techniques to force him to give up on their shared political dream. The novel ends with the narrator embarking on a perilous journey through the South China Sea as a part of the huge boat exodus—the "internal hemorrhaging of modern Vietnam" (Goscha 2016: 386)—that marked the history of the country.

Nguyen's book is nestled at the junction of various literary traditions. It begins like a war thriller, it shifts into a movie industry satire *à la Tropic Thunder*, and it ends as a sort of Vietnamese spin on Franz Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" as penned by Samuel Beckett. The narrator himself is a distillation of all the most brazen, irreverent, and disaffected *isolatoes* living on the edges of the Western canon. To craft his voice, Nguyen threw into the kettle all kinds of literary 'I's he could. His list of declared sources spans decades and continents. Joseph Heller and Louis-Ferdinand Céline's literary heroes are often brought up as a comparison. As the self-despising veteran doctor from António Lobo Antunes' *The Land at the End of the World*, 'the captain' too is an unnamed witness-participant of neocolonial atrocities. As *Lolita*'s Humbert Humbert, he is writing an unreliable memoir while in imprisonment. As Ralph Ellison's invisible man, he ends his journey in a white room replete with lightbulbs. And as with Philip Roth's Alex Portnoy, his is a continuous monologue addressed to an absentee interlocutor.

A spy narrative that abruptly derails into a modernist delirium, *The Sympathizer* confidently hovers between realist conventions and antirealism strategies. It tackles the well-rooted idea of the Second Indochina War as a war that defies representation, the "first terrible postmodernist war," as per Fredric Jameson's definition (1991: 44)—an idea that resonates with countless passages about true war stories and not-knowing-what-you-saw-until-years-later taken from the works of Michael Herr and Tim O'Brien. In this instance, however, aesthetic (un)representability of war is not intended as a philosophical matter as much as a political issue. The question is not "is the war in Vietnam representable?" as much as "whose representation of the war in Vietnam gets passed down?"

In other words, the issue at hand is not representability but representations. All the cultural artifacts addressing the war's memory, in Nguyen's view, are fabrications that convey partial perspectives. A narrative about narratives, *The Sympathizer* is informed by a logic according to which the only way to expose this state of things is to put together a fiction at once realist and antirealist that with its own existence single-handedly redefines collective memory as "an arena of competing narratives, an uneven field dominated by the memory machines of Hollywood" (Chattarji 2019: 207). Hence an array of creative licenses and modernist solutions that go beyond the necessity of opposing hegemonic memories with suppressed histories, to embrace instead an aesthetics of distortion and infidelity that does not, however, discard black comedy and genre fiction conventions.

Nguyen's subversion of realism takes many forms. Stylistically, the book rests on a baroque prose timbre meant to enhance the story's farcical undertones. The structure is loaded with knotty subplots that dovetail one into another. Spy and war novel tropes are but screens concealing a more challenging class of narrative. *The Sympathizer* is a "thriller of ideas"—a piece of criticism written in form of a novel. By pairing it with its companion book, the essay/manifesto *Nothing Ever Dies* (2016), we derive a picture in which Nguyen's fiction and nonfiction works are part of one same "fict-critical" project that is equal parts narrative and theory (August 2021; Chihaya 2018; Xiang 2018). Every oddity within *The Sympathizer* is to be explained as an antirealism strategy meant to sew political discourses into the fabric of the story. It is as if Nguyen would smuggle ideas under the detective trench coat of genre fiction. As a monologic utterance—a confession written under duress—*The Sympathizer* is dominated by the voice of its narrator. Text and character are basically one and undistinguishable. By doing away with quotation marks, Nguyen blurs every voice and dialogue into an indistinct togetherness. One is often unable to tell apart the narrator's words from that of other characters: Hollywood directors, university professors, and first-generation refugees fresh off the tarmac all express themselves in a comparable manner. Period accuracy, language patterns, inflections, mannerisms, are virtually nonexistent. As the narrator's voice

Giacomo Traina Sapienza
University of Rome, Italy
University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

flattens everything to a monochord voiceprint, there is no demarcation line between the self and the world he inhabits. The narrator becomes the speakers, and the speakers become the narrator: this is a single voice, a "literary dubbed" voice (Tran 2018: 414) which contains every other—a voice that "carries everything" (Nguyen 2022). The narrator is not a reporter as much as a ventriloquist, a stand-up comedian making impressions. In the theater of his mind, the characters become *his* characters, recurring actors playing multiple roles, each taking turns on the stage. They are not real individuals, but dream-projections with vague shapes and interchangeable traits: visible embodiments of the invisible forces that shaped his life. It is as if through his writing the narrator would transmute those who own his representation into representations he can own.

In fact, many of the book's characters—as if personified concepts in a Medieval morality play—may be said to embody structures of power in the flesh. These characters often express themselves through recognizable keywords and bear generic names-function ("the General," "the Commandant," "the Auteur"). They are not personas as much as cartoonish allegories, broad-brush silhouettes, stock characters. Nguyen was not interested in developing their individuality: "many people," he affirms, "can fill [their] shoes" (Nguyen 2023). The General conflates Nguyễn Cao Kỳ, South Vietnam's air marshal, with all the rest of Saigon's 1960–1970s military elite. The Commandant is the orthodoxy of the Vietnamese Communist Party in human form. The Auteur merges Francis Ford Coppola with John Milius and Oliver Stone. One could even make the case that, in his quest against Hollywood stereotypes, Nguyen deliberately resorted to other stereotypes to prove his point. Suffice it in this respect to compare *The Sympathizer*'s personified entities with the rest of the novel's cast. Even better, to juxtapose them with the full-fledged people at the center of Nguyen's sophomore fiction effort—the long-in-the-works short story collection *The Refugees* (2017), the prose style of which, save for some incursions in magic realism territory, tends more towards life-like scenarios. In both cases, one will notice that Nguyen can write round characters well enough when he wants to.

The Sympathizer also turns the past into a test bench for present-day reckonings about power, memory, empire, and race. The novel's protagonist is a wartime Vietnamese spy whose political concerns strike one as "surprisingly modern, articulating a perspective more often heard today in Asian American studies classes and film festivals rather than from a community of Southeast Asians who had just arrived in the United States in the 1970s" (Chong 2018: 372). While working as a set consultant in the Philippines, the narrator helplessly watches Vietnamese refugees hired as extras becoming a faceless crowd of cinematic one-dimensional presences. Straying from his real-life counterparts—like Phạm Xuân Ẩn, a Politburo spy working undercover as a *Time* magazine journalist—Nguyen's character is seemingly unfazed with his duties as an agent of the Revolution. Instead, he comes out as one more worried about Hollywood's erasure of Asian stories. "[N]ot to own the means of representation is… a kind of death," he muses, "[f]or if we are represented by others, might they not, one day, hose our death off memory's laminated floor?" (Nguyen 2015: 187). Basically, Nguyen devised a fiction in which he could put a stand-in of himself as a scholar on the set of a cinematic misrepresentation of war in order to shed critical light on Hollywood's "simulacrum vision[s]" (Gradisek 2020: 15). By making his protagonist a movie consultant on a 1970s set, Nguyen puts his theories about power and stories into practical test. Through fiction, he has the chance of addressing such issues in real-time rather than forty years later behind the walls of a university classroom.

The fictive movie itself, *The Hamlet*, is yet another narrative oddity. *The Hamlet* is a Hollywood impossibility—an outstandingly crafted B-Movie, a crass slugfest shot with mastery, a Frankenstein monster of a film whose limbs are taken from as many as seven cinematic retellings of the war. In devising it, Nguyen merged plots of antiwar New Hollywood classics with tropes of New Right-inspired, testosterone-filled revenge fantasy flicks. His ostensible purpose was to show how, deep down, movies like *Missing in Action* and *Apocalypse Now* are more alike than one would realize. As if satisfying a revenge fantasy of his own, Nguyen all but dismantles the "Hollywood miracle" mythos that surrounds the making of Coppola's war masterpiece, turning the epic-behind-

Giacomo Traina Sapienza
University of Rome, Italy
University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

the-epic into a farce-behind-the-farce. In the novel, *Apocalypse Now* becomes a jingoistic mess packed with trite characters and ready-made dialogues, one that no cinephile worth their salt would ever stand to watch. Albeit filmed with a "painterly Renaissance shading" (Nguyen 2015: 275) reminiscent of the Caravaggio-like cinematography of Vittorio Storaro, *The Hamlet* is much closer to the original vision of screenwriter John Milius, who intended *Apocalypse* as a shoddy, unequivocally prowar "Super-John-Wayne-movie" oozing patriotism. In *The Hamlet* there is no warrior-poet waxing lyrical over the necessity of barbarism—only old-fashioned, steely-eyed, country-loving American heroes. *The Sympathizer* turns *Apocalypse*'s psychedelic journey into the heart of darkness into a tawdry "epic about white men saving good yellow people from bad yellow people" (129): it is as if Nguyen had Francis Ford Coppola directing *The Green Berets*.

However, *The Sympathizer* rejects the binds of historical accuracy—not history. As a ray of light changing speed because of Snell's law of refraction, crossing from one transparent element to another, and giving the viewer the illusion of seeing a bent pencil under the surface of a glass of water, Nguyen's novels often blur the boundaries of time and space, turning the late 1970s' Vietnamese California, postwar Vietnam, and the set of *Apocalypse Now* into a warped image of our times. This *refracted history*, in which past and present (imperfectly) mirror one another, is what Nguyen's novels are about. To look for realism while reading them is as pointless as trying to reconstruct Guernica's bombing using Picasso's painting as a historical source. "Many of the events of this novel did happen," writes Nguyen in the "Acknowledgments" of *The Sympathizer*, "although *I confess* to taking some liberties with details and chronologies" (369, my italics). Given the relevance of the morpheme "confess" throughout the novel, the ambiguities it conveys in the plot, and the recurrent overlapping between the voice of the narrator and the opinions of the author as expressed in his works of nonfiction, this occurrence—the only paratextual incidence of the morpheme in the whole text—is worth mentioning.

Even more significant is how the novel recontextualizes the historical tragedy of reeducation camps into an avant-garde,

pseudo-Modernist domain. After 1975, the communist victors confined hundreds of thousands of their defeated enemies in "harsh, disease-ridden parts of the country," forcing them to "countless sessions of brainwashing, rectification, new hero emulation, and propaganda" (Goscha 2016: 383; see also Vo 2004 and Canh 1983). The presence (and the presentness) of these labor camps in Vietnamese American collective memory is still practically visible. One can tell just by strolling around the stalls of community fairs such as the annual UVSA Festival in Costa Mesa, OC. Here, it is easy to bump into the touring collections of the Vietnamese Heritage Museum, where the belongings of prisoners are displayed for all visitors to see. One could also take a four-hundred mile drive up north and look at the dioramas representing camp atrocities prominently featured in the small, volunteer-run Viet Museum that stands on the edges of San Jose's History Park. Looking up, one would see glass cases displaying the ragged prison clothes of survivors, hung on the walls among vintage rifles, pennants, and military uniforms. Borrowing from Pierre Nora's definition, one may define the reeducation camps as diasporic *lieux de mémoire*, that is, as entities, "whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time [have] become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of [a] community" (Nora 1996: XVI). With *The Sympathizer*, Nguyen reclaimed the camps as a place of the imagination. He transformed Nora's *lieu de mémoire* into a Bakhtinian *chronotope*, that is, into a "connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships […] artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin 1981: 84). In *The Sympathizer*, the site of refugee memory becomes a symbolic space, a place "half-real, half-metaphorical" (Bakhtin 1981: 244), not different from the classic examples of the road, the castle, the parlor, and the threshold as provided by Mikhail Bakhtin. As a "means for materializing time in space" (Bakhtin 1981: 250), the reeducation chronotope makes an "epoch"—postwar Vietnam—become "graphically […][and] narratively visible" (1981: 247)

In the novel, Nguyen toyed with this chronotope. He clothed it in modernist garbs and reshaped it into a barren, T. S. Eliot-ish landscape of horror and bleakness. The unnamed camp seen in *The Sympathizer* is the terminus, the one place where all the nov-

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Sapienza
University of Rome, Italy
University of Silesia
in Katowice, Poland

el's threads converge: the "organizing center" of the narrative, "the place where [its] knots are tied and untied." Here is where ends the parable of 'the captain,' where his dream of revolution comes to a (momentary) stop—in the same fly-infested barracks where the cause he served showed its more awful face. In the "reeducation section" of the novel, Nguyen's intent was not to refer to specific "geography," but to keep the place "very mythical and not get bogged down in reality" (Nguyen 2022). The camp depicted in the novel is an unreal place—a bamboo gulag concealing white bright rooms replete with thousands of lightbulbs, surrounded by "a forest of toothpicks over which gusts of crows and torrent of bats soared in ominous black formations" (Nguyen 2015: 299). Nguyen designed it as a meld of a CIA black site, the mythical landscapes of *The Waste Land*, and the underground cellar where the protagonist of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* lives.

He also filled it with examiners dressed in mad-scientist attires resorting to sophisticated methods of interrogation. In Chapter 21, the techniques used by Man, the Commandant, and the Doctor are (oddly) based on those historically used by the Special Branch of South Vietnam's National Police (Valentine 1990: 110ff). The episode shows *The Sympathizer*'s nature of a "Janus-faced" narrative "turned toward the past [but] refracting current US practice and rhetoric of interrogating Arab detainees during the War on Terror" (Stefan 2021: 210). *The Sympathizer* reframes history by outlining unseen continuities, reimagining the war in Vietnam as a Petri dish for America's forever war by putting the emphasis on a common genealogy of interrogation methods that recur from Saigon to Guantánamo, as if yesterday's wars and today's were one the mirror of the other. Sleep denial, sensory deprivation, and all such ways of obtaining intel without leaving marks on the body of the prisoner all stem from the *KUBARK* handbook, a 1963 CIA manual that promoted a kind of torture "that relied on [...] self-inflicted pain for an effect [...] more psychological than physical" (McCoy 2006: 50). As Alfred McCoy details in his *A Question of Torture* (2006)—one of Nguyen's sources for the novel—the *KUBARK* techniques rely on white bright, shadowless, and soundproof rooms to induce derealization and delirium. When inflicting "white torture," the interrogators

attack "the victim's sense of time, by scrambling the biorhythms fundamental to every human's daily life" (McCoy 2006: 51) thus jumbling one's perception of reality. This interrogation method involves a "perverse theater" in which the subject is "compelled to play the lead in a drama of his own humiliation" (80). In such a scenario, McCoy explains, "the cell becomes a studio, the inquisitors actors, and the detainees their audience" (79). The *KUBARK* procedures were tested in South Vietnam during the war, to then return under different names in Central America in the 1980s, and more recently in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In December 2012, while Nguyen was writing *The Sympathizer*, Kathryn Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty* was released in theaters, showing the hunt for Osama Bin Laden from the point of view of CIA agents. Bigelow's movie rounded off a decade of Hollywood reckonings with the then ongoing War on Terror. In those years, even superhero flicks like Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* showed America's inner strife with its own conscience, as they staged the tragedy of men/women who get their hands dirty to keep those of the American people clean. The question raised by these movies in the wake of the Patriot Act and mass surveillance was what the nation was ready to become in order to stop its enemies. In a way, Nguyen's novel reverses this perspective. It presents four chiasmatic scenes of abuse, each of which is designed to recall the others: 1) the Watchman's interrogation in the "white room" (carried on by the narrator in his double capacity of undercover spy and Special Branch operative); 2) the fictional torture of Binh and the fictional rape of Mai in the movie *The Hamlet* ('perpetrated' by South Vietnamese refugee extras dressed as Vietnamese communists); 3) the actual rape of the communist agent in the "movie theater" room (committed by South Vietnamese policemen with the complicity of the narrator); 4) the torture of the narrator in the camp (performed by Vietnamese communists using American techniques tested in South Vietnam). The narrator's "multiple roles," Hayley C. Stefan points out, "offer prismatic views on torture which inform the novel's multivalent critique" (2021: 215). In *The Sympathizer*, all kinds of victims and perpetra-

Giacomo Traina
Sapienza
University of Rome, Italy
University of Silesia
in Katowice, Poland

tors take turns on and around the torture table.[1] The Americans, the South Vietnamese, the Vietnamese communists, and even Hollywood, Nguyen seems to suggest, are all part of one same circus of atrocities in which the oppressed and the oppressors keep trading places. In Chapter 22, this "dialectics of victim and victimizer" (Liu 2019: 545) comes full circle. Here, the "perverse theater" of the *KUBARK* method is made literal, with the entire chapter structured as a Beckett piece, an absurdist play complete with stage names and stage directions.

