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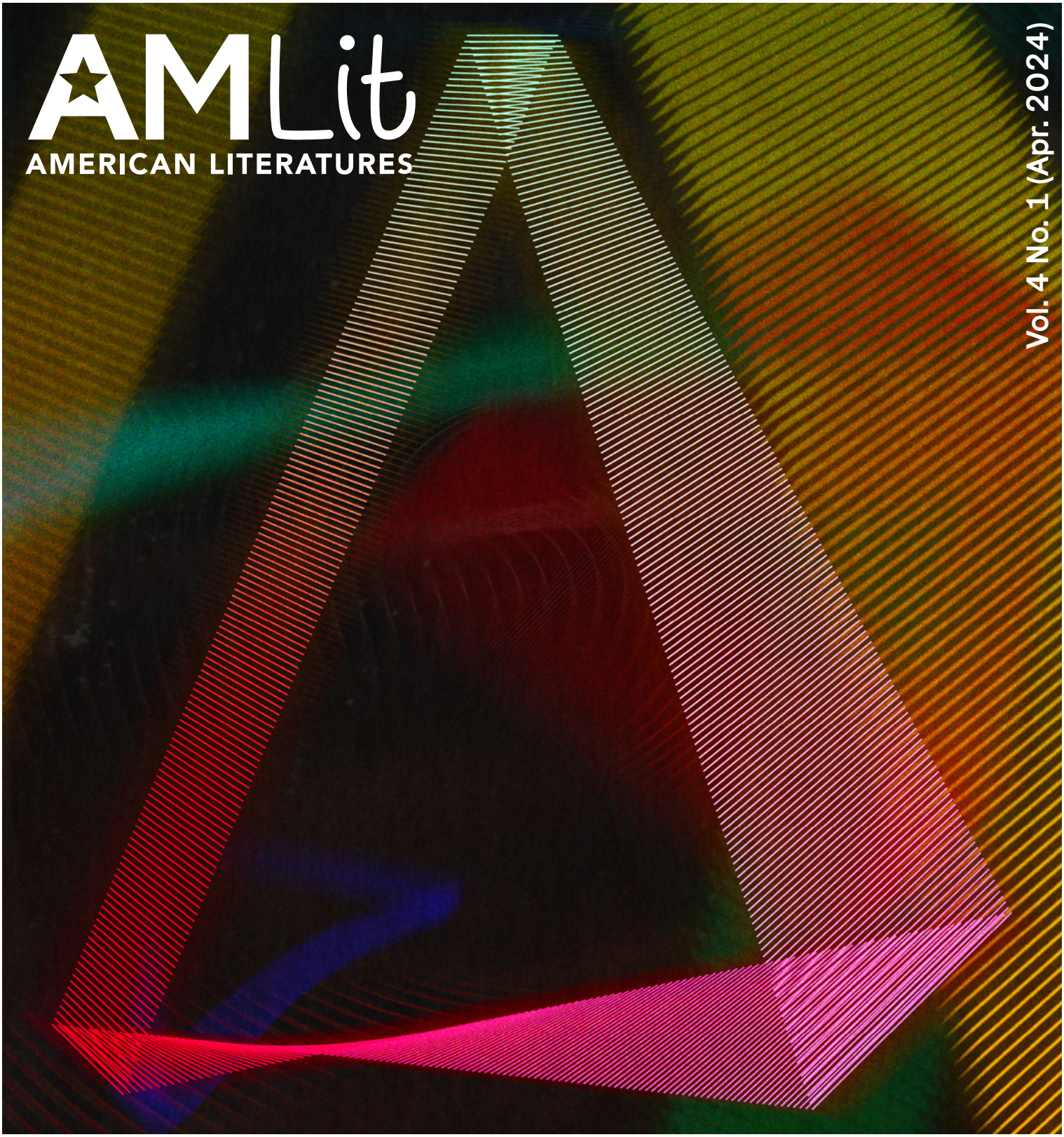

Societal Transformations and American Literatures in the World

Stefan L. Brandt, Frank Mehring, and Tatiani G. Rapatzikou
(Guest Editors)

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Content

Introduction:

Societal Transformations in American Fiction and Poetry Writing

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> The function of literature, through all its mutations, has been to make us aware of the particularity of selves, and the high authority of the self in its quarrel with its society and its culture. Literature is in that sense subversive.
> Lionel Trilling, *Beyond Culture* (103).