However, Nguyen's choice of offering a "pathogenic reading of torture as transnational and crossing temporal periods" (Stefan 2021: 22) should not distract us from the fact that such kind of "perverse theater" is unlikely to ever have taken place as depicted in the novel. The narrator's ordeal clearly oozes Cold War symbolism. We see American lightbulbs, powered by a Soviet generator, used by the Vietnamese communists, whereas sensory deprivation methods were historically used by the South Vietnamese during wartime as a CIA-sponsored alternative to the brutal techniques inherited by the French colonialists (Valentine 1990: 84). Make no mistake, horrible punishments were regularly meted out in communist camps. All the sources report beatings, abuse, starvation, isolation, and every kind of conceivable ill-treatment, with prisoners left to languish in small-size CONEX boxes under the scorching sun (Vo 2004: 81). However, one would not find any mention of "white torture" in any of the reeducation memoirs that Nguyen cites in the novel's "Acknowledgments." According to researcher Nghia M. Vo, in actual fact the Vietnamese communists, to an extent, used CIA-inspired sleep deprivation techniques in "special centers where these pieces of equipment [were] utilized on a special number of people" (Vo 2022). A high-ranking communist defector, Colonel Bui Tin, confirmed in his memoir that similar techniques were employed by the communists during the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia on suspected double agents:

1. One will find a similar dynamic at play in the last section of *The Sympathizer*'s 2021 sequel, *The Committed*, with Vo Danh and the French Algerian gangster Mona Lisa equally taking turns on the chair of torture.

> The "professional methods" they had used were torture and sophisticated physical abuse: not allowing the prisoners to sleep, questioning the prisoners around the clock to put them under extreme psychological tension; forcing them to go without food and water and then telling them that they would not be given anything to eat or drink until they confessed, etc. (Pribbenow 2023)

However, no source I am aware of mentions an *Invisible Man*-like ceiling covered by lightbulbs such as the one seen in *The Sympathizer*. Nguyen himself has admitted how his was in fact a poetic license:

> Now this part is I think fictional, the techniques that I have read about [...] tend to be much more physical, but they did use also sensory deprivation as well. Not in quite as refined a way as it's depicted in this novel. So I took poetic license, I took the idea that at the end of the war, the Vietnamese captured the documents that the CIA used. (2016b)

Nguyen's license thus gives way to a nesting doll-like narrative that, while discussing the war in Vietnam, "gestures [effectively] toward an otherwise" (Liu 2019: 543). Americans still see the shadows of Vietnam lingering over new wars, new quagmires, and the demise of yet another ally-turned-client state. But what they fail to see, Nguyen insinuates, is how all these elements are connected. They fail to see how the so-called "Vietnam syndrome," in a sense, has always been a misdiagnosis. The point, in *The Sympathizer*, is not the reality of American decline as much as the myth of American innocence. In the novel, Nguyen puts these words in the mouth of another communist spy, the Watchman:

> [Americans] believe in a universe of divine justice where the human race is guilty of sin, but they also believe in a secular justice where human beings are presumed innocent. ... They pretend they are eternally innocent no matter how many times they lose their innocence. The problem is that those who insist on their innocence believe anything they do is just. (Nguyen 2015: 182–183)

American innocence, the Watchman seems to imply, is akin to that of a pit-bull puppy: young America, like all young creatures, does not know how hard is biting. Through the artifice of refracted history, Nguyen proves how this myth still (dangerously) reverberates in the industries of memory. An example of this is Hollywood's Vietnam, whose reimaginations depoliticized "the struggle [by] turn-

Giacomo Traina
Sapienza
University of Rome, Italy
University of Silesia
in Katowice, Poland

ing it into a test of manhood, a rite of passage, or a personal trial" (Tomasulo 1990: 147). The one moral crisis underlying the whole Vietnam War movie genre can be summed up with the final words of Charlie Sheen's character, private Chris Taylor, in Oliver Stone's *Platoon*: "we didn't fight the enemy, we fought ourselves, and the enemy was in us." Hollywood's Vietnam, says *The Sympathizer*, is not a real place as much as a repository of American fantasies, a celluloid exorcism made only possible by the passing of time. The American imagination recast the name of a country into the name of a war, and the name of a war into a gallery of movie stills. Its icons still tower over the collective unconscious: Robert De Niro pointing the gun to his temple, Willem Dafoe raising his arms to the sky in sacrifice, Sylvester Stallone's scarred chest covered with bandoliers. No NLF officer ever used Russian roulette as a punishment, no Air Cav division ever attacked a village blaring out Wagner—yet these are the Vietnam War images worldwide audiences are thoroughly familiar with. Even a movie screen, the novel suggests, is nothing but a "perverse theater" in which scores of Vietnamese extras freshly recruited from refugee camps are forced to play a part in their own misrepresentation.

By pointing out how the US lost the war on the battlefield but won it "in memory," Nguyen shows how America heard only the first part of the Vietnam lesson. If we see it in this sense, *The Sympathizer* is indeed more a novel about war than a novel about *a* war, insofar as Nguyen approaches 20th Century's Vietnam like a case study for understanding American imperialism at large, one branch at a time. In the novel, as Yu-yen Liu puts it, the war in Vietnam is seen as "a node among a cluster of state violence" (2019: 542). Throughout the book, Nguyen could make the additional step that many Vietnam War narratives never dared (or cared) to take: to pan all over history like a camera dolly, from the blazing huts of the American war to the rubber plantations of the French colonial era, to arrive at the War on Terror and at the other battlefields of America's forever war. In the novel, as is clear from a passage taken from the final scene of torture, history is described as a chain of causalities and casualties, a Droste effect of original sins. In this climatic scene, in a vortex of nightmarish images secondary to sleep deprivation, 'the captain'

sees history unraveling before his bloodshot eyes as a panoply of missed opportunities. His train of thought covers all the bloody past of Vietnam, intersecting ancient legends and recent events "not as a series of chronologically unfolding events, but as a single utterance cast somewhere between supplication and yearning" (Britto 2019: 378): "if there were no Light and no Word, if Heaven and earth had never parted, if history had never happened, neither as farce nor as tragedy…" (Nguyen 2015: 340).

The line "if history had never happened" makes the principle behind Nguyen's refracted history finally manifest. Individual choices, the character realizes, cannot break the chains of larger causalities. Nguyen's narrator traces the causes of his suffering further and further back in history, steadily following a straight line that pierces through his life to get lost in the mists of time. With ever-increasing speed, he climbs down a ladder of causes and effects: the war, the Americans, the Soviets, the Japanese, French colonialism, the Chinese, the beginning of time, Adam and Eve. History becomes a circus of atrocities—Nguyen's game of refractions implies that everyone, whether or not s/he knows it, is forced to play a part in it. In such a scenario, no true innocence is possible. Even running a refrigerator in suburban America is to look "into the obscene guts" of war, as it might use a refrigerant made by the same chemical company that patented the Agent Orange defoliant (Nguyen 2016: 230). As Sarah Chihaya puts it, quoting an excerpt from *Nothing Ever Dies*, "this kind of recognition—one that acknowledges the multiplicity of both perpetrator and victim—requires vulnerability to a certain slippage between these imagined positions that 'confronts the totality around us and within us' and in so doing 'reveals the stereoscopic simultaneity of human and inhuman'" (2018: 369).

According to Nguyen's view of history, tales of displaced people, raped women, and elderly refugees with dementia become war stories in their own right, as nothing but war made them possible. In the words of Subarno Chattarji: "[t]he refugee story as war story complicates the 'American Dream' story in that it will not obliterate events and contexts that produced the refugee influx and neither will it construct the US as an ideal end" (2019: 202). Wars, says Nguyen, do not end when history books say they do. Modern

Giacomo Traina Sapienza
University of Rome, Italy
University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

Vietnam, a Southeast Asian emerging economy power favored by international trade and tourism, now walks at a brisk pace away from the uncomfortable legacies of its past. Hanoi's boulevards, however, are still surmounted by red billboards promoting the same rhetoric that prompted a struggle for national reunification that is now half a century old. Even more so in the overseas communities, where symbols from a distant past still mark the face of diasporic "memoryscapes" (Tran 2023), and the ghost of South Vietnam still lingers over countless "strategic memory projects" (Aguilar-San Juan 2009: 8) dotted across the American diaspora. Dozens of parking lanes, walks of fame, and commemorative plaques take the names of obscure military martyrs dead since decades. Bronze soldiers charging invisible enemies tower over the strip malls of Bellaire Boulevard, in the western outskirts of Houston, Texas. Eden Center, the beating heart of Falls Church's Vietnamese community, is a scale replica of Saigon's iconic Bến Thành Market as rebuilt in the suburbs of Washington, DC. In the peaceful gardens of Bảo Quang Temple, in Orange County, simulacra of the rickety boats that carried hundreds of thousands on Western shores are forever anchored into small ponds as a reminder of the crossing from oppression to the siren songs of the American Dream. Fluttering between cream stucco pagodas and ranks of smiling statues, the ever-present *cờ vàng*, the three-striped flag of the Republic, long banished in the homeland, casts its flickering shadow over the fences. And even if many in the local community—especially among the young—have long started to rethink 1975 as a beginning rather than an end, a rise rather than a fall—not the twilight of South Vietnam but the dawn of Vietnamese America—the year 1975, as in *The Sympathizer*, still marks the collective unconscious of a generation of exiles who lives "in two time zones, the here and the there, the present and the past" (Nguyen 2015: 192), as if history had stopped and the Vietnam War still rages, doomed to endlessly refract itself again in the wars of the future.

Abstract: This paper explores the way in which Viet Thanh Nguyen's Pulitzer-prize-winning debut novel, *The Sympathizer* (2015) reframes history by outlining unseen continuities, reimagining the war in Vietnam as a Petri dish for America's Forever War, as if yesterday's wars and today's were one the mirror of the other. *The Sympathizer* is not about war as much as about war narratives and the power rationales

that allow for their unequal dissemination. It tackles the well-rooted idea of the Second Indochina War as a war that defies representation. In this instance, however, aesthetic (un)representability of war is not intended as a philosophical matter as much as a political issue. The question is not "Is the war in Vietnam representable?" as much as "Whose representation of the war in Vietnam gets passed down?" In other words, the issue at hand is not representability but representations. All the cultural artifacts addressing the war's memory, in Nguyen's view, are fabrications that convey partial perspectives. A narrative about narratives, *The Sympathizer* is informed by a logic according to which the only way to expose this state of things is to put together a fiction at once realist and antirealist that with its own existence single-handedly redefines collective memory as "an arena of competing narratives, an uneven field dominated by the memory machines of Hollywood" (Chattarji 2019: 207). By bending the facts, Nguyen brings into question the power circumstances that make misrepresentation possible.

Keywords: Viet Thanh Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*, Vietnamese American literature, Vietnam War

Bio: Giacomo Traina holds a PhD in English literatures, cultures, language and translation from Sapienza University of Rome (Italy) and the University of Silesia in Katowice (Poland). His research interests include the memory of the Vietnam War through the works of contemporary Vietnamese American authors and the narrative works of Herman Melville. He is currently working on his first monograph on the fiction of Viet Thanh Nguyen.

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Giacomo Traina Sapienza
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LEGACIES OF RESISTANCE

Emerson, Buddhism, and Richard Wright's Pragmatist Poetics

Anita Patterson
Boston University
USA
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2530-3628

Emerson's affinity with Buddhism has been a subject of much controversy, and his adaptation of the doctrine translated as Buddhist "indifference" can easily be construed as stifling resistance to social injustice. I will revisit this topic, showing how Emerson figures prominently in discussions of Buddhism by the British haiku scholar R. H. Blyth, in order to develop a context for analyzing modes of resistance in Richard Wright's late haiku-inspired poetry. In 1959, when Wright was exiled and seriously ill in Paris, he studied Blyth's works while composing 4000 poems he would draw from a year later to produce "This Other World: Projections in the Haiku Manner," a manuscript that remained in the Rare Book Collection of Yale's Beinecke Library until its publication in 1998, thirty-eight years after Wright's death (Fabre, *Unfinished* 1993: 510; Ogburn 1998: 57). A central question raised in discussions of these poems is whether or not Wright turns away from the social and political concerns evident in his earlier writings. I hope to show that their significance and force as protest poetry are stronger when read in light of a twentieth-century Emersonian pragmatist tradition elaborated by scholars such as Cornel West, James Albrecht, and Douglas Anderson, a tradition characterized by East-West intercultural exchange that includes John Dewey and Wright's close friend, Ralph Ellison. Contextualized and enriched by this

tradition, the poem Wright selected out of the 4000 to open his collection, "I am nobody," can be read in numerous ways, including as a pragmatic affirmation of Emerson's individualistic ethic of self-expressive action. I will conclude by discussing how Wright's pragmatist poetics and creative engagement with Buddhism in the work of T. S. Eliot shed light on Emerson's vastly neglected contribution to the development of Eliot's modernism in *The Waste Land*.

Emerson's first encounters with Asian cultures happened during his youth. His namesake uncle, Ralph Haskins, was active in trade with East Asia, and returned from a voyage to China shortly after Emerson was born (Haskins 1881: 8–9). Kenneth Cameron describes how Emerson's father, the Reverend William Emerson, was the founding editor of the *Monthly Anthology and Boston Review*, which in a July 1805 issue featured "possibly the first Sanskrit translation in the United States" (Cameron 2007: 14). Emerson was a student at Harvard College during a time when there was a great deal of interest in Indic traditions, and much of what he read about Hinduism in periodicals as an undergraduate provided a rich stimulus for his future studies in Buddhism (Cameron 2007: 18–20, 26, 24; Goodman 1990: 625). As Robert Richardson puts it, "Despite the scarcity of major texts and sympathetic accounts in languages he could read, Emerson came quickly to value the importance and appeal of Buddhism" (Richardson 1995: 393).

Although Emerson's first explicit mention of Buddhism occurs in an 1841 letter to Margaret Fuller, he first learned about East Asian Buddhism as early as 1831. In a letter written on May 24th to his brother William, Emerson says that he has been reading the first seven or eight lectures in the first volume of Victor Cousin's *Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie*, which was published in Paris in 1829 (Emerson, *Letters* 1: 322). Emerson's reading of Cousin came at a moment of transition and crisis, a time when he was raising fundamental questions about his faith and vocation, culminating in "The Lord's Supper" and his resignation from the pulpit at the Second Church of Boston on September 9th, 1832 (Buell 2003: 21; Richardson 1995: 139; Urbas, *Metaphysics* 2016: 77–85). He left for Italy in December, arriving in Paris in mid-June, 1833, where he visited the Louvre and the Jardin des Plantes, and attended

Anita Patterson
Boston University
USA

lectures at the Sorbonne and the Collège de France. In his book, Cousin calls attention to the importance of Buddhism in the history of philosophy; elaborates the historical and doctrinal connections between Hinduism and Buddhism; and, perhaps most significantly, refers to new work by the important nineteenth-century scholar, Eugene Burnouf, that was published in the March 1825 issue of the *Journal asiatique* by the Société Asiatique de Paris (Cousin 1829: 178n.1). In 1826, Burnouf published *Essay sur le pali*, the first grammar for one of the sacred languages of Buddhism, giving access to the language of the oldest Buddhist canon. In 1832, just a year before Emerson's visit, Burnouf was elected to the Collège de France, inaugurating the study of Buddhism in Europe. One of the first major texts of Buddhism Burnouf chose to translate was the *Lotus Sutra*, or the *Lotus of the Good Law* and, in 1844, Burnouf published *Introduction à l'histoire de Buddhisme Indien*, which set the course for the academic study of Buddhism for the next century.

Thus we know that Emerson happened to be in Paris when European Buddhist studies was first emerging in the early 1830s and, as Raymond Schwab has shown, the city was the hub of oriental scholarship (Schwab 1984: 111, 46). Ralph Rusk reports that among the Emerson papers there is a copy of the outline of lectures at the Sorbonne for the second semester, 1833, which lists courses by professors such as Cousin, and a copy of a program from the Collège de France that lists Burnouf "on the Sanskrit language and literature" (Emerson, *Letters* 3: 387n.90; Rudy 2001: 220–21n.1). Emerson became increasingly interested in Buddhism during the 1830s and 1840s, unlike the vast majority of Americans, who knew very little about Buddhism until the 1860s and 1870s, when Buddhism became a vogue (Jackson 1981: 56, 141). We know that he read and reread a translation of an Indian book on Buddha, because it appeared on the lists noted in his journals for 1836, 1838, and 1840—an experience which, according to Frederic Carpenter, "clearly affected Emerson's writing" (Carpenter 1930: 108). We also can be sure that Emerson was aware of Burnouf's 1839 translation from Sanskrit into French of manuscripts of the *Lotus Sutra*, because selections from Burnouf's translation were included in two articles in *La Revue Indépendante* in 1843—"Fragments des Prédications

de Buddha" and "Considérations sur l'Origine du Bouddhisme"—and in his journal that year, Emerson had translated a passage from the latter of these articles into English. Emerson was editor for *The Dial* at that time, and included a selection from Burnouf's French translation that was subsequently translated into English, either by Elizabeth Palmer Peabody or by Emerson himself, for publication as "The Preaching of Buddha" in the January 1844 issue (Van Anglen 2012: 3–5). This publication of a selection from the *Lotus Sutra* in *The Dial*, which was prefixed with an extract from Burnouf's article, effectively opened what Thomas Tweed has called "the American conversation about Buddhism" (Tweed 1992: xix).

Emerson's doctrine of correspondence has been discussed in connection with the influence of Emanuel Swedenborg and Coleridge, but more should be said about the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination, which teaches that all things arise in dependence on other things (Bosco et al. 2009: 101–102). Carpenter has noted Emerson's expressed aversion to the "over-rational quality which he felt to underlie [Buddhism]" as evidenced by this journal entry from 1845: "*Buddha, or he who knows*. Intellect puts an interval: if we converse with low things,—the interval saves us. But if we converse with high things, with heroic actions, with heroic persons, with virtues, the interval becomes a gulf, and we cannot enter into the highest good." (Carpenter 1930: 146, 148; Emerson, *Journals* 9: 2) But this passage immediately precedes another entry that shows a similar aversion to Plato, even though Plato was central to the formation of Emerson's thought. Indeed, the intellectual quality underlying the Buddhist perspective may have been an enabling source of its appeal for Emerson at this time. Emerson's experience in the Jardin des Plantes, related in his journal for 1833, instructs us not just to take Emerson's interests in science more seriously, but to consider how his awareness of Buddhism, through Cousin and Burnouf, prepared him for his naturalist revelation, when he writes, "Not a form so grotesque, so savage, nor so beautiful but is an expression of some property inherent in the observer,—an occult relation between the very scorpions and man. I feel the centipede in me—cayman, carp, eagle, & fox. I am moved by strange sympathies, I say continually, 'I will be a naturalist'" (Emerson, *Journals* 4: 199–200). In *Nature*, as in the Jardin des Plantes, Emerson is drawn

Anita Patterson
Boston University
USA

to the organic, dynamic, all-encompassing unity in nature's web of relation and analogy, the profound interrelationship among the overwhelming diversity of natural facts arranged into a perfectly ordered, unified system that shows the "radical correspondence between visible things and human thoughts" (Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* 1983: 10–11, 22).

There are many other suggestive references to Buddhism in Emerson's journals, but the clearest evidence we have that Emerson himself regarded Buddhism as relevant to his thought occurs in "The Transcendentalist," an 1842 lecture read at the Masonic Temple in Boston. Here, in his first public reference to Buddhism, Emerson explicitly identifies Buddhism with Transcendentalism. "The Transcendentalist adopts the whole connection of spiritual doctrine," he writes. "Buddhism is an expression of it. The Buddhist…in his conviction that every good deed can by no possibility escape its reward, is a Transcendentalist." (Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* 1983: 22) In this lecture, as in his essay "Compensation," which appeared a year earlier, Emerson conceives of a universe where beneficial effects are derived from virtuous actions and harmful effects from evil actions, a theory that, according to Arthur Versluis and others, was shaped by the doctrine of karma shared by Buddhism and Hinduism (Versluis 1993: 58; Christy 1932: 98–105; Jackson 1981: 54).

There is, moreover, a growing consensus among scholars with regard to resonances with the Buddhist doctrine of selflessness or the nonego in one of the most memorable passages from Emerson's *Nature* where he becomes a transparent eye-ball: "In the woods, we return to reason and faith […]. Standing on the bare ground […] all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God" (Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* 1983: 10; Richardson 1995: 393; Rudy 2001: 50; Hakutani 2017: 45–47). Sharon Cameron has argued that in Emerson "the personal is most marked at the moment of its obliteration," and this recurring dialectic, Emerson's "making and *un*making of personality," should be regarded in light of his interest in Buddhism (Cameron 2007: viii, 93–94). Indeed, Emerson's perceived affinities with Buddhism may have been one reason, as Alan Hodder has remarked, that his writings influenced Japanese intellectual circles during the Meiji era, when "Compensation" was the very first of his essays to be translated into Japanese by Nakamura Masano in 1888. Hodder states that "By the 1890s, Emerson's

writings began to exert a strong influence on Japanese culture more widely, and before long, quotations from Emerson found their way into Japanese newspapers, magazines, and even common usage as well" (Hodder 2015: 401). Emerson's 1872 speech at a Harvard banquet held in Boston for the Iwakura mission, a group of diplomats and technical advisors sent by the Meiji government to study Western institutions, may have helped to establish his popularity in Japan (Gewertz 2004). D. T. Suzuki, an influential interpreter of Zen Buddhism, published his "Essay on Emerson" in 1896, and in later years recalled the "deep impressions" made upon him while he was reading Emerson in college (Suzuki 1959: 343–344; Goto 2007: 74–82).

Richard Wright very likely would have come across Suzuki's commentary on Emerson while he composed his projections in the haiku manner in 1959, because at the time he was also perusing *The Complete Works of D. T. Suzuki: Manual of Zen Buddhism* and Suzuki's second series of *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. Wright owned three volumes of collected essays by Emerson, and his deep and lasting appreciation for Emerson's place in the American tradition was expressed in his comments in an unpublished essay on "Personalism" written in the mid- to late-1930s, and on the dust jacket of Henrietta Buckmaster's history of the Underground Railroad, published by Harper in 1941. "Emerson speculated and sang of the spiritual and moral perfection of the individual under what he hoped would be a truly democratic civilization," Wright claimed. "We Americans have lost something, have forgotten something, that we will never be ourselves again until we have recaptured and made our own the fire that once burned in the hearts of […] Douglass, […] Emerson, […] and others." (Fabre, *Books* 1990: 19, 47; Davis et al. 1982: 167)

Learning about haiku and Buddhism from R. H. Blyth, Wright would have become even more intensely aware of Emerson, for the simple reason that Blyth quotes extensively from Emerson to illustrate fundamental tenets of Zen Buddhism. There are seventeen quotations drawn from Emerson's poetry and prose in Blyth's four volumes, and nine in the first volume alone, a volume we know Wright studied with great care. For example, in his discussion of "Zen, the State of Mind for Haiku," in a section

Anita Patterson
Boston University
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titled "Selflessness," Blyth quotes from Emerson's "Bacchus"—"And the poor grass shall plot and plan/What it will do when it is man"—to illustrate the Buddhist doctrine of the nonego where, he writes, "it is the insentient things whose own Buddha nature stirs within them." Wright would also have been struck by Blyth's quotation of a line from "Self-Reliance," "God will not have his work made manifest by cowards," to explore courage as a manifestation of Zen:

> Though not one of the virtues especially emphasized by the moralist, it nevertheless includes all the other twelve characteristics mentioned above, selflessness, loneliness, grateful acceptance, wordlessness, non-intellectuality, contradictoriness, humour, freedom, non-morality, materiality, and love. All these elements are in some way present when an act of courage is performed. It may be difficult, however, to see how courage is an essential, even the most essential part of a poet. (Blyth 1949: 165, 261–62; Emerson, *Collected Poems* 1994: 96; Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* 1983: 260).

The majority of the illustrative passages in Blyth's discussion of Zen and haiku in the first volume are drawn from Emerson's "Woodnotes I." For example, in order to explain "Materiality" as a manifestation of Zen and the "practicality of haiku," Blyth quotes from the first section of "Woodnotes I," to show how Emerson "gives us a list of things that a poet, and preeminently a haiku poet, prizes most" (Blyth 1949: 304):

> [...] shadows, colors, clouds,
> Grass-buds and caterpillars' shrouds,
> Boughs on which the wild bees settle,
> Tints that spot the violet's petal [.]
> (*Emerson, Collected Poems 1994: 35–36*)

At the end of the volume, Blyth uses his own line breaks and omits the conjunction "And" opening a line in the third section of Emerson's poem (*Collected Poems* 1994: 37) as a model of what he describes as "haiku in English poetry" (Blyth 1949: 241–242):

> Up the tall mast
> Runs
> The woodpecker.

Another quotation from the third section of the poem occurs where Blyth elucidates the "extreme simplicity" of Zen, and the resulting reticence of haiku poetry where "the volubility of the Japanese language has been completely overcome." "Such a simplicity," he continues, "implies an extraordinary acuteness, such as we find, for example, in the following: […] 'Go where he will, the wise man is at home.'" Finally, the memorable and compelling identification of love with courage "as one thing" in Zen and haiku is illustrated in Emerson's concluding lines:

> When the forest shall mislead me,
> When the night and morning lie,
> When sea and land refuse to feed me,
> 'Twill be time enough to die:
> Then will yet my mother yield
> A pillow in her greenest field,
> Nor the June flowers scorn to cover
> The clay of their departed lover.
> (Blyth 1949: 252, 267–68; Emerson, *Collected Poems* 1994: 39)

In scholarly debates concerning Wright's haiku-inspired poetry, the Buddhist doctrine of selflessness has been construed as stifling resistance to social injustice: a central question critics raise is whether or not Wright turns away from the social and political concerns evident in his earlier works (Fabre, "Poetry" 1982: 271; Tener 1982: 273–74; Brignano 1970: 16). Consider, for example, the opening poem from Wright's collection, which arguably alludes to the passage in *Nature* where Emerson writes "I am nothing":

> I am nobody:
> A red sinking autumn sun
> Took my name away. (Wright, *Haiku* 1998: 1)

Some critics, such as Toru Kiuchi, have praised Wright for exhibiting the influence of Zen Buddhism (Kiuchi 2011: 34); it is plausible, as Sanehide Kodama has argued, that the poet-speaker's description of himself as "nobody" represents "selflessness," in Blyth's sense, because an angry black consciousness has, through the poem's willed loss of identity, been transcended and transmuted to peace of mind and acceptance (Kodama 2011: 127–128). Viewed in these terms, Wright's "I am nobody" liberates the poet-speaker from his-

Anita Patterson
Boston University
USA

tory, including his lifelong struggle against racism. However, "I am nobody" has also been construed as a powerful affirmation of subjectivity. Robert Tener has argued that Wright did not achieve mastery of haiku as a genre in this poem, in part because the poet-speaker is too intrusive, and fails to accept the loss of personal identity (Tener 1982: 283, 289); as Yoshinobu Hakutani observes, "the poet is strongly present, even by negation" (Hakutani 2017: 141). According to this interpretation, Wright's poem should be read as a protest poem depicting what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. memorably described some years later as "a degenerating sense of 'nobodiness'" in his celebrated "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" (King 1991: 283).

The significance and force of Wright's "I am nobody" as a poem of protest and resistance are considerably stronger when it is read in light of Emersonian pragmatism: another possible intertext is "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" by Emily Dickinson, whom Richard Poirier has identified as a pragmatist, whose lyric practice has been found to share characteristics of Japanese visual art and ceremonies underlying the aesthetics of haiku poetry, and whose poetry Wright reread in 1958 (Poirier 1992: 80; Takeda 2013: 26; Fabre, *Unfinished* 1993: 464, 614n.5). In *White Man, Listen*, published in 1953, Wright adamantly affirms both the "autonomy" of art and a "tough-souled pragmatism" that would nurture a meaningful life: "I am convinced that the humble, fragile dignity of man, buttressed by a tough-souled pragmatism, […] can sufficiently sustain and nourish human life, can endow it with ample and durable meaning […]. I believe that art has its own autonomy, a self-sufficiency that extends beyond […] the spheres of political or priestly power or sanction" (Wright, *White* 1957: 51–52). In his 1945 introduction to *Black Metropolis* by St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, Wright discusses the work of John Dewey, along with his fellow pragmatist William James (Wright, "Introduction" 1945: xxiii). His interest in Dewey's *Art as Experience* is especially noteworthy, insofar as Kenneth Yasuda has observed the applicability of Dewey's text to traditional haiku aesthetics (Yasuda 1957: 12), and at least one Dewey scholar, Jim Garrison, has examined Dewey's influence on twentieth-century Japanese Buddhist philosophy (Garrison et al. 2014: 4–5, 13).

I will not attempt to definitively answer the question of whether Emerson should be regarded as a pragmatist or an originator of this tradition, citing instead numerous scholars, such as Cornel West, Richard Poirier, James Albrecht, and Douglas Anderson. Joseph Urbas has addressed this question in an illuminating close analysis of the line in "Experience" where Emerson writes that "The true romance which the world exists to realize will be the transformation of genius into practical power," concluding that Emerson's doctrine is "practical *because metaphysical*" insofar as the world "exists to realize right ideas aligned with its causal order." (Urbas, "How Close" 2017: 569) As Albrecht observes, "The notion that Emerson is a seminal figure or precursor for American pragmatism is no longer new or controversial" and the influence of pragmatist ideas and motifs in American literature during the first half of the twentieth century has been widely recognized by Frank Lentricchia, Paul Jay, Jonathan Levin, and others (Albrecht 2012: 18; Lentricchia 1994: 1–46; Jay 1997: 20–56; Levin 1999: 17–44). West, Anderson, and Albrecht have argued that Dewey, following Emerson, places emphasis on reconstructing the idea of truth with a focus on consequences, the conduct of life, and the betterment of human existence in society. All three affirm that Dewey adapts and expands Emerson's affirmation of individuality as self-reliance. "The grand breakthrough of Dewey," West writes, "is not only that he considers [...] larger structures, systems, and institutions, but also that he puts them at the center of his pragmatic thought without surrendering his allegiance to Emersonian and Jamesian concerns with individuality and personality" (West 1989: 217).

It is very likely that Wright had both Emerson and Dewey in mind when he composed "I am nobody," because Dewey quotes Emerson's transparent eye-ball passage to illustrate the mystic aspect of "aesthetic surrender," advocating intercultural engagement with the arts of Asian and African civilizations in order to combat racism (Dewey 1934: 29, 344, 349–350). But an even more compelling intertext is *Invisible Man* by Wright's close friend Ralph Ellison, a novel which, as Albrecht has convincingly argued, should be included in the genealogy of Emersonian pragmatism. Refuting critics who interpret Ellison's parodic allusions as a "scathing rejection" of Emerson, Albrecht argues that *Invisible Man* expresses

Anita Patterson
Boston University
USA

Ellison's ambivalent indebtedness to and critique of Emerson's conception of self-reliance and "complex sense of the self's social implication and indebtedness" (Albrecht 2012: 19). I contend that Wright, in "I am nobody," deliberately alludes to Ellison's opening chapter in *Invisible Man*, where a single passage encapsulates a central insight about democratic individuality as it is reconceived by Emerson and the legacy of pragmatism elaborated by Dewey: "It took me a long time," says the Invisible Man, "and much painful boomeranging of my expectations to achieve a realization everyone else appears to have been born with: That I am nobody but myself." (Ellison, *Invisible* 1995: 15) Despite their at times fraught relationship, Wright's late haiku recalls Ellison's celebration of Wright's "assertion of individuality" in his 1945 review of *Black Boy*, "Richard Wright's Blues" (Ellison, *Collected* 2003: 134). Affirming Emerson's individualistic ethic of self-expressive action, or self-culture, Wright and Ellison both show how individuality can only be known and developed against the resistance of a particular social environment; in doing so, they respond in a hopeful, life-affirming way to what would otherwise appear to be tragic limitations on the self.