> What is the power of a work of literature to affect a reader´s perception of his or her world?
> Paula Moya, *The Social Imperative* (5).

Lionel Trilling's assertion that literature is subversive encapsulates its enduring ambition as a transformative force. Beyond merely portraying societal changes, literature serves as an act of rebellion. Rather than functioning as mere chroniclers of social change, literary texts confront us with the implications of overarching societal developments, compelling us to take a stance. This special issue of *AmLit – American Literatures* navigates the intricate interplay between words and societal transformations. Each essay within this collection examines the symbiotic relationship between literature and societal change, offering insights into the transformative power of the written word. In this special issue, *Societal Transformations and American Literatures in the World*, we delve into realms where writing intersects with influence, stories mirror societal changes, and academic perspectives underscore the effect of literary expression on the ever-evolving fabric of America. This is highlighted further by Paul Moya`s question about the social imperative when arguing that "the power of a work of literature [is] to affect a reader´s perception of his or her world" (5), which in our current reality of ongoing crises proves to be urgently needed.

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This realization calls for an exploration of societal representation in literary practice and raises the question: does society influence writing, determining its form and essence, or does representation shape our reality, thereby directly impacting our environment? Homi K. Bhabha has invited us to refrain from any teleological interpretation of the nexus between society and literature and rather look at its intricate underpinnings and political interdependencies. "[T]he dynamics of writing and textuality," Bhabha writes, "require us to rethink the logics of causality and determinacy through which we recognize the 'political' as a form of calculation and strategic action dedicated to social transformation" (33-34). Culture is conceived here as a "structure of feeling," as Raymond Williams famously put it (*Long Revolution* 69), a complex and intertwined system that interconnects social practice with its textual representation. "Now the fascinating thing about the structure of feeling [...] is that it is present in almost all the novels we now read as literature, as well as in the now-disregarded popular fiction" (Williams, *Long Revolution* 89). Literature is seen in this model not as a superstructure but as the very base that changes not the 'objective' world but our imaginative response to it. In this sense, "[a]rt reflects its society and works as a social character through to its reality in experience" (Williams, *Long Revolution* 91). If art functions as a "social character," in Williams's words, societal transformation must be understood as a complex process that simultaneously involves "diffusion and affirmation, the death and birth of the subject" (Eagleton, qtd. in Bhabha 92). All these observations reveal the spatial and temporal flux that human subjects are constantly confronted with as they try to come to terms with diverse challenges, changes, and transformations in their everyday as well as socio-historical and political reality.

This special issue discusses literary representations as much as it explores changes in society at large. Much has been written about the relevance of societal transformations and their impact on the way we feel and think. Thomas S. Kuhn has famously argued that scientific communities undergo paradigm shifts during periods of crisis, leading to radical changes in accepted scientific theories and methodologies. Far from being cumulative, scientific progress has often proven to be erratic and extreme, characterized by paradigm shifts that have radically changed societal norms and conventions (Kuhn 84-91). Samuel P. Huntington adds that global transformations, such as the democratization waves of the late twentieth century, were strongly influenced by overarching geopolitical factors that permeated social discourses (124-42). When it comes to social change, the local and communal are often subtly intertwined with overarching developments. The decline of social capital in American communities, Robert D. Putnam has shown in *Bowling Alone*, is linked to various factors, including changes in work patterns,

technology, and lifestyle (18-26). In Naomi Klein's reading, economic and political elites often exploit disasters and crises to implement neoliberal economic policies. She argues that moments of shock are seized to advance what she calls a "shock doctrine," pushing through free-market reforms that might face resistance during more stable times while creating "a radical neoliberal transformation" (151; see also 142-54). The digital revolution of the past decades has reminded us how fragile existing conventions and structures in western industrial societies have become in the face of fundamental technological transformation. This transformation pervades every facet of society and changes even our ways of thinking. In *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*, Klaus Schwab showcases the transformative impact of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and biotechnology, on society, economy, and governance (1-24). He emphasizes the need for a proactive and collaborative approach to harness the benefits of these technologies while addressing the associated challenges.