I hope I have given some indication of how Emerson fostered the development of Wright's pragmatist poetics. I will conclude with a brief consideration of how Wright's pragmatist poetics and interest in Buddhism help us to acknowledge that Emerson's East-West interculturality laid a foundation for the flourishing of T. S. Eliot's modernism in *The Waste Land*, a work rarely discussed in connection with either Emerson or Wright. We know that part three of *Lawd Today!*, Wright's first novel, was begun in 1935, at a time when Wright was reading Eliot with a passion, and carried this memorable, haunting epigraph taken from Eliot's *The Waste Land*: "But at my back in a cold blast I hear/The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear." (Walker 1988; Eliot 2015: 62; Patterson, "Projections" 2021: 13) The epigraph explicitly alludes to one of the most enigmatic, studied passages in all of Eliot's poetry, part three of *The Waste Land*, "The Fire Sermon," which culminates in a juxtaposition of fragments from Augustine's *Confessions* and a Buddhist scripture that Eliot identifies in a footnote and had studied in the original Pali

for Charles Lanman's course as a graduate student at Harvard. As I have argued elsewhere, the influence of *The Waste Land* extends to Wright's protest poems published during the 1930s, including "Between the World and Me," which appeared in the *Partisan Review* in the summer of 1935, and where Wright renders his speaker's awakening to shocked horror at a lynching (Patterson, "Projections" 2021: 17). Wright's 1945 journal, written shortly before he expatriated to Paris, reveals a renewed interest in Eliot's poetry, insofar as Wright quotes from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "Portrait of a Lady," and *Ash-Wednesday*. Composing his projections in the haiku manner two decades after he first used the epigraph from Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Wright's interest in Buddhism, haiku poetry, and transpacific interculturality rendered Eliot's work more relevant than ever (Patterson, "Modern Poetry" 2021: 296–298). Wright's dialectical affirmation of subjectivity by negation in "I am nobody," inspired by Emerson and Buddhism, also recalls Eliot's formulation of poetic impersonality in his 1919 essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"—a concept that was, according to Sharon Cameron (Cameron 2007: 152, 166–167), Tatsuo Murata (Murata 1995: 18–23), Christian Kloeckner (Kloeckner 2012: 166–167, 171), and others, shaped by Eliot's study of Sanskrit and Pali texts and attraction to the Buddhist doctrine of selflessness.

Eliot's own academic course of study raises the strong possibility that he was intensely aware of Emerson's prior interest in Buddhism. In his graduate courses with Lanman, for example, where Eliot read works by the Sanskrit scholar and philologist, F. Max Müller, he would have learned that Müller dedicated his foundational study of comparative religion, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, to Emerson. Moreover, while auditing lectures in another course, Philosophy 24a, "Schools of Religious and Philosophical Thought in Japan," taught by the Japanese comparative religion scholar Masaharu Anesaki, during the 1913–1914 academic year, Eliot received a class handout on the "parable of the plants" from the *Lotus Sutra* that was the same excerpt published by Emerson as "The Preaching of the Buddha" in *The Dial* (Patterson, "Eliot" 2018: 36–38; Crawford 2015: 176). Anesaki, who frequently drew comparisons between Unitarianism and Buddhism, and who was closely connected with the Unitarian community in Boston as well

as the Unitarian mission in Japan, would have known, and likely mentioned this to his class (Kearns 1987: 78).

Many critics have examined Eliot's allusion to Hinayana Buddhism in "The Fire Sermon," but no one to my knowledge has discussed the relevance of Emerson's 1844 Mahayana Buddhist selection for *The Dial*, even though its imagery and hermeneutical emphasis present strong, striking resonances with *The Waste Land*. In *The Waste Land*, as in the parable of the plants, thunder and water figure the difficulty, and necessity, of cultural mediation and interpretation in the transmission of Mahayana Buddhist teachings. The version rendered in *The Dial* describes a scene in which a great cloud, resounding with the noise of thunder, spreads water over the land and nourishes the different kinds of plants. The rain, we are told, represents the teachings of the Buddha, and the plants represent the diverse capacities of living beings who hear and are nourished by his teachings, each one according to their ability and need. The parable demonstrates how the Buddha employs skillful means and devices in order to adapt his teachings to the abilities of his hearers, a central doctrine of the Mahayana. Eliot's deliberate allusion to this East Asian Buddhist parable conjoins the quandary of interpretation vividly dramatized at the end of *The Waste Land* by the Hindu parable of the Thunder, and the Biblical trope of water as a metaphor of transmission in what Eliot called the "water-dripping song," endowing greater formal coherence to his poem as a whole.

We still have much to learn about Emerson, Buddhism, and their importance for the development of Wright's pragmatist poetics as well as Eliot's modernism. At the very least, I hope I have shown that, read carefully within the context of Emersonian legacies of resistance, Wright's work is a monumental achievement that has opened new cross-cultural vistas and will continue to inspire future generations.

Abstract: Emerson's affinity with Buddhism has been the source of much controversy, and his adaptation of the doctrine translated as Buddhist "indifference" has been construed as stifling resistance to social injustice. I will revisit this topic, explaining why Emerson figures so prominently in discussions of Buddhism by the philosopher D. T. Suzuki and the British scholar R. H. Blyth, in order to develop a context for analyzing modes of resistance in Richard Wright's late haiku-inspired poetry. A central

Anita Patterson
Boston University
USA

question raised in critical debates is whether or not Wright turns away in these poems from the social and political concerns of his earlier works. I will show that their significance and force as protest poetry is considerably stronger when regarded in light of Wright's "tough-souled pragmatism" and an Emersonian pragmatist tradition elaborated by scholars such as Cornel West, James Albrecht, and Douglas Anderson, a tradition characterized by East-West intercultural exchange that includes John Dewey and Ralph Ellison. Contextualized and enriched by this tradition, the poem Wright selected out of the 4000 to open his collection, "I am nobody," can be read as alluding to Ellison's allusion to Emerson in *Invisible Man*, protesting what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. would some years later memorably describe as "a degenerating sense of 'nobodiness'" in his celebrated "Letter from Birmingham City Jail." I will conclude with a brief consideration of how Wright's creative engagement with Buddhism in the work of T. S. Eliot illuminates Emerson's vastly neglected contribution to the development of high modernism.

Keywords: transpacific, pragmatism, haiku, Buddhism, Richard Wright, Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Dewey, T. S. Eliot, modernism, African American literature

Bio: Anita Patterson is Professor of English at Boston University. She is the author of *From Emerson to King: Democracy, Race, and the Politics of Protest* (Oxford University Press, 1997) and *Race, American Literature and Transnational Modernisms* (Cambridge University Press, 2008). She is currently researching how the widening popularity of *Japonisme* fostered an American literary tradition of transpacific exchange that extends from Emerson and T. S. Eliot up through the Black Chicago Renaissance and the haiku-inspired poetry of Richard Wright.

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Boston University
USA

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Boston University
USA

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"ATOM BY ATOM, ALL THE WORLD INTO A NEW FORM"

Ralph Waldo Emerson's Theory of Reform

Daphne Orlandi
Sapienza
University of Rome
Italy
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1955-8752

Dissent, from the Latin verb *dissentire*, to differ in sentiment, or, put more simply, to feel differently about something, is at the core of the American project. Religious and political dissent, for example, were driving factors of, respectively, the earliest migrations to North America and the War of Independence. As historian Ralph Young points out in his *Dissent: The History of an American Idea*, dissent not only "created this nation, [but it also] played, indeed still plays, a fundamental role in fomenting change and pushing the nation in sometimes unexpected directions" (2015: 2). As the First Amendment makes clear, dissent should not only be tolerated on American soil, but it also deserves to be protected. To use David Skover's and Ronald K. L. Collins' words, dissent is necessary for American society to thrive, and "it is what legitimates democratic governance; it is the seal affixed to the social contract" (2013: 132). In its etymological sense of "feeling differently" about something, though, the concept of dissent seems to be particularly close to some of the basic tenets of Transcendentalism. This literary and philosophical movement, with its constant emphasis on "intuition" and "individualism," indeed revolved around the idea of "feeling differently." According to the transcendentalists, intuition legitimized independent and personal endeavors, and they urged their contemporaries to live their lives with self-reliance,

to rebel against custom and established models, to speak out and express their dissent when necessary.

This relationship between dissent and Transcendentalism has long been at the center of scholarly debate, but while Young rightly identifies Transcendentalism as "the wellspring of American dissent" (2015: 137) others have been more resistant to attribute such a revolutionary–and political–feature to the movement. Specifically, when it comes to the writings of the leading voice of Transcendentalism, Ralph Waldo Emerson, many have been skeptical about labelling his works as expressions of "dissent." His image in popular culture has often been that of the "idealist Emerson," a supposedly aloof and detached intellectual who chose to separate himself from the political and social reality of his time. Although there has been an effort in contemporary criticism to bypass this limiting interpretation of Emerson's writings (see for example Gougeon's *Virtue's Hero: Emerson, Anti-slavery, and Reform*, Levine and Malachuk's *A Political Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, or Garvey's *The Emerson Dilemma: Essays on Emerson and Social Reform*), what is still to be fully explored is the *productive* dissent that one can find in his essays. This connotation of "dissent" here is crucial because as Young notes, dissent can be expressed in a variety of forms. Some dissenters "are *reactionaries* who seek to address the problems by returning to the policies that existed before the problems arose. Some are *radicals* or even *revolutionaries* who propose to solve the problems by smashing the system and starting over," and some, like Emerson, are "*reformers* who wish to fix the problems through a process of reform" (2015: 5). Drawing on Steven H. Shiffrin's point that dissent is "a practice of vital importance to the self-realization of many individuals, and even more important, a crucial institution for challenging unjust hierarchies and for promoting progressive change" (1999: XII), this article aims to demonstrate that a strong reformist energy was inherent in Transcendentalism as a social and cultural phenomenon, and argues that Emerson's idea of reform, though primarily directed towards the individual, was also intended to have an effect on society at large. Indeed, Emerson can be said to aim at social change through the reform of the individual.

Daphne Orlandi
Sapienza
University of Rome
Italy

What makes this topic relevant today is the openness of Emerson's work. Though he saw himself as a scholar, a poet and a lecturer, he wanted his audience to learn how to "listen to their interior conviction," (*Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks* 3: 374) and never intended to communicate ultimate lessons. As Donald E. Pease points out, critics have identified in his writings both a "depoliticizing transcendentalism and a politicizing social reformism" (2010: 131). To analyze his theory of reform both tendencies need to be acknowledged since they are, as Pease observes, in "a relationship of antagonistic cooperation" (2010: 132).

EMERSONIAN INDIVIDUALISM AND SOCIETY

The starting point of an analysis for Emerson's theory of reform, as expressed in four different essays—"Reforms," "Man the Reformer," "New England Reformers," and "Reform"—is necessarily his individualism. Since his doctrine of reform revolves around both the individual and the society in which he or she moves, it is crucial to examine his concept of individualism, as well as at its implications for society. As is often the case with Emerson, individualism, just as Transcendentalism—which he loosely defined as "Idealism as it appears in 1842" (*Complete Works* 1: 311)—is a term that notoriously defies a simple and concise characterization. Emersonian individualism, or self-reliance, has been and still is a contested concept. Emerson's appeals to "trust thyself," his emphasis on self-trust and self-sufficiency have been interpreted in a number of ways. John Holzwarth claims that Emerson's concept of self-reliance has been often "dismissed as merely a rugged individualist's sneer to 'do it yourself'" and contemporary liberals sometimes "worry that Emerson's emphasis on self-reliance undermines empathy for the needy and feeds conservative attacks on the welfare state" (2011: 331). Over the course of the years, many scholars have attempted to define the essence of Emersonian self-reliance. Among them is Lawrence Buell who, while listing the heterogeneous interpretations of this concept in his 2004 landmark work *Emerson*, makes a point of exposing the apparently paradoxical foundation of self-reliance. Although "self-reliance seemingly sets the highest value on egocentricity, [it] also strives mightily to guard itself against the egotism it seems to license"

(2004: 59). While acknowledging that the Emersonian "I" rests upon the "subjectivity of vision," Buell also stresses that self-reliance is "exemplary of any person's capabilities and [thus] sink[s] egotism into precept" (2004: 77). In her *Critical Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Tiffany K. Wayne points out that "Emerson rejected the idea that an inward focus on the self, or 'egotism,' as critics charged, was undesirable and even harmful to society" (2010: X). The kind of self-reliant individuals who Emerson was envisioning were an asset to society, which, as Wayne puts it, being made up of individuals, is "only ever as good as those individuals make it" (2010: X–XI).

The relationship between self-reliant individuals and society is arguably one of the most interesting aspects of the concept of self-reliance. Emerson uses the opposition between the individualism at the core of the idea self-reliance and a well-functioning society where individuals are in some way dependent on one another to create a productive dialectic tool which empowers them and strengthens the society in which each self-reliant individual moves. In other words, in Emerson's mind, being self-reliant did not require a definite rupture with society. Those who lived with self-reliance were able to act freely in accordance with the truth of their mind—rather than according to what was expected of them—and yet their defiance of public opinion never presupposed isolation and solitude. To use Buell's words, self-reliant behavior "prescribe[d] not insular withdrawal but more robust coexistence" (2004: 78). Indeed, the kind of self envisioned by the Transcendentalists was not conceived to be a self-contained unit that existed separate from the world around him or her and though Emerson was, without any doubt, mainly interested in the development of the individual, he also believed that self-reliance had the potential to work "a revolution in all the offices and relations of men" (*Complete Works* 2: 76).

This intermingling of the individual and society is precisely what Wayne defines as "the paradox of Transcendentalism." She asks:

> How did a belief in the power of the *individual* translate into a *social* movement? The fundamental belief in the right to self-development, in the integrity of the individual mind, had application to questions of equality and justice that dominated 19th-century political culture,

from the right to vote to the right to an education, from labor reform to women's rights, from Indian removal to the atrocities of American slavery. (Wayne 2010: X)

It might be surprising to see how often a transcendentalist approach was indeed used to tackle many of the most pressing social issues of the time. And yet this philosophical movement, often remembered for its emphasis on abstract concepts such as the "Soul" and for its sustained focus on the individual, truly seemed to have had extremely practical and social applications, as it was often used to "reform the day-to-day world, to improve society—and make good on the American promise—for all" (Petrulionis et al. 2010: XXIV). In this sense, Transcendentalism has a powerful reformist core. What to some commentators is the rather abstract idealism of Emerson's philosophy, for others constitutes a "mood of resistance to established conventions and expectations, and [a] desire for rethinking and remaking" (Robinson 1999: 14). As the number of different interpretations on the matter demonstrates, this quality of Transcendentalism is not entirely apparent at first sight, but there seems to be growing consensus among scholars on the shortsightedness of considering the Transcendentalists as only concerned with the development of individuals.

It seems that Emerson was convinced that the achievements of the mind were also supposed to have an impact on the world in which the individual moved and, as Kerry Larson affirms, in his essays he was aware that "getting people to change their opinion about themselves is often bound up with getting them to change their views on what it means to interpret the world around them" (2001: 994). Emerson appears sure that a maturation of the individual mind had to go hand-in-hand with the general improvement of society, the latter being the stage in which the self-reliant man[1] should perform his action. This application of Transcendentalism to society is the underlying assumption of this study. The comprehensive theory of reform that Emerson developed through the years, though clearly focused on the emancipation of the individual, was also meant to alter the world around them.

1 I am here, and elsewhere in the article, using "man" as a non-gender-specific term.

Daphne Orlandi
Sapienza
University of Rome
Italy

However, as is often the case with Emerson, there are passages in his essays on this theme that seem to put individuals and society at odds with each other. In "The Individual," an 1837 essay, he writes "All philosophy, all theory, all hope are defeated when applied to society. There is in it an inconvertible brute force and it is not for the society of any actual present moment that is now or ever shall be, that we can hope or augur well. Progress is not for society. Progress belongs to the Individual" (*Early Lectures* 2: 176). Although these words certainly exemplify some of Emerson's thoughts on this theme, there are other occasions in which, when writing about the reform efforts of his time, he seems to put individualism and society in a fruitful relationship with each other.

EMERSON'S THEORY OF REFORM

The 1830s in the United States are known as the "Era of Reform." As Len Gougeon writes, at that time "a number of reform movements took shape in America. Some prompted religious freedom, women's rights, penal and prison reform, and peace, but none became as strong or as successful as the abolition movement" (*Virtue's Hero* 1990: XIII). Much has been written on Emerson's antislavery writings (see for instance Gougeon's *Virtue's Hero* and the volume he co-edited with Joel Myerson *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*), which have been used as tangible examples of his interest in civic matters and of his commitment to certain political positions. He also famously argued for religious reform and commented (albeit somewhat superficially) on women's rights. Even though his friend Henry David Thoreau is perhaps the most famous example of a nineteenth-century intellectual also engaged in practices of political dissent, Emerson was evidently no stranger to it either. For that matter, he did not limit himself to writing about reforming society—he even developed what he called a "doctrine of reform" which envisioned a systematic theory of reform founded on the concept of self-reliance.