It is literary writing, as evidenced in fiction, poetry, and theater, that often takes this proactive role in our culture, pinpointing both the benefits and the dangers of societal change and raising awareness of its large dimensions and far-reaching impact. In his seminal introduction to literary theory, Terry Eagleton convincingly shows that literature possesses the potential to critique and reshape societal values, contributing to overarching social transformations. This trajectory use goes back to the eighteenth century when literature transcended the mere embodiment of social values, becoming an instrument for their deeper entrenchment and wider dissemination (Eagleton 15-46; quote on page 15). Roland Barthes further establishes literature as a space for a plurality of meanings, challenging fixed interpretations and promoting social openness (159-60). Building on Barthes's model, Julia Kristeva emphasizes literature's "key role" in what she terms "the system of discourses" (93). In her view, literature serves as a site for exploring the 'semiotic,' enabling a profound understanding of human subjectivity and societal structures. "As the borderline between a signifier where the subject is lost and a history that imposes its laws on him, literature appears as a specific mode of *practical knowledge*" (Kristeva 96, italics in the original). This notion of 'practical knowledge' aligns with Williams's perspective, framing literature as a social act rooted in the cultural imagination and grounded in concrete practice. Williams's concept of literature is inherently practice-driven, emphasizing the performative dimensions of literary texts:

> Literature is quite obviously [...] a social activity, and value does seem to lie in the writer's access to certain kinds of energy which appear and can be discussed in directly literary terms (that is to say, as an intention

> that has become language), but which, by general agreement, have a more-than-literary origin, and lie in the whole complex of a writer's relations with reality. (Culture and Society 362)

The writer's interconnectedness with reality, as suggested here, reveals the inner workings of literary practice that revolves around the co-witnessing of lived experience and its gradual transformation into an imagined and fictionalized experience.

Along these lines, Fredric Jameson has argued that literature is not merely a mirror reflecting society but a tool actively shaping societal self-perception—a "socially symbolic act" (1; see 61). This embedment in social practice and its symbolic significance enable literature to exert a remarkable force on audiences. Mikhail Bakhtin asserts that literature is "inseparable" from "the total context of the entire culture of a given epoch" (2), emphasizing its pervasive role in the cultural imagination. The fascinating interplay between writerly activity and social practice constitutes a crucial aspect of literary representation. Literature's operational approach to reality and its use of language to articulate sentiments, perceptions, conditions, and materialities are essential inquiries. Michel Foucault contends that literature has the capacity to transform and intensify ordinary language, systematically deviating from everyday speech:

> [L]iterature is that which compensates for (and not that which confirms) the signifying function of language. Through literature, the being of language shines once more on the frontiers of Western culture - and at its centre - for it is what has been most foreign to that culture since the sixteenth century; but it has also, since this same century, been at the very centre of what Western culture has overlain. (44)

With these words, Foucault captures the animating capacity that language has to capture the seen and the unseen, the central and the peripheral, the known and the foreign in its effort to come to terms not only with the changes that are taking place but also with the attitudes, ideologies, and discourses that are prevalent in the course of different historical periods. Conceived in this manner, language exerts its own impact on the formation of the literary imagination. This should be considered a faculty that complements and eventually subtly merges with social practice, influencing it in the process. This moment of mutual interaction with society's transformative power is where literary texts derive their enormous influence. As eloquently phrased by literary critic Paul L. Holmer, "literature adds to reality, it does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides; and in this respect, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already

become" (28). In this sense, literature does not feature as an isolated action but as an ongoing negotiation of points of view, subject positions, voices, and experiences.