The four essays Emerson devoted to this topic, "Reforms" (January 1840), "Man the Reformer" (January 1841), "New England Reformers" (March 1844), and "Reform" (November 1860), show that the idea of reform was a longstanding interest of his, one

Daphne Orlandi
Sapienza
University of Rome
Italy

which he revisited multiple times. In the late 1830s, as Gougeon states, Emerson believed that "comprehensive reform of American society could only come about as the result of the reform of individuals" (*Emerson, Poetry, and Reform* 1989: 39) and therefore he developed a theory of reform centered on self-reliance and on individual improvement. However, an analysis of these essays shows that this theorization was simply the necessary first step towards a reformation of society as a whole. In what he envisioned as a process of circular influence, individual improvement was not meant to be the end goal. Self-reliant individuals were supposed to help in reforming society at large, and a reformed society would have, in turn, fostered self-reliance.

This interdependency is already evident at the beginning of his 1840 essay "Reforms," the sixth lecture in his series at the Masonic Temple in Boston. He opens it by noting that a distinctive trait of his age is a "great harvest of projects" of reform aimed at reforming the domestic, social, and civil sphere as well as the literary and ecclesiastical institutions. Emerson applauded these because, as Gougeon writes, he was persuaded that "universal regeneration could never be wrought by emphasizing a singular moral cause like abolition" (*Emerson, Poetry, and Reform* 1989: 39). According to him, these changes were the result of what he called the "education of the public mind" (*Early Lectures* 3: 256), a remark that hints at the connection between a self-reliant man and a self-reliant society. Emerson praised the existence of these attempts at reform, which he calls "efforts for the Better," and he welcomed the fact that his epoch "did not sleep on the errors it inherited, but put every usage on trial, and exploded every abuse" (*Early Lectures* 3: 257). Emerson welcomed these movements, which to him were the proof of the soul that resided in every human being. In a comment reminiscent of Skover's and Collins' description of dissent as the loyal and faithful concept that works to preserve the democratic system in its ideal form (2013: 134), Emerson—in his much more abstract style—wrote that what "agitates society every day with the offer of some new amendment" was the "eternal testimony of the soul in man to a fairer possibility of life and manners than he has attained" (*Early Lectures* 3: 259).

However, although he was not blind to the positive sides of these "efforts for the Better," he was also well aware of their faults and lamented their organization in a "low inadequate form [that] mix[es] the fire of the moral sentiment with personal and party heats, with measureless exaggerations, and the blindness that prefers some darling measure to justice and truth" (*Early Lectures* 3: 259). As Prentiss Clark remarks, Emerson was "particularly attentive to how associations and collective reform efforts could stray from their guiding principles and variously lead to unthinking conformity, misplaced sentiments, or hypocrisy" (209) and he often complained about the narrow-mindedness and dogmatism of many reformers of his time. Considering the many faults that one could find in these reformist projects and in their most famous proponents, Emerson believed that one had the right to be wary of those who "personify" change and be skeptical when change is forcibly imposed on individuals. About this he writes:

> What then is our true part in relation to these philanthropies? Let us be true to our principle that the soul dwells with us and so accept them [...] Accept the reforms but accept not the person of the reformer nor his law. Accept the reform but be thou thyself sacred, intact, inviolable, one whom leaders, one whom multitudes cannot drag from thy central seat. If you take the reform as the reformer brings it to you he transforms you into an instrument [...] Let the Age be a showman demonstrating in picture the needs and wishes of the soul: take them into your private mind; eat the book and make it your flesh. Let each of these causes take in you a new form, the form of your character and genius. Then the Age has spoken to you, and you have answered it: you have prevailed over it (*Early Lectures* 3: 260).

The transformation of the individual into the instrument that Emerson describes might make the modern reader think about the Marxist concept of reification (from the German: *Verdinglichung*, "turning something into a thing"), however the focal point of this essay is Emerson's insistence on what Gougeon calls "the central ethical responsibility of the individual soul" (*Virtue's Hero* 1990: XXI). Time and again, throughout the essay, Emerson insists on the sacredness of the individual, who has to stay put on their "central seat," a concept that he will explore in "Self-Reliance," published a year after this essay. Interestingly, in "Reforms" he writes that he "cannot find language of sufficient energy to convey my

Daphne Orlandi
Sapienza
University of Rome
Italy

sense of the sacredness of private Integrity," (*Early Lectures* 3: 266) and yet the following year he will find both language and energy to write his most celebrated essay on self-sufficiency.

The 1841 collection *Essays: First Series* also contains what is probably Emerson's most famous essay on reform, "Man the Reformer," a lecture that he delivered to the Mechanics' Apprentices' Library Association in Boston on January 25th, 1841. In this piece, Emerson begins to reflect on what he calls "the wider scope" of individual reform efforts. He states that:

> We are to revise the whole of our social structure, the State, the school, religion, marriage, trade, science, and explore their foundations in our own nature; we are to see that the world not only fitted the former men, but fits us, and to clear ourselves of every usage which has not its roots in our own mind. What is a man born for but to be a Reformer, a Remaker of what man has made; a renouncer of lies; a restorer of truth and good, imitating that great Nature which embosoms us all, and which sleeps no moment on an old past, but every hour repairs herself, yielding us every morning a new day, and with every pulsation a new life? Let him renounce everything which is not true to him, and put all his practices back on their first thoughts, and do nothing for which he has not the whole world for his reason (*Complete Works* 1: 236).

In this famous passage Emerson puts a clear emphasis on the individual, whom he believes is supposed to attempt to improve society at large, to reform "the whole of social structure." Men are born to be reformers and, as Emerson famously writes in "Self-Reliance," he wishes to see them questioning old habits and avoiding conformity more often. This "upright and vital" (*Complete Works* 2: 52) attitude, however, has to be applied to the community in which the individual lives, and is thus not meant to be limited to individual experiences. As he writes at the very beginning of "Man the Reformer," Emerson hopes that every person in the audience has:

> Felt his own call to cast aside all evil customs, timidities, and limitations, and to be in his place a free and helpful man, a reformer, a benefactor [...] a brave and upright man, who must find or cut a straight road to everything excellent in the earth, and not only go honorably himself, but *make it easier for all who follow him* to go in honor and with benefit (*Complete Works* 1: 218) [author's emphasis].

Despite his constant emphasis on the importance of the individual, Emerson does not wish to see them detached from the rest of their community and urges them to help others in their journey towards self-reliance and reform. His reformist energy cannot be more explicitly evident than in this passage in which, with a tone that is reminiscent of "Emerson the preacher," he asks his audience "whether we have earned our bread today by the hearty contribution of our energies to the common benefit" and urges them not to "cease to *tend* to the correction of flagrant wrongs, by laying one stone aright every day" (*Complete Works* 1: 235–6).

Self-reliance and the reformist efforts are also at the center of another important lecture of the 1840s, "New England Reformers," an address he delivered at Amory Hall in Boston on March 3rd, 1844. Here, Emerson notes that, in those years, there was a "keener scrutiny of institutions and domestic life than any we had known, there was sincere protesting against existing evils, and there were changes of employment dictated by conscience" (*Complete Works* 3: 241) and points out that the "good result" of these movements was the "assertion of the sufficiency of the private man" (*Complete Works* 3: 241). Slowly, he argues, mankind was realizing the power of the individual and was learning to cast off material aids, in favor of a "growing trust in the private, self-supplied powers of the individual" (*Complete Works* 3: 247). While this text certainly puts emphasis on solitary agents of change, it also theorizes a way for people to act communally that does not take a toll on their individual development.

In a crucial passage of the essay, Emerson writes about the concept of "concert," which he argues is

> Neither better nor worse, neither more nor less potent than individual force. All the men in the world cannot make a statue walk and speak, cannot make a drop of blood, or blade of grass, any more than one man can. But let there be one man, let there be *truth* in two men, in ten men, then is concert for the first time possible (*Complete Works* 3: 252) [author's emphasis].

As this quotation makes apparent, to him a union of intents is only possible as long as everyone in the community acts truthfully, and to act truthfully means to act with self-reliance. For this model

Daphne Orlandi
Sapienza
University of Rome
Italy

to work, though, each individual has to reach their full potential. In Emerson's own words:

> There can be no concert in two, where there is no concert in one. When the individual is not *individual*, but is dual; when his thoughts look one way, and his actions another; when his faith is traversed by his habits; when his will, enlightened by reason, is warped by his sense; when with one hand he rows, and with the other backs water, what concert can be? (*Complete Works* 3: 253)

Even when he attempts to reconcile the individual with society, Emerson never abandons the idea of self-reliance, since the first step for him is always the development of each individual, who only then would be able to fully function and thrive within a larger society. Although the individual remains the main focus, Emerson perceives the world's interest in communal efforts, in the idea of union. He believes that when this union will finally be realized, "men will live and communicate, and plough, and reap, and govern, as by added ethereal power, when once they are united" (*Complete Works* 3: 253). However, Emerson warns that this union "must be inward, and not one of covenants," for "union is only perfect, when all the uniters are isolated. It is the union of friends who live in different streets or towns" (*Complete Works* 3: 253). Incidentally, these words are strikingly similar to Margaret Fuller's famous passage from *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), in which when discussing marriage, she points out that women had to develop their own individuality before entering a marriage—she affirms that "we must have units before we can have unions" (Fuller 1998: 60)—and are indicative of Emerson's plan to integrate self-reliant individuals within society.

In his later essay "Reform" (1860), which he delivered before the Twenty-Eight Congregation Society at the Music Hall in Boston, he stresses once again that reform is a vital function, that it is "an incessant impulse like that of gravitation" (*Later Lectures* 2: 151) and, playing with the etymology of the word, he maintains that "it is not Reform: It is form, and substance. It is primary truth, the clearing away all the delusions, so that you live to honor, justice, and use" (*Later Lectures* 2: 155). The reform efforts of his time are, to him, indicative of our aspiration to imagine fairer possibilities of life and to live truthfully, and therefore he wants self-reliant

individuals to "be an intellectual power" that, by seeing themselves, have to "make others see" (*Later Lectures* 2: 155). Twenty years after the first essay devoted to the theme of reform, Emerson is even more adamant in advocating for self-reliant individuals to fulfill certain obligations to society. He affirms that:

> The part of man is to advance, to stand always for the Better, not himself, his property, his grandmother's spoons, his corner lot, and shop-till, and the petty trick that he and his have done over and over again, till the patience of Nature is exhausted; but to stand for his neighbors and mankind; for the making others as good as he is, for largest liberty; for enriching, enlightening and enkindling others and making life great and happy to nations (*Later Lectures* 2: 157).

It is striking to see Emerson downplaying (to a certain extent) the centrality of the self. Furthermore, in this passage he powerfully asserts that self-reliance should not be an end in and of itself, but rather it should function as a tool to improve life for everyone, everywhere. Emerson even mentions the word "nations" which, though it could refer simply to a great number of individuals, points to the *idea* of "nation" in its more common meaning, that of an organized society in which a diverse group of people, made up of single individuals, work together for the common good.

As these essays demonstrate, whenever Emerson wrote on reform, though he might have seemed solely concerned with individual growth, he was in fact also advocating for tangible social changes, which, in his mind, were to be introduced by self-reliant individuals, by those whom we could call reformers or dissenters. The starting point of his theory of reform is clearly the formation of self-reliant individuals, for as he writes in "New England Reformers," in 1844, "Society gains nothing whilst a man, not himself renovated, attempts to renovate things around him" (*Complete Works* 3: 225). Eminent critics have analyzed and described Emersonian individualism, and though they are right in noticing the importance of the individual project, Emerson seems to think that it is only one side of the matter. For him, individualism was never meant to end in itself. An excerpt from his *Journals*, in which he comments on the 1848 revolutions in Europe, explains this point even further:

Daphne Orlandi
Sapienza
University of Rome
Italy

> People here expect a revolution. There will be no revolution, none that deserves to be called so. There may be a scramble for money. But as all the people we see want the things we now have, & not better things, it is very certain that they will, under whatever change of forms, keep the old system. When I see changed men, I shall look for a changed world (*Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks* 10: 311).

While analyzing passages that record Emerson's reaction to this historical event, Sacvan Bercovitch emphasizes that Emerson had a "firm belief that all hope for change, reformist or revolutionary, peaceful or violent, belonged to individualism" (1993: 338). However, this individualism was not the end goal for him, and indeed he states that he would only start looking for a changed world after individuals took it upon themselves to radically change, thus suggesting that the process of amelioration of each individual should not stop there, but should instead be the engine of a larger revolution. As Robert Milder points out, "the future, as Emerson imagined it, rested on a full-scale reorganization of consciousness, [one that] led individuals […] to a terra incognita of spiritual being that promised to remold traditions and social institutions" (1999: 56). Milder calls this a "revolution-by-consciousness," and describes it as a process that rests on the idea that to transform the world, one has to first transform mankind (1999: 59). Furthermore, Jeffrey Stout believes that time and again, Emerson in his writings alludes to Romans 12:2 ("Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind") and posits that Emerson makes use of a "rhetoric of transformation [which] aims to draw readers into a process of ethical change" (2014: 20). These renewed individuals, humankind 2.0, are those who, as Emerson states in "Reform," should bring about (social) change: "Each man is a new power in nature; has an aptitude which none else has; is a new method and distributes things anew. If he could attain full size he would take up first or last, atom by atom, all the world into a new form" (*Later Lectures* 2: 159).

The only way to attain "full size," however, is to use the power of self-reliance to change and improve the lives of others, for as Emerson writes in "The Transcendentalist," "the good and wise must learn to act, and carry salvation to the combatants and demagogues in the dusty arena below" (*Collected Works* 1: 211). To truly be self-reliant, one needs to recognize that

self-reliance does not extinguish its power into the individual. On the contrary, as he writes in his lecture "The Individual" (part of *The Philosophy of History* series), individual progress is the necessary condition for the emergence of any meaningful social reform: "out of the strength and wisdom of the private heart shall go forth at another era the regeneration of society" (*Early Lectures* 2: 186). As is often the case in Emerson's oeuvre, the apparent dichotomy of self/society is rethought and ultimately almost dissolved. Not only, as James M. Albrecht has noted, Emerson's self is "inescapably social," but in his works a "healthy community" is often described as one in which "active individuals inspire and antagonize one another through their diverse activities" (1999: 21–22). The constant progress of amelioration of the individual that Emerson argues for throughout his whole career places extreme value on the variety of human experience. Although Emerson firmly believes in a "universal mind" of which "each individual man is one more incarnation" (*Collected Works* 2: 4), he also appreciates the dynamism and diversity that could arise in a society whose members were able to learn the lesson of self-reliance. As Joseph Urbas notes, Emerson's "self-reliant soul" is "fundamentally creative—morally, poetically, religiously, and politically creative" (2021: 235) and, as I have shown, this ultimately results in a radical rethinking or a rigorous reconstructing of society and its institutions. Urbas also rightly points out that, for Emerson, "self-reliance is not synonymous with indifference to social or political engagement" and that "obligations to self do not dispense us from those to others" (2021: 254). Although this is undoubtedly true, Emerson's theory of reform goes even further. When he writes that "every reform was once a private opinion" (*Collected Works* 2: 4), he not only stresses that self-reliance does not oppose social engagement, but rather he envisions moral and ethical development as the necessary ground for—and hence the first step of—any meaningful project of social and political reform.

Abstract The idea of dissent has often been discussed in association with the works of the Transcendentalists, who greatly influenced the literary and philosophical landscape of the United States in the 19th century. This article aims to shed light on an often-ignored side of Ralph Waldo Emerson who, often described as an aloof thinker, was an adamant dissenter and, more specifically, a conscientious reformer. By focusing on his theory of reform as expressed in a selection of essays devoted to this theme, this paper argues that Emerson's concept of reform, though primarily directed towards the individual, was also intended to have repercussions in society at large. This dichotomy between individualism and communal effort is analyzed in texts which cover a twenty-year span in Emerson's life, to demonstrate that this dualism constitutes an opposition that must be reevaluated and ultimately resolved.

Keywords: Transcendentalism, reform, Ralph Waldo Emerson, individualism, dissent, American Literature

Bio: Daphne Orlandi recently completed her PhD at Sapienza–University of Rome in cotutelle with Technische Universität Dortmund and is currently a lecturer in English at Sapienza. In her doctoral thesis she has argued for a radical rethinking of Emerson as a literary globalist and pointed out how the transnational and universal value that Emerson ascribed to literature, coupled with the realization that new modes of production and circulation were altering the inner workings of literature, made him sketch a "permanent" canon of texts that embodied global ideals and could resonate with everyone at all points in history. In 2019 she was awarded AISNA's Gullì Prize for her MA thesis, and in 2022 she was the recipient of the Emerson Society Graduate Student Paper Award. Since 2021, she has served as managing editor for *JAmIt!* (*Journal of American Studies in Italy*). Her main fields of interest include 19th century American literature and comparative literature. She is especially interested in Transatlantic Studies, Transcendentalism as a social force, in the works of Margaret Fuller and in Walt Whitman's poetry.

Daphne Orlandi
Sapienza
University of Rome
Italy

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Daphne Orlandi
Sapienza
University of Rome
Italy

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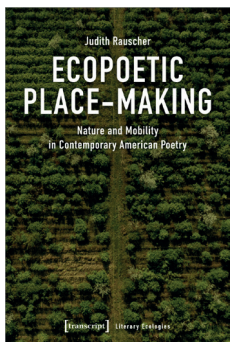
ECOPOETIC PLACE-MAKING: NATURE AND MOBILITY IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETRY

by by Judith Rauscher
(A Book Review)



Carlotta Ferrando
Sapienza University of Rome
Italy
University of Silesia in Katowice
Poland
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9678-7842

Twenty years into the 21st century, the matters of forced mobilities, relocations and displacement are more than ever issues at hand, as we keep on witnessing ceaseless global migratory movements resulting from political persecutions, wars, violence, and/or climate change. Precisely taking the cue from this present-day issue, namely the intersections of environmental change, global ecological crisis and human mass mobilities, Judith Rauscher's *Ecopoetic Place-Making* (2023) focuses on contemporary "American ecopoetries of migration," namely "the oeuvres of […] chosen poets that prominently feature American places and American histories of displacement" (2023: 31).

Drawing mostly from the fields of Ecocriticism and Mobilities Studies, her work explores the complex relationship between migratory subjects and the non-human world, in particular, "the many ways in which human-nature relations are shaped by physical and geographical movement, whether voluntary or forced" (2023: 34) as well as "the varying effects that these displacements in place and between places have […] on the environmental imaginaries in the works of contemporary American poets of migration" (2023: 24). Inspired by some approaches offered by Critical Region-

alism (a recent field of study that focuses on the representations of place-formations and non-urban environments, whilst reflecting primarily on matters of race and histories of dispossession), building on Mobility Studies scholars' work such as Sheller and Urry's "The New Mobilities Paradigm," investigating how people imagine "the atmosphere of place" (2006: 218)—a matter that more often than not features in the poetry and literature of exile and displacement—and examining what ecocritics have defined as "sense of place" (Buell 2005; Heise 2008), Judith Rauscher's study, as she explains in her introductory chapter, "seeks to generate insights of value for the critical debates surrounding mobile culture and cultural mobility in these fields [viz., Cultural Studies and the social sciences] as well as in the humanities at large" (2023: 22). Following in Nixon (2011) and DeLoughrey's (2007; 2011; 2019) footsteps, the author also engages with environmental theories of displacement that consider the role played by human and nonhuman mobilities in place-making and in the formation of postcolonial and transnational ecologies. More specifically, her work examines "the complex cultural ecologies" (2023: 23) resulting from the experiences of diaspora and displacement in the Caribbean, in the Pacific, and in the continental United States. Similar to Jim Cocola's study of spatiality in American poetry, Rauscher concentrates on works of poetry that investigate how the concept of place can become a "pivotal axis of identification" (2016: xi), something capable of creating translocal, planetary, and cosmic connections. But whereas Cocola focuses primarily on a wide range of poetic traditions across America from Modernism to present times, addressing the connections above in relation to the issues of mobility only occasionally, Rauscher's study deals specifically with late 20th- and early 21st century migrant poets "who evoke the complex layering of American places, the ways various kinds of human mobilities affect human environments, and the human-nature relationships as well as environmental imaginaries that emerge from the encounters of mobile subjects with the nonhuman world," while always keeping an ecocritical approach that allows her to reflect "on the social and environmental significance of practices of poetic place-making in the context of mobility" (2023: 29).

Carlotta Ferrando
Sapienza
University of Rome
Italy
University of Silesia
in Katowice
Poland

Indeed, *Ecopoetic Place-Making* offers an interesting and thought-provoking analysis of five contemporary authors (Craig Santos Perez, Juliana Spahr, Derek Walcott, Agha Shahid Ali, and Etel Adnan), migrants of different national, cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. Drawing inspiration from their own experiences of mobilities, these poets, through their works, challenge restrictive and exclusive ideas of place-attachment. Moreover, while actively engaging in ecopoetic place-making—a "restorative or constitutive practice" that, according to Rauscher, takes place among more-than-human communities and consists in human-nature relations in a particular place (2023:16)—they prove that poetry can serve as a tool to envision and "produce environmental imaginaries" (2023: 16) fit for our globalized age.

The first chapter, "Decolonizing Environmental Pedagogy," is devoted to CHamoru poet, scholar, and activist, Craig Santos Perez. His series of poetry collections, titled *from unincorporated territory* (2008–ongoing), is at the center of Rauscher's analysis, which sheds light on Perez's examination of Indigenous practices of place-making, as well as his exploration of the creative modes of resistance against acts of land-taking committed by settlers in his native island of Guam/Guåhan. By showing both past and contemporary acts of colonial violence, along with the environmental devastation that has taken place over the years in the Pacific, Perez's poetry becomes a tool of resistance against the never-ending violation of rights of Pacific Islanders, whose collective well-being and environmental integrity are continuously at stake. According to Rauscher, Perez's framing of CHamoru place-making on his native island of Guåhan can be considered "an epistemological and political project of decolonization that must be attentive to the inextricable link between cultural and environmental losses, while also addressing histories of immobilization and mass mobility" (2023: 43). Taking the cue from the work of other scholars, this chapter intends to demonstrate how Perez's poetry strives to enlighten readers and sensitize them to the detrimental consequences of military invasion and colonial confinement on the natural environment of Guåhan, as well as on the CHamoru people's relationship with the non-human world. Perez's collections investigate how the environmental

wisdom of the CHamoru has been threatened both by ecological devastation and by the immobilization of the CHamoru people, as well as the effects of continental migrations and tourism, which disrupt the native community of Pacific Islanders. As argued by the author, Perez opposes these past and present disruptions with a "participatory ecopoetic that promotes poetry as a means of mobile CHamoru place-making and community formation and as a means of environmental pedagogy that seeks to engage the broadest audience possible" (2023: 47–48) to achieve a collective project of decolonization.

The second chapter, "Situating Ecological Agency," focuses on Anglo-American settler poet Juliana Spahr's *Fuck You–Aloha–I Love You* (2001) and *Well Then There Now* (2011), two collections written after and in response to the author's move to Hawai'i. Here, Rauscher examines how Spahr's "para-lyrical experimentations" (2023: 43) serve to delve into the constraints of settler ecological agency within the context of global capitalism and US imperialism. Spahr's experimental ecopoetry questions the conventional notions of Anthropocene subjectivity by pointing out how various scales of human and non-human mobility contribute to the formation of ecosocial processes that impact and influence both individuals and collectivities. In doing so, Spahr's ecopoetics of multi-scalar mobility do not simply call attention to non-human agencies or flatten the existing hierarchies between human and non-human agencies; actually, to Rauscher, Spahr poignantly questions and explores "the cultural and political conflicts as well as the emotional and cognitive contradictions produced by life in the Anthropocene for the more privileged demographic segments in the United States" (2023: 88). As Rauscher contends, Spahr's poems about Hawai'i perfectly demonstrate this personal conundrum—the author's desire as a continental migrant to connect with the non-human world of Hawai'i clashes both with Indigenous rights concerning lands access and control, and her own self-awareness of her position as a privileged settler—and showcase, as a result, how her efforts to engage in the practice of ecopoetic place-making can become "ethically fraught" (2023: 89).

Chapter three, "Lyricalizing the Planetary Epic," turns its attention to Afro-Caribbean poet Derek Walcott, and, in particular,

Carlotta Ferrando
Sapienza
University of Rome
Italy
University of Silesia
in Katowice
Poland

to his book-length poem, *Omeros* (1990). Not only considering the more-critically acclaimed and discussed Caribbean sections, but mostly focusing on the understudied US-American passages of the poem, Rauscher here asks herself what happens when a poet, born and raised on a colonized island and used to idealized literary representations of English and American landscapes, questions not only these very same landscapes, but also US-American histories from a migratory perspective. In the scholar's view, Walcott's engagement with American places and histories of displacement from a perspective of mobility compels him to face the challenges intrinsic to ecopoetic place-making and, as a result, leads him to a new self-awareness, one that concerns itself with his possible implication in and complicity with neocolonial forms of exploitation and environmental destruction, as he is a transnational migrant, but nonetheless privileged. In the critic's analysis, Walcott's ecopoetics of mobility strictly depends on genre-mixing: merging together multiple literary genres, such as the epic with the pastoral, the travel poem, the (pastoral) elegy, and the confessional lyric, *Omeros*, according to Rauscher, can be read as "an environmentally resonant lyricization of epic that is ripe with tensions between the universal and the particular, the communal and the individual, the global and the local, the postcolonial and the transnational" (2023: 129). Walcott, indeed, challenges the Western poetic tradition and its typical representations of nature and mobility which have generally erased (or, at least, overlooked) past occidental histories of violence, displacement and exploitation. In doing so, Walcott "gestures toward a critical transnational sense of place" (2023: 135), which, consequently, allows Rauscher to read *Omeros* as a "lyricalized *planetary epic*" that sheds light on "the discrepant scales of human and nonhuman histories" as well as "the possibilities and limits of an ecopoetry of migration" (2023: 136).

Kashmiri-American Agha Shahid Ali's poetry—its disposition toward the *translocal* and the environmental, as well as its engagement with "the crowded cartogram of US-American places, histories, literatures, and art" (2023: 167)—is the focus of the fourth chapter of the volume, "Reimagining Ecological Citizenship." Contrary to previous criticism, which usually concentrated either on Ali's poetry about Kashmir (the poet's place of birth)

or on his *ghazals* (the poetic form Ali used most in his later poetry written and published within the American context), Rauscher's analysis delves deep into *A Nostalgist's Map of America* (1991), one of the poet's mid-career collections, to examine which shape his ecopoetic place-making takes in his poems about the United States. Despite prominently featuring desertic landscapes belonging to the American Southwest, the speaker of the poems collected in *A Nostalgist's Map of America* appears to the readers as having already moved on somewhere else in the East Coast: here, Ali's speaker reveals his longing for meaningful relationship to his new place(s) of residence, including those parts of the United States he only passes/d through. As maintained by Rauscher, the project of ecopoetic place-making that takes place in *A Nostalgist's Map of America* can be seen as a "backward but also forward-oriented nostalgic longing for place-attachment without an insistence on permanent emplacement" (2023: 167). Infused with a profound sense of loss and longing, Ali's poetic engagements with American nonhuman environments, in fact, address the multiple and varied ways in which the relationships between human and place in the US are determined by human mobilities, both voluntary and forced. The nostalgic and "environmentally suggestive" (2023: 181) poems collected in *A Nostalgist's Map of America* do not simply recount physical human-nature connections but also evoke encounters with places in memory and through literature, blending a place-based and at the same time mobile poetic imagination with suggestive intertextual references, and a highly figurative language. In Rauscher's reading, Ali's ecopoetics of mobility is, thus, informed "by environmental nostalgia that depicts places as lived-and-imagined and as completely layered and translocal formations" (2023: 167): as a result, this collection does not simply aim at portraying "mobile forms of place-attachment," but also foregrounds a "diasporic intimacy with the world" (2023: 168).[1] Precisely this diasporic intimacy questions exclusive notions of ecological citizenship and asserts the possibility, for mobile subjects, to establish meaningful connections to the places they

1. A concept Rauscher derives from Svetlana Boym (2001), and further expands.

Carlotta Ferrando
Sapienza
University of Rome
Italy
University of Silesia
in Katowice
Poland

pass through, along with acknowledging their capacity to care deeply for places they inhabit either temporarily or forever.

The last chapter of this volume, "Queering Ecological Desire," entails an analysis of the poetry of Lebanese-American painter and writer Etel Adnan. Ali's collection *A Nostalgist's Map of America* was read by Rauscher as an expression of profound longing for a diasporic intimacy with the world which intends to challenge econativist beliefs about belonging and emplacement to promote more mobile and inclusive ideas of ecological citizenship that include experiences of displacement. Similarly, Etel Adnan's poetry displays—according to Rauscher—a "nature-oriented longing," which consists, on the other hand, in "a queer ecological desire for an intimate connection with the more-than-human world from a different perspective toward mobility" (2023: 207). Whereas Ali's migrant speaker writes from a precarious position, constantly on the move, as he tends to look back at past wonderings across America, the perspective employed by Adnan in her poetry is informed by two kinds of post-mobility: a re-orientation toward nature as a result of the disorientation caused by her own experience of migration, and in light of a new-found awareness of the advancing immobility that comes with old age. Drawing from Queer Ecocriticism and Queer Phenomenology, and expanding on Sara Ahmed's work (2006), Rauscher focuses on Adnan's poetry about the more-than-human world exploring human-nature relations from a perspective of migration—a topic hardly ever addressed in the scholarly discourse about this author. In her reading of Adnan's collections *There: In the Light and the Darkness of the Self and of the Other* (1997), *Seasons* (2008), *Sea and Fog* (2012), and *Night* (2016), and in her analysis of their "mobile environmental imaginary," both "the migrant's desire for meaningful encounter with the more-than-human world" and the "apocalyptic environmental ethics informed by experiences of mobility" (2023: 208–209) are particularly emphasized by Rauscher. Despite Adnan's concerns both with the climate change crisis and the physical consequences of her aging—issues that, for sure, do not paint an optimistic and cheerful picture of the future—at the core of her poetry stands a radical love for nature, one that hopefully will inspire the readers back into feeling the same sentiments of care

and affection necessary to save the world. In doing so, Adnan seems to be embracing what Nicole Seymour (2013) described as a "queer ecological empathy" (2023: 234), thus, in Rauscher's opinion, reaching towards "an imagination of a *queer ecological futurity* in the face of apocalypse" (2023: 209).

Without a doubt, Rauscher's work offers a unique and original contribution to the ongoing scholarly debate regarding mobility, displacement, and practices of place-making in literature and, in particular, in poetry. Mainly aimed at scholars and researchers interested in Mobility Studies and Ecocriticism*, Ecopoetic Place-Making* will, however, also pique the interest of readers who approach this topic for the first time. The introductory chapter, in particular, will serve as an effective guide that will help beginners navigate some of the core issues belonging to this subject-area (such as the distinction between Nature and nature, or the concept of "sense of place" from a Mobility Studies perspective). Noteworthy is, for sure, Rauscher's decision to analyze and discuss such a heterogenous group of authors, thus giving voice to diversified experiences of displacement, colonization and migration—issues, more than ever, relevant to our globalized society.

Abstract: Twenty years into the 21st century, the matters of forced mobilities, relocations and displacement are more than ever issues at hand, as we keep on witnessing ceaseless global migratory movements resulting from political persecutions, wars, violence, and/or climate change. Taking the cue from the intersections of environmental transformations, global ecological crisis and human mass mobilities, Judith Rauscher's *Ecopoetic Place-Making* (2023) focuses on contemporary "American ecopoetries of migration," namely the "the oeuvres of […] chosen poets that prominently feature American places and American histories of displacement" (2023: 31). Drawing mostly from the fields of Ecocriticism and Mobilities Studies, her work explores the complex relationship between migratory subjects and the non-human world, in particular, "the many ways in which human-nature relations are shaped by physical and geographical movement, whether voluntary or forced" (2023: 34) as well as "the varying effects that these displacements in place and between places have […] on the environmental imaginaries in the works of contemporary American poets of migration" (2023: 24). Ecopoetic Place-Making offers an interesting and thought-provoking analysis of five contemporary authors (Craig Santos Perez, Juliana Spahr, Derek Walcott, Agha Shahid Ali, and Etel Adnan), migrants of different national, cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. Drawing inspiration from their own experiences of mobilities, these poets, through their works, challenge restrictive

and exclusive ideas of place-attachment. This text is a critical review of Judith Rauscher's monograph.