Based on this assertion, what are the implications regarding the current special issue and the transformations it attempts to bring to the readers' attention? Drawing on an array of literary texts and literary practitioners, this issue manages to bring together a variety of voices and viewpoints from different geographical locations and backgrounds in the American hemisphere. Such a diverse terrain of action cannot help but reinstate the importance of Bakhtin's realization, as expressed in *The Dialogic Imagination*, that "at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past ... these 'languages' of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying 'languages'" (291). The linguistic plurality that is suggested here stands for an open and ongoing voicing, reading, and interpreting of stories and experiences, as proven by the primary sources each one of the essays hosted in this issue sheds light on. The acknowledgment of a multiplicity of voices, as these reach the readers via the intervention of literary imagination and the creation of multiple literary textualities, proves that multiple concerns exist that need to be revealed and addressed. Winfried Fluck, in his exploration of post-WWII American culture, urges scholars to embark on a bold quest that involves seeking a new way to structure the narrative of "America," a task that eludes current capabilities within U.S. American Studies (102). In the context of the present *AmLit* issue, the specific urge becomes visible due to the effort made by the authors of the essays to bring to the attention of their audience texts that cut across any real, conceptual, and ideologically-constructed borders at different moments in time. Such a realization contests the indivisibility of America and exposes the multi-facetedness of its cultural traits.

For generations, scholars in our field took for granted that American culture and goods played a significant, albeit conflicted, role in the global push for democratization. However, the once straightforward political instrumentalization of cultural production is no longer assured. In our era of rapid political and cultural shifts, European and American Studies academics find it beneficial to anchor their scholarly analyses of American literature, culture, media, history, and politics in the contexts from which these shifts emerge and impact. This kind of anchoring, originating in the social sciences during the 1960s, serves as a valuable research method and strategy for the analysis provided in the essays of the current special issue. This involves an intellectual activity firmly grounded and rooted in hermeneutics, linking traditional methods of textual interpretation with qualitative approaches. This

dynamic epistemological and methodological framework should be tailored to meet the needs of the conceptual thinking at work each time an in-depth analysis is necessary. In this special issue, we aim to explore the insights that can be gleaned from American studies inquiries in an era that is marked by new border thinking. By embracing grounding as a method, we can navigate the complexities of our research terrain, while weaving together diverse perspectives and experiences in an effort to enrich our understanding of a far more diverse American literary practice that cuts across literal and figurative borders amidst contemporary challenges, transgressions, and subversions.

This recognition becomes evident in Paula Moya's *The Societal Imperative* which attempts to strike a balance between "believing that literary criticism has the ultimate power to interpret and change the world, and believing that it has none at all" (5). In her introduction, Moya recognizes a historical divide between science and cultural studies, bridging this gap by incorporating the perspectives of twenty-first-century social psychology into into the examination of major societal issues as is the case of racial difference and racism within literary studies. It is important to highlight that social science has significantly influenced black writers throughout the twentieth century. While they have rejected race science, these writers have actively participated in social scientific inquiry, underscoring the enduring resonance of such approaches. Moya encourages us to explore the intricate connection between the elusive social concept of race and the practice of reading throughout history (cf. Larkin 2). The practice of reading and its power of transformation can be extended to other parts of American cultural and social environments, as evidenced in the edited collection by Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine titled *Hemispheric American Studies*. Here attention is paid to "the complex ruptures that remain within but nonetheless constitute the national frame, while at the same time moving beyond the national frame to consider regions, areas and diasporan affiliations that exist apart from or in conflicted relation to the nation" (2). What this statement reveals has to do with the current-day awareness that American literature and culture should be considered alongside the tensions and perspectives that derive from the multiplicity of its transnational and diasporic relations. This kind of approach widens the interpretative possibilities offered, while it allows for multiple voices to be heard and writing methodologies to be displayed and studied.

In the context of this *AmLit* special issue, the subsequent essays will demonstrate literature's capacity to enhance reality, while infusing our worlds with vibrant colors, emotions, and tactility. This ongoing exchange of perspectives between inner and outer worlds is what fuels the literary and artistic mind as well as enriches it with experiences that are not only innate but also part of the world at large. In the intricate tapestry of a multiplicity

of voices and literary texts and textures, this essay collection acts as a kaleidoscopic lens, as it attempts to reflect on the multifaceted ways in which literature mirrors and influences societal transformations. Each essay in this volume illuminates a unique facet of the special relationship that develops when literature, through the stories narrated, does not hesitate to expose ideologies, discourses, systems of belief, and stances in its effort to capture, even momentarily, the constantly shifting contours of an enhanced and geographically diversified American society. The essays cover a variety of topics, ranging from the issue of shame in Hemingway's fiction characters to climate change awareness through theater and innovative poetics, as well as efforts to reclaim Chamorro identity.