Keywords: ecopoetics, place-making, place, mobilities, poetry, Judith Rauscher, ecocriticism, mobility studies, American poetry, American Literature

Bio: Carlotta Ferrando is a PhD student in English Literature, Language and Translation at Sapienza University of Rome (curriculum in Literary Studies), in cotutelle with the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland. She graduated in July 2021 with an MA degree from the Programme in Comparative Literatures (University of Turin) having defended her dissertation on contemporary American Literature titled "Family Dynamics in Blank Coming-of-Age Novels: Less Than Zero, The Lost Language of Cranes and Generation X," after obtaining a bachelor's degree in Italian Literature. She is currently working on a PhD project focused on the representation of female mental illness in contemporary American novels. She is a member of AISNA.

Carlotta Ferrando
Sapienza
University of Rome
Italy
University of Silesia
in Katowice
Poland

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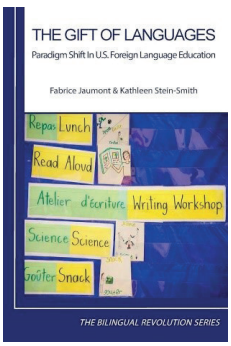
THE GIFT OF LANGUAGES PARADIGM SHIFT IN US FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

by Fabrice Jaumont and Kathleen Stein-Smith
(A Book Review)



Monika Grotek
University of Silesia in Katowice
Poland
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6846-2784

The Gift of Languages. Paradigm Shift in US Foreign Language Education by Fabrice Jaumont and Kathleen Stein-Smith is one of several publications that have been released in The Bilingual Revolution Series under the auspices of the Center for the Advancement of Language, Education and Communities (CALEC). With international membership and worldwide reach, this non-profit organization aims to promote multilingualism and cross-cultural understanding by supporting language communities in creating education programs in languages and cultures.[1]

It seems worth noting that the overall mission of the CALEC program is reflected in the book's very organizational frame: the nine core chapters of *The Gift of Languages*, ushered in by Preface and Foreword, are preceded with a list promoting a variety of TBR books already in circulation[2], and statements of praise. Likewise, following the body of the text (complete with References,

1. In fulfillment of its goals, it focuses on providing both parents and teachers involved in fostering multilingual education with pointers to relevant results of academic research in the area and offering them materials dedicated to teaching practice, mentoring, and space for interaction and sharing ideas.
2. —including previous publications by Jaumont and Stein-Smith.

Index, and Authors' bios), one will find an extra section dedicated to the goals of the TBR Books series, as well as a description of the profile and mission of the Center for the Advancement of Language, Education and Communities. The publisher's choice to lock the text proper between sections presenting the Center's promotional materials, general instruction manuals, and lists of motivational books[3] may, on the one hand, be read as a manifestation of the organization's marketing strategy and, on the other, as a paratextual indication of the character of the publication itself. Such a choice suggests that *The Gift of Languages*—whose text, as one soon discovers, is characteristic of the persuasive style of argumentation, reiteration of the vital points and data, as well as moderately rigorous referencing of the background literature—should be read and evaluated as a popular (perhaps even inspirational) publication, rather than as an academic monograph, and, simultaneously, as a medium of the promotion of the goals of the CALEC.

Although targeting primarily non-academic audiences, such publications do deserve academic attention as their increasingly voluminous supply in the publishing market communicates a more and more acutely felt grassroots-level demand for profound change in popular thinking about education in America. Their proliferation seems to reflect an intuition shared by a growing number of American educators that a profound revision of the dominant attitude to language learning is a condition for students in the United States to achieve the second language (L2) proficiency at a level sufficient for college purposes (which, today, as the authors acknowledge, is a norm among their Western-European counterparts), but also, perhaps much more importantly, that it is key to the future of efficient interactions within local multicultural communities in the US and in international contexts alike.[4] Furthermore, with the facility of travel, with transnationality of global corporations, with easy access to new technologies spearheading innovation

3. —mostly books designed by and for activists advocating work on the (largely neglected) foreign language skills in the USA through developing early start two-way dual-language immersion programs in K-12 public education.
4. —in all essential aspects of cultural practice, ranging from business and science to media, arts, and sports.

Monika Grotek
University of Silesia in Katowice
Poland

in intersectional and cross-cultural communications, the achievement of such proficiency requires that the existing mental scripts, conditioning the character of the dominant approaches to foreign/second language teaching and learning in the US, be confronted with, and adjusted to, the practical needs of the 21st-century life both *within* and *outside* America.

In this vein, the first four chapters of *The Gift of Languages* address the need for a shift in the US foreign language education. These sections provide the grounding for the book's central premise. In the first chapter, the authors argue that the limited and continuously declining interest in developing L2 skills among Americans—a paradoxically *monolingual* nation of immigrants—is an exponent of the educational paradigm that must be changed in order to enable American students to keep up with their peers in other countries of the world, most of which, as data suggests, are indisputably way ahead of the United States in terms of their populations' preparation for 21st-century multicultural communications. The authors point to the fact that, in the globalized world, the ability to speak more than one language is a norm for about 40–50% of people worldwide. They demonstrate that only about a quarter of the global population is able to speak English and that the percentage of those ready to use English as *lingua franca* is even smaller. Besides, they point out that only about 10–25% of the US citizens and residents (including recent immigrants) speak a language other than English, that fewer than 20% of Americans study a foreign language at the K-12 level, and that only 7.5% of the cohort of college or university students are enrolled in a course in a language other than English. All of the above, combined with the fact that the immigrants to the US tend to lose their ancestral language by the third generation, seems to suggest that an intra-American perceptual paradigm is at work.

Fabrice Jaumont and Kathleen Stein-Smith compellingly express their concern with the palpable consequences of the existing language paradigm's perseverance in the US, which, predictably, cannot be reduced to any single factor. It might be a distorted echo of the overarching idea of *e pluribus unum*, a global consequence of the donor-acceptor culture dichotomy, an outcome

of the socioeconomic conditioning of the American traveling habits, or a manifestation of (overtly or covertly professed) American exceptionalism. Nonetheless, the statistical juxtaposition of the predominantly non-monolingual world that learns and uses English as a *lingua franca* (and thereby turns multilingual) with the essentially monolingual America demonstrates that the US citizens, deprived of the benefits of multilingualism, lag behind. Cognitively limited to English, the potential of Americans to profoundly embrace the multiculturalism of their own country is severely restricted. Yet, much as one might be inclined to lean towards the stance adopted by the authors concerned about the fact that—as citizens of the world, in which only a portion of the "global web of information, education, entertainment and communication" (34) is Anglophone—Americans inevitably end up in a disadvantageous position both at home (ethnic tensions, sense of uprootal, etc.) and abroad (dependence on the polyglots outside of the English-speaking world), it would be difficult not to observe that the chapter's core argument would have gained much in terms of its strength if it were derived from methodical analyses of the evolution of approaches to foreign language education in the USA, such as those presented by Ovando (2003) or Hartmeier (2022). If offered a systematic insight into how the paradigms have changed over time, or at least a set of footnotes demonstrating that the authors' premise is, in fact, a *conclusion* drawn from a diachronic analysis and not an intuitive claim founded on assumptions stemming from synchronic observations, the readers would not only be able to understand the origins of the approach to L2 teaching adopted by the federal, state, and local governments today, but also more easily follow the logic of the postulates of change that Fabrice Jaumont and Kathleen Stein-Smith present in the subsequent chapters.

Instead, the authors choose a different path. Banking on traditional American pragmaticism, the second chapter convincingly describes foreign language skills as an *asset*. The opening section emphasizes the *joy* of exploring other cultures and the *life-enriching* experience of contact with people who represent them. Soon enough, however, the argument shifts from emotional and intellectual affluence to something more practical: the *use-*

Monika Grotek
University of Silesia in Katowice
Poland

fulness of foreign language skills for business and work. Appealing to employers, the authors devote a few subchapters to making a case for the increasing demand for bilingual workers in the US healthcare, customer service, tourism, law enforcement, education, and social services, not to mention the usefulness of the command of a foreign language in the space of international business.[5] They observe that the demand for translators and interpreters in the US is still growing, yet relying on their services for the nation's economic growth is considered shortsighted as developing new international business relations in the 21st century essentially relies on direct communication, active listening, and ability to see a variety of issues from the perspective of the partner, so empathy and problem-solving skills evolved while learning and using a foreign language are of essential value. Foreign language skills are further presented as a *commodity*. If such a commodity is not offered to Americans as part of their early public education, it will eventually have to be purchased at the language teaching services market, which will inevitably deepen the already existing social and economic inequalities.

In their global appreciation of the interconnectedness of cultural phenomena, the authors stress the potential of language as a vehicle of soft power, capable of influencing a variety of aspects of communal and individual life. The above notwithstanding, they seem to underplay the essence of the benefits of the combination of one's command of English, whose worldwide presence is undeniable with one's knowledge of a foreign language. Bearing in mind the overall goal of the CALEC, as advocates of The Bilingual Revolution, targeting US audiences, Jaumont and Stein-Smith appear to purposefully marginalize the present-day effects of the exportation of American cultural values, including the exportation of laws,[6] or the ubiquity of countless products of the US

5. In particular, the authors emphasize the importance of using the language of the client in the context of the efficiency of the sales of products or services.

6. Admittedly, although the authors indicate that relatively monolingual countries—like Japan and Korea—have proven to be both successful and innovative, the lack of the socio-historical background to the success stories of these countries may be considered an argumentative shortcoming. Even a footnote concerning the effects of the World War II and of the Korean War,

popular culture outside America, and the impact of the globality of the use of English upon the evolution of the worldview of the representatives of the Digital Age generation.[7] Refraining from a more thorough analysis of the practical ramifications of the donor-acceptor dynamics and of the cultural effects thereof in the context of transcultural communications, the authors choose to focus on the cultural productivity of the French language, culture, and values. Although their argument is undoubtedly valid, Jaumont and Stein-Smith fail to convincingly disperse potential doubts concerning the urgency of the practical need to invest money, time, and energy in learning a foreign language or in teaching it in the face of America's attractiveness to millions of people worldwide, who not only travel to the USA to study, work, or to permanently relocate, but also speak English as their working language, and—within America—in light of the *e pluribus unum* Anglonormativity. Deciding not to address the benefits of bilingualism *despite* the popularity of English and irrespective of the directionality of cultural transfer, deciding not to exemplify the dangers of projecting one's own cultural norms upon English-speaking interlocutors, whose roots are non-Anglophone-American, as well as refraining from the demonstration of how devastating intra-lingual, yet transcultural misunderstandings could prove, the authors seem to choose the simplicity of the argument over its completeness,

both of which caused an indelible trauma, suffering and death of millions, but both of which also resulted in the opening up of new pathways of economic and cultural transfer between these countries and the United States, might inspire a more thorough understanding of how value transfers work and how the knowledge of foreign languages beyond English may facilitate profound transcultural contact. Especially, if one's command of Japanese or Korean sends a signal of the appreciation of the host's culture, colonized in the aftermath of cruel military conflicts.

7. Freedom, egalitarianism, boldness, truthfulness, and hard work—although often presented in a naïve or irritatingly didactic fashion in American television or cinema—have long inspired the American dream among countless individuals throughout history. Perceived in the perspectives of socioliguistics and linguistic pragmatics, American English may be claimed to have been historically imbued with these values, both at the level of phraseology and of language use (e.g.: standards of politeness). In international contexts, non-American business partners often take into account that their interlocutors are American, irrespective of the adopted language of communications.

Monika Grotek
University of Silesia in Katowice
Poland

thus running the risk of losing some of their potential audience: especially the pragmatically-oriented audience responsible for the decisions concerning the future of the foreign language education in the USA.

Importantly, however, in the third and fourth chapters, the scholars return to the societal benefits of multilingualism in the USA. They begin with an attempt to explain the relationship between the diversity of languages and cultures within America and the creativity of its multilingual communities, whose varied, language-encoded viewpoints may lead to innovation in the globalized, fast-developing, contemporary world. The authors view large American cities as places of innovation characterized by global mobility. They discern the need to make the most of this fact by fostering a welcoming atmosphere based on hospitality, understanding, and trust, which can be attained through "educating children about other languages and cultures and empowering them through multilingualism to maximize their potential in a globalized world and workplace" (56). The scholars see the potential for change in *immersion education*. In particular, they emphasize the importance of two-way dual-language immersion—a form which, in their opinion, would cater to the demand for bilingual skills in the globalized workplace and, at the same time, would benefit the multilingual US society in many other ways. The academic results that students enrolled with such programs achieve are likely to go hand in hand with the unifying effect that shared language and cultural skills may have in local communities and, by extension, in the whole nation. Nevertheless, the authors are well aware of the challenges that contemporary immersion programs in the US pose, the most serious of which include the shortage of qualified teachers due to the gradual decline in the number of foreign language majors, limited resources, difficulties with the program design and structure, the need to develop sound curricula and matching materials, as well as the requirements of the mixed-ability classrooms (varying levels of proficiency of students in L1 and L2), and, last but not least, differences in terminology and assessment procedures, varying from state to state. Such problems, albeit serious, can be overcome if the role of language in the construction of the identity of individuals and communities through "shared human experi-

ences" (64) is acknowledged by teachers and decision-makers alike. As the authors emphasize, one cannot deny the heritage-building potential of creative expression through literature and other language-based forms of art; such forms of value transfer, whether intra- or intercultural, are far more efficient if they do not depend on translation. Still, irrespective of how painstaking the process of building a more profound understanding of the cultural significance of multilingualism might be at more abstract levels, at the operational level, Americans working abroad seem to have arrived at a consensus as far as the importance of the gestures of appreciation for the language identity of their co-workers is concerned. Those sharing such experiences broadly acknowledge that US expats learning and using the language of the country in which they reside are more successful in the corporate environment and function better socially in their local neighborhoods. Drawing conclusions from the above, the authors end the first section by compiling a list of tasks that American foreign language educators face. In order to bridge the gap between actual foreign language skills and intercultural competence and the demands of the globalized world (including the need to function on equal terms with multilinguals in the US and outside), educators in the US will need to focus on the "support of heritage language learners and their skills, encouraging English speakers to begin continued foreign language study to proficiency, and developing English language skills among non-English speakers" (63).

These rather commonsensical guidelines introduce a more theoretically oriented discourse in chapter five. Although Jaumont and Stein-Smith seem to avoid the issue of how to specifically handle the tasks listed in the previous chapter, they do, rather superficially, invoke several theories in an attempt to explain how the paradigm shift in attitudes toward foreign language education in the US should be effected. Although, again, an expert in foreign language methodologies will not find any groundbreaking information there, the chapter provides arguments for lobbyists for the cause of foreign language education, especially those rooted in the management-related theories of dealing with change. The authors start with Kotter's (2012) change management model in companies, focusing in particular on building a sense of urgency

Monika Grotek
University of Silesia in Katowice
Poland

to create the buy-in. Following the ten steps of Lee and Kotler's (2016) social marketing model, the authors highlight getting the message to the target groups who are the most likely to benefit from language learning and who, therefore, may enjoy the highest opportunity but also face the largest number of opportunity barriers. The scholars complement these theories with Rosica's (2012) cause marketing, presented as an extension of the corporate social responsibility model, which emphasizes the importance of identifying suitable corporate partners and developing sustainable partner relationships. They further suggest the application of Cialdini's (2009) psychology of influence to establish positive relationships with prospective groups of language learners based on identifying the "common ground," i.e.: similarities in CALEC goals and the aspirations of the target groups.

Jaumont and Stein-Smith combine the theories above with Christensen et al.'s (2006) disruptive innovation model, which concentrates on the early start of foreign language teaching with a view to producing proficient language users at the high school level. Such a change would lead to innovation, emerging as a result of the disruption of the inefficient college and university foreign language curricula, simultaneously disintegrating unique language selling points of elite private schools and commercial language teaching centers, providing an advantage to a limited number of privileged students only. A democratic change of this kind underlies the grassroots political campaign, whose goal is to get the message directly and personally to families and communities. Such a campaign relies on individuals most likely to actively support the cause as opposed to solely relying on technology to assess the needs of particular groups. This, in turn, facilitates the deployment of Kim and Mauborgne's (2004) Blue Ocean strategy, which emphasizes the development of new markets rather than competition on the existing ones, and thus, a so far non-existent demand for foreign language education among parents and community leaders should be created. The Blue Ocean Action Steps for Foreign Languages, presented by Jaumont and Stein-Smith as the fundament of a campaign incorporating all of the theories mentioned before, include the following elements:

– creating a sense of urgency;
– targeting the audience most likely to benefit from foreign language skills;
– finding an appropriate corporate partner or funding sources to collaborate with;
– communication based on authenticity;
– and engagement of stakeholders.