In the first essay "The Ritual of Shame," Wenwen Guo unveils the complex interplay of shame within Hemingway's works, exploring characters' struggles with the modern dichotomy of pursuit and retreat, desire and embarrassment. Guo's analysis spans Hemingway's career, from *The Sun Also Rises* to *The Garden of Eden*, capturing the inherent shame of modernity and weaving a narrative tapestry that reflects life's strivings and actions marked by shame. In the conclusion, the focus on affect, particularly shame, is emphasized as a primary mode of communication, surpassing verbal discourse. The ritual, as discussed by scholars like James Watson and Wade Wheelock, operates along channels of syntactic rules, conveying meaning through experiences and affects rather than explicit information. The essay underscores the significance of ritual in conveying the meaning of shame analogically, celebrating cyclicality and relationality while discrediting the linearity of time and history. The ritual practitioners in Hemingway's works turn to the rituals of life, akin to the bull in the bullfight, to grapple with shame, yet unlike the bull, they manage to move forward, finding new conceptions of shame to contend with in their ongoing journeys.

Jacob Zumoff's reevaluation of Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* challenges prevailing interpretations, arguing against a Marxist perspective. Zumoff contends that Hammett's crime novel presents a nihilistic vision of society amid the shift from rural traditionalism to urban modernism. Zumoff invites readers to reconsider Hammett's perspective, highlighting the novel's reflection of societal changes during the rise of modernism. Despite Hammett's later political engagement, Zumoff cautions against shoehorning the novel into Marxist literature, asserting that the roots of Hammett's politicization lie in external factors of the 1930s rather than explicit political visions within his writings. The trajectory of Hammett's life, marked by his turn to Communism, contradicts any straightforward political interpretation of *The Maltese Falcon*, underscoring the novel's enduring ambiguity, skepticism, and cynicism.

Martin Praga's essay "More than Lost Cargo: Fragmentation in Craig

Santos Perez's *from UNINCORPORATED TERRITORY* series" explores the intersection of experimental form and political message in Craig Santos Perez's poetry. Perez's avant-garde epic reconstructs Chamorro identity from fragments found in oral history, court cases, songs, and myths. The essay delves into Guam's post-WWII history and the impactful presence of the US military on the island, addressing the consequences of military buildup, environmental disruptions, and the complex choices faced by the Chamorro people. Despite challenges, including the silenced subaltern voice, Chamorro activism achieves environmental victories, offering a glimpse of hope. Through strategic paratextual elements, Perez's poetry puts Guam "on the map," inviting Chamorros to "cling to every subtraction" as materials for building a new identity, emphasizing the potential richness of these "spoils of the empires" beyond mere lost cargo.

In "The Price of Virtual Utopia," Philip Steiner dissects Ernest Cline's virtual reality odyssey, *Ready Player One*, unveiling its intermedial portrayal and implications for society. Steiner delves into the juxtaposition of dystopia and utopia within the OASIS, emphasizing how Cline's novel serves as a virtual realization of the American dream. In the novel, the OASIS becomes a realm offering self-discovery, friendship, and love, showcasing the positive facets of a fully realized virtual reality. However, Steiner argues that beyond the OASIS lies a clear-cut dystopia, raising thought-provoking questions about humanity's relationship with reality and the potential crises associated with the advent of virtual reality. The novel, according to Steiner, presents a multifaceted portrayal of both dystopian and utopian possibilities, highlighting a deep appreciation for genuine reality while acknowledging the transformative power of human ingenuity.

Finally, Andrea Färber's essay, "Climate Change Theater and the Interrelation of Human and the More-Than-Human," underscores the urgency of climate change awareness through theater, emphasizing interconnectedness between humans and the more-than-human. Färber, drawing on Chantal Bilodeau's play *Sila*, contends that fostering empathy through theater is essential for instigating change. The essay explores *Sila*'s portrayal of interconnectedness beyond shared familial dynamics, encompassing shared grief and the importance of the Inuit concept of *sila*, symbolizing the interwovenness of all existence. The inclusion of polar bears in the play allows Bilodeau to address both human and more-than-human issues, avoiding trivialization and highlighting the urgency of climate change. *Sila*'s overarching message urges action against climate change, emphasizing the interconnected suffering of humans and the more-than-human, with the hope of evoking sympathy and prompting meaningful engagement from the audience.