In the view of the authors, the standard lobbying tools, streamlined in accordance with the Six Sigma error reduction methodology in the business environment, may prove efficient in the campaign advocating foreign language education in the US. In particular, the Six Sigma DMAIC model appears applicable in the context of the CALEC campaign:

– Define (the problem of the shortage of foreign language skills among English-speaking Americans);
– Measure (the deficit);
– Analyze (determine causes and challenges);
– Improve (employ strategies to enhance foreign language learning);
– Control (develop metrics to monitor progress).

Globally, the focus of such an action is on problem-solving and "developing strategies before implementing tactics" (77). The authors, however, streamline the process, adjusting the methodology to the real-life conditions in America. They propose the application of the Lean Six Sigma model, which adds the concept of lean management to the process, allowing the proponents of change to attain success in spite of the shortage of resources, "both financial and personnel" (77), in a country "where funding depends largely on member contributions and where staffing is provided by individual volunteer change agents who are also very busy teachers and educators" (77). However, the deployment of tools themselves may require lobbyists capable of influencing business and government leaders, who will tend to remain practical but should not lose sight of the big idea that is advocated for the greater good. According to LeBov (2013) and Markarian

Monika Grotek
University of Silesia in Katowice
Poland

(2017), whose articles the scholars quote, the traits of an ideal lobbyist for the cause should include "subject matter expertise, knowledge of the relevant individuals and organizations, knowledge of legislative processes and procedures, people skills, sound judgment, political savvy, excellent communication skills" (76), as well as "clear self-identification, being polite and professional, having a clear and concise message, making it personal, being accurate and truthful, being prepared to work with the government officials hard to make appointments with, compromise if necessary, being ready to engage in dialogue with officials and staffers, using online and social media appropriately, thanking all those who have supported the cause" (75–76).

The eventual practical recommendation is the *strategic* foreign language advocacy, which should be proactive rather than simply reactive to foreign language cuts in programs, flexible in terms of traditional and online techniques, and widespread in its reach, targeting "students, parents, alumni, and school administrators, as well as current and potential partners in the community and the wider local or regional committee" (79). The scheme includes five components:

- creating a "buzz" for foreign languages to build and sustain motivation to devote time and energy to learning and teaching (by means of presenting foreign learning education as trendy in social media, by organizing events that promote a particular language culture or showcase students' language skills);
- being present in the community (by sponsoring free language events or creating places where language learners and heritage speakers can come together, sending newsletters, or organizing meetings and classroom visits for local education administrators and officials to offer them the first-hand experience of the reality of foreign language classrooms and to keep them informed);
- taking leading roles in education-related associations (running for leadership positions, active voting; writing for practitioner-oriented and research publications and speaking at conferences);
- re-booting endangered programs; reaching out "to potential allies at the local, state, regional and national levels, and using social media and online petitions in addition

to in-person advocacy" (83) to save a program or at least prevent further cuts; creating new programs, which can be attained through building "a grassroots coalition of supporters who share the same vision and to make the case to school administrators and to decision-makers, using all of the strategies and tactics of an effective campaign, and present a reasonable case grounded in the existing research on the benefits of foreign language skills" (84),

– and *l'union fait la force* (working with "fellow foreign language stakeholders in the community, in the private sector, and government" [84]).

Having presented what could be dubbed "the manual for advocacy," in Chapter 6, Jaumont and Stein-Smith address the preferable language teaching approaches to be introduced in American schools. Bearing the CALEC philosophy in mind, the authors return to the argument that the goal of foreign language learning should be the interdisciplinary development of translingual and transcultural competence not only through learning the grammar and lexis but also by means of teaching the culture of the L2 language community. Because language teaching in the United States is mainly effected in the formal setting of a classroom (rather than in the natural environment of the family or community), the authors propose building integrative motivation in the students through developing and sustaining their interest in other cultures, for instance, by means of the use of authentic materials, appropriately selected and adjusted to the learners' level. Such an effect could be achieved if language teaching methods emphasizing the importance of immersion and interdisciplinarity—such as CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), CBI (Content-Based Instruction), TPR (Total Physical Response), TPRS (Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling), and CI (Comprehensible Input)—are used in the classroom. The application of such methods serves the purpose of properly equipping future college students and business professionals for the experience of mobility. Offering students traditional, heritage, or immersion language courses starting early in their primary and secondary level, educators ensure a smooth transition from classroom experience to adult life. Having attained a sufficient command of a foreign

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University of Silesia in Katowice
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language and cultural competence to address global issues in the multilingual world and participate in international projects by the time they graduate high school, the students are ready for their real-life foreign language use in an academic and business context at the onset of their college experience. As a result, while pursuing their higher education, rather than focusing on language learning in the time when they are busy with their content studies, students may experience their interactions fully, streamlining their language skills and cultural competence in the process. Thus prepared, such students are able to put their global skills to practical use sooner than others who were not exposed to immersive language education in primary and secondary schools.

In the following section of the book, the authors return to the discourse of advocacy. The next chapter equips foreign language education supporters with a detailed list of personal, cultural, professional, and social benefits of multilingualism, which can serve as arguments in favor of expanding foreign language programs in the US. Firstly, unique cognitive and academic benefits include better educational outcomes, the development of tolerance and creativity, improved decision-making and problem-solving skills, and, last but not least, staving off the onset of dementia. These go hand in hand with cultural benefits, the most direct of which is the freedom to enjoy literature, songs, theatre, films, and media—possibly reflecting another perspective and a different worldview—without the mediation of translation. Complementing the above are the social and communicative advantages stemming from the increase in the efficiency of the bidirectional transmission of information to and from local and trans-local communities, understanding one's own and another's community heritage, family background, and discovering fundaments upon which to solidify one's own cultural identity. Parallel benefits of foreign language skills are those felt in the workplace in the context of international or expatriate careers, work for a multinational corporation or for an organization serving clients outside the US, or for institutions catering to the needs of local multilingual communities. These advantages include the ease of communicating with co-workers, clients, and beneficiaries of services in their own language, which largely reduces the potential for misunder-

standing, sends a message of appreciation, and facilitates side conversations and other forms of social interaction, which affect the efficiency of collaboration levels of work satisfaction. Finally, societal benefits for the USA as a multilingual and multicultural nation consist in the country's opening up to the full potential of the contribution of non-Anglophone Americans to the national culture and economy and in the reduction of the negative consequences of the marginalization of the non-English speaking cultures in America throughout its history. The authors argue that, in the long run, such a shift—although unlikely to solve all of the historically rooted problems of American society—might seriously contribute to the making of a more harmonious society within the US, and, simultaneously, be a major step towards 'global citizenship.'

The repetitive argumentation, which would be considered a rather serious shortcoming in a strictly academic text, serves a pragmatic purpose in *The Gift of Languages*. Occasionally irritating as it might seem to a professional academic reader, the book's rhetoric is supposed to "drive the authors' point home" and thereby win over those who might possibly hesitate as to whether or not a change is indeed necessary and whether its practical ramifications are worth the time, effort, and money. Therefore, to reinforce the arguments presented so far, the authors continue by disarming two lingering myths that might still stand in the way of language learning advocacy. The first common belief shared by many Americans is that if a person undertakes a foreign language learning, success in the endeavor can only be acknowledged if the learner attains the ability to speak the language with fluency and accent indistinguishable from native speakers—a conviction which, as the authors assert, derives from the observation of early bilinguals. To counteract this prejudice, the scholars argue, in motivating American learners to study a foreign language, the learning goals must be defined based on individual needs to use the language in various circumstances, requiring different degrees of fluency. Such a redefinition of goals, if systematically implemented, renders one's self-expectations as a language learner realistic, reducing the level of reluctance to confront possible frustration. The second common misconception causing mistrust towards foreign language

Monika Grotek
University of Silesia in Katowice
Poland

learning in America is the threat of weakening the country due to compromising its Anglonormative unity by promoting multilingualism, which is seen as a factor potentially dividing American citizens. The authors dismantle this populist construction by presenting the examples of Switzerland and Canada, whose official policies of multiculturalism—involving the promotion of multilingual education—have warranted the economic and cultural growth of both countries.

The Swiss and Canadian examples pave the path for the next part of *The Gift of Languages*, which is devoted to two-way Dual-Language Immersion (DLI) programs. The DLI programs are designed "for students to develop high levels of language proficiency and literacy in both program languages, to demonstrate high levels of academic achievement and to develop an appreciation for and an understanding of diverse cultures" (98). The authors recommend the two-way DLI as the best systemic solution, allowing learners to acquire cultural competence along with communication skills in L2 in the course of the interaction with teachers who are native speakers of both languages and expert representatives of both cultures. Such instructors' expertise warrants their credibility and allows them to extend the scope of their teaching beyond the obvious outward manifestations of cultural similarities and differences (festivals, food, music, costumes, film, etc.). DLI instructors are teachers of the cultural codes, shaped by but inscribed in the language with which the students are becoming familiar. The practice of *reciprocal multilingualism*, where everybody is both the mother tongue speaker and a second language learner, "reduces social segmentation and increases the overall welfare" (Caminal, 2016, quoted in Jaumont and Stein-Smith 2019: 117). As such, it is conducive to the intellectual and economic development of multilingual communities in the USA, with the potential for immigrant children to learn the dominant language faster in environments that value the language of their parents. The authors report over 2,000 successful DLI programs in operation in the USA, mainly at the elementary level, emphasizing the urgent need to involve more children in such a form of education as early as possible and to ensure the possibility of continuing the students' Dual Language Immersion at the high school level. It must be noted,

however, that much as the authors support two-way DLI programs, they do not dismiss or marginalize the importance of traditional forms of foreign language education, unequivocally supporting all forms of L2 learning in the US as beneficial.

The authors' final argument, rounding off their multifaceted persuasive presentation, involves the history of advocacy for L2 education in the USA. The section offers the reader quite a comprehensive list of reports dated between the late 1970s and early 1980s and the present day. The overview of the reports demonstrates that the gradual drop in interest in foreign language learning and teaching in the USA and in other Anglophone countries has not gone unnoticed. The phenomenon, causing concern to federal governments, the professional community of educators, and teacher associations alike, gave rise to such campaigns as "Lead with Languages" launched in 2017, or "Many Languages One World" Essay Contest and the Global Youth Forum (MLOW), launched in 2013 by the UNO.

Reiterating the conclusions of the reports, the authors reinforce their claim concerning the necessity for the paradigm shift in the approaches to foreign language education in the US and re-emphasize the vital importance of constant active language learning advocacy in the process. Summarizing their findings, Fabrice Jaumont and Kathleen Stein-Smith offer their readers a roadmap toward lasting change. The first step in this way is to raise—and then maintain—motivation to start and continue learning foreign languages, for which parental, school, and community support is needed. In the second step, opportunities for K–16 language study, optimally in two-way Dual-Language Immersion programs, must be created, which, in turn, involves the necessity of developing proper DLI teacher training programs. Simultaneously, at the level of higher education, pre-professional foreign language programs with internships and experiential learning, as well as partnerships with language enterprise stakeholders aiming at the development of transcultural career paths, must be promoted. To achieve these goals, foreign language advocacy, carried out in the form of a multifaceted campaign promoting language learning, is necessary. Such a campaign may only be efficient if it is launched as a joint effort of educators, parents, community groups, and language

education stakeholders in business and government. Once the alliance of stakeholders is made, "the campaign needs to be strategic, framed by the psychology of influence, change management, beginning with an 'a sense of urgency' and social/cause marketing to promote language learning as a common good" as multilingualism "empowers those with foreign language skills and cultural knowledge to work together to effectively address complex social issues, both local and global" (115).

In conclusion, it seems necessary to observe that *The Gift of Languages. Paradigm Shift in US Foreign Language Education* by Fabrice Jaumont & Kathleen Stein-Smith is an important text documenting the transformations of social and cultural awareness among educators in 21st-century America. Although the subtitle of the book might be more adequately phrased as *Towards a Paradigm Shift in US Foreign Language Education* to eliminate possible misconceptions as to the intentions of its authors, globally, their work convincingly presents the *necessity* for a paradigmatic change in the American foreign language education and equips any potential advocator for the cause with sound arguments—as well as with concrete guidelines for action. Emphasizing the centrality of personal commitment at the individual, local, state, or federal levels to ensure a place for foreign language programs (traditional or DLI) in K–16 public schools and colleges, the authors themselves lead by example. Their own activist dedication is manifest in the pragmatism of *The Gift of Languages*, their practical "manual of foreign language advocacy," which follows the principles of persuasive communications, yet replaces the dryness of the language of business with the rhetoric of affect. Inspirational in style, the book has the potential to exhort individuals to act and indeed to present the young generation of Americans with the gift of languages, a gift they will find priceless in their everyday relations with their multicultural local communities, and indispensable in the multilingual world that, with every passing year, requires more and more intercultural interaction.

Monika Grotek
University of Silesia in Katowice
Poland

Abstract: The article offers a critical review of *The Gift of Languages. Paradigm Shift in U.S. Foreign Language Education* by Fabrice Jaumont & Kathleen Stein-Smith, published by TBR Books in 2019. The book, fitting in the general category of instruction manuals and motivational

materials, has been written in support of the cause of the advocates of the paradigm shift in foreign language learning in the United States. Focusing on the need to expand the L2 skills among US elementary, high school, and college students by means of the systematic implementation of two-way Dual-Language Immersion programs in K–12 and secondary public education, the monograph contributes to the mission of the Center for the Advancement of Language, Education and Communities. The CALEC, a non-profit organization with international membership and worldwide reach, focuses on promoting multilingualism and cross-cultural understanding by supporting language communities in creating programs of education in languages and cultures. The present article offers a review of this important, albeit popular, publication emphasizing its value as a document testifying to the transformations of the American culture in the Age of Globalization.

Keywords: dual language immersion programme, foreign language education, advocacy, multilingualism, the USA, paradigm shift

Bio: Monika Grotek, PhD in linguistics, is an assistant professor in the Department of Humanities at the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland. On the one hand, her research interests include applied linguistics and sociolinguistics, as well as EFL teaching to adults. On the other hand, exploring the linguistic image of the world through English in cross-cultural contexts, she does not refrain from projects involving comparative cultural and literary studies. As Deputy Director of the Institute of English in the years 2016–2019, she has expanded the curriculum to include "Introduction to andragogy with elements of applied linguistics" and supported the development of modules that would combine processes of learning and acquiring a foreign language with sociolinguistic aspects of cross-cultural contact.

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Monika Grotek
University of Silesia in Katowice
Poland

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INTERNATIONAL AMERICAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION'S OFFICIAL STATEMENT

on the Violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (October 23, 2023)

The Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads clearly that "Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms" in full awareness of the fact that, historically, "disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind," and with a view to "the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want." Representing all inhabited continents of the world, we, the Scholars of the International American Studies Association, universally share the "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family" as "the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world."

In the light of the fact that the Governments of the States who have ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child are legally bound guardians of these fundamental rights, their inaction in the face of acts of aggression renders them complicit in the ongoing horrendous slaughter of civilian lives, including lives of thousands

of children. As Members of the International American Studies Association, we therefore call upon the United Nations Organization and all Member States to take efficient action, legal, diplomatic, and economic alike, to safeguard the lives, wellbeing, and fundamental rights of all civilians in the war zones.

We call upon the United Nations and its Member States to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance of the Declaration, "both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction." We demand that the United Nations Organization, along with its Member States, take immediate action towards a renewed and united effort for a diplomatic resolution to ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, Ukraine, and all other war zones, where structures of governance capable of vouchsafing freedom, justice and peace in the world no longer exist. No aggression in which civilians perish can be condoned: unless those who pledged themselves to the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms live up to their obligations, the mortal cycle of aggression and retaliation will not be broken.

We call upon the Nations who ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to act now, and act efficiently to put an end to the suffering of innocent people in the Middle East, in Ukraine, and world-wide, thereby making the third decade of the 21st century, war-free.

As a Community of Scholars associated in IASA whose essential goal is to foster intersectional understanding, we shall continue to meticulously observe the steps of the States and Organizations whose refusal to act renders the Universal Declaration of Human Rights a tragic mockery of compassion.

"You who wronged…"
by Czesław Miłosz

You who wronged a simple man
Bursting into laughter at the crime,
And kept a pack of fools around you
To mix good and evil, to blur the line,
Though everyone bowed down before you,
Saying virtue and wisdom lit your way,
Striking gold medals in your honor,

Glad to have survived another day,
Do not feel safe. The poet remembers.
You can kill one, but another is born.
The words are written down, the deed, the date. [...]
[Translated by Richard Lourie]

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