As diverse as these essays may be, they converge on a central theme—the reciprocal relationship between literature and societal transformation. Each piece illuminates how literary works act as mirrors reflecting the complexities of contemporary issues, fostering awareness, reclaiming identities, and exploring the consequences of societal shifts. Together, these essays invite readers to explore the rich terrain where fiction, poetry, and theater intersect with the ever-changing landscape of society, offering revealing insights into the transformative power of words.

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Biography

Stefan L. Brandt is Professor of American Studies at the University of Graz and former President of the Austrian Association for American Studies. After receiving his PhD and Venia Legendi at Freie Universität Berlin, he was awarded lecturer positions at University of Chemnitz and University of Bochum as well as professorial positions at Freie Universität Berlin, University of Siegen, and University of Vienna. He was affiliated—on the research and teaching level—with numerous other universities, among them Università Ca' Foscari, Radboud Universiteit, University of Toronto, and Harvard University. Brandt has talked and written on a wide range of topics in American Cultural Studies, having published four monographs—among them *The Culture of Corporeality: Aesthetic Experience and the Embodiment of America, 1945–1960* (Winter, 2007), and *Moveable Designs, Liminal Aesthetics, and Cultural Production in America since 1772* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022)—and (co-)edited eight anthologies, most recently *In-Between: Liminal Spaces in Canadian Literature and Culture* (2017) (Lang Canadiana Series), *Space Oddities: Difference and Identity in the American City* (2018) (LIT Verlag, with Michael Fuchs), and *Ecomasculinities: Negotiating New Forms of Male Gender Identity in U.S. Fiction* (2019) (Lexington Books, with Rubén Cenamor). Brandt is currently working on a book project dealing with the transatlantic origins of U.S. formation literature (*Burgeoning Selves: Transatlantic Dialogue and Early American Bildungsliteratur, 1776-1860*). He is also one of the founding members of the European research network 'Digital Studies' (www.eaas.eu/eaas-networks/643-eaas-digital-studies-network) (together with Frank Mehring and Tatiani G. Rapatzikou).

Frank Mehring is Professor of American Studies at Radboud University, Nijmegen. His research focuses on cultural transfer, migration, intermediality, and the function of music in transnational cultural contexts. In 2012, he received the Rob Kroes Award for his monograph *The Democratic Gap* (2014). His publications include *Sphere Melodies* (2003) on the intersection of literature and music in the work of Charles Ives and John Cage, *The Soundtrack of Liberation* (2015) on WWII sonic diplomacy, *Sound and Vision: Intermediality and American Music* (2018, with Erik Redling), *The Politics and Cultures of Liberation* (2018, with Hans Bak and Mathilde Roza), or *Islamophobia and Inter/Multimedial Dissensus* (2020, with Elena Furlanetto). Mehring unearthed a new visual archive of transatlantic modernism with articles, lectures, exhibitions, editions, and catalogues such as *The Mexico Diary: Winold Reiss between Vogue Mexico and Harlem Renaissance* (2016) and *The Multicultural Modernism of Winold Reiss* (2022). With Tatiani G. Rapazikou and Stefan L. Brandt, he is the co-founder of the European Digital Studies Network and the online journal *AmLit—American Literatures*. He organized the first performance of the Marshall Plan opera *La Sterlina Dollarosa* and co-curated exhibitions on Winold Reiss, Joseph Beuys, the Marshall Plan, and Liberation Songs in Kleve, New York, Nijmegen, and The Hague.

Biography

Tatiani G. Rapatzikou is Associate Professor at the Department of American Literature and Culture, School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTh), Greece. She holds a B.A. from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece, while for her graduate studies she holds an M.A. from Lancaster University and a Ph.D. from the University of East Anglia, Norwich, U.K. (funded by the Board of Greek State Scholarships Foundation, I.K.Y). She was a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at the M.I.T. Comparative Media Studies program (2009). She has received various fellowships: the Arthur Miller Centre Award (2000), the BAAS Short Term Travel Award (2000), the British Library Eccles Centre for American Studies Visiting Fellowship (2020). She was a Visiting Research Scholar at the Program in Literature at Duke University, U.S. (2012), the Department of English at York University, Toronto, Canada (2016, 2022), and the Department of Fine Arts & Humanities, Augustana Campus, University of Alberta, Canada (2022). She has written the monograph titled *Gothic Motifs in the Fiction of William Gibson* (Rodopi 2004), while she recently co-edited: *Ethnicity and Gender Debates: Cross-Readings of the United States of America in the New Millennium* (Peter Lang 2020); *Visualizing America* (Hellenic Association for American Studies Digital Publications, National Documentation Center 2021); and the special journal issue *The Cultural Politics of Space* (2020: *Gramma, Journal of Theory and Criticism*). She is one of the founding members of two online peer/blind review journals (*Ex-centric Narratives: Journal of Anglophone Literature, Culture and Media* and *AmLit: American Literatures*) and of the EAAS Digital Studies Network (together with Stefan Brandt and Frank Mehring). Between 2019 and 2022, she served as the Director of the Digital Humanities Lab "Psifis" (AUTh). Her teaching and research deal with: contemporary American literature, postmodern writing practice, cyberpunk/cyberculture/cybergothic (William Gibson), electronic literature, print and digital materialities.

The Ritual of Shame:

Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Garden of Eden*

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Abstract

This paper argues that not only in his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) but also in the posthumously published work, *The Garden of Eden* (1986), characters have harnessed a shameful reaction to life—they are at the same time adamant about pursuing their interests and desirous of retreat with the slightest setback, embarrassed about the unrequited emotional investment and unable to completely relinquish their aroused interest or joy. Lost in the loops of affective positivity and negativity, the individuals in Hemingway are caught in the *ups* and *downs* and the *passes* and *returns* of the sensations of shame. Together the two novels that nearly bookend his career as a committed and compassionate prose writer capture the shame *in* and *of* modernity—the shamed action of and *is* life, with all its strivings.

Keywords

Ernest Hemingway; *Garden of Eden*; Ritual; Shame; *The Sun Also Rises*.

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"You are all a lost generation."
——Gertrude Stein in Conversation

"One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever [...] The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to the place where he arose...The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits...All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again."
——Ecclesiastes

Looking for Meaning and its Various Shameful Substitutions

The two epigraphs of *The Sun Also Rises* have been cited as a valuable source to critique Ernest Hemingway's 1926 novel. Themes of loss and nature have, in various ways, supported readings of moralism, ecocentrism, new historicism, symbolism, masculinity, etc. In significant ways, the two quotes signal the moral depravity of the American expatriates in the 1920s,[1] the venomous consequences of anthropocentrism,[2] and the omnipresence of human struggle and suffering.[3] Hemingway draws from both Gertrude Stein and the *Ecclesiastes* in rendering a quintessential modern portrait, and I would propose, of shame. Modernity is portrayed as a constant flux, between loss and gain, passing and coming, and ups and downs. Together, the two quotations tell a story of modern human being's loss and their persistent efforts at refuting that debilitating disorientation. The *Ecclesiastes*, by pointing to the "earth," the "sun," the "wind," the "river," and the "sea," offer a range of abiding fixtures whose meaning remains steady across the centuries. Beyond the Romantic, Transcendentalist suggestion of returning to nature, Hemingway charts a rhythmic rebuttal to Stein's pronouncement of a lostness. Rooted in the dynamics of passing, coming, going, and returning, is a stabilized ritual of motion and change. The guiding spirit of return echoes the inevitable revival of interest. Casting the modern malaise in a similar discourse of loss and return, Hemingway astutely, if not only intuitively, comments upon the metacondition of shame in his century.

In a four-volume psychological explication on affect, *Affect Imagery Consciousness*, Silvan Tomkins has defined the innate activator of shame as the "incomplete reduction of interest or joy" (353). To render the complexity of shame in the plainest formula, Tomkins speaks of a "continuing but reduced investment of excitement or enjoyment" (361). Outlasting the pain of shame is a far more persistent and sticky desire. The remains of positivity do not wither away but precede the revival of interest and joy. Besides the natural

phenomena, the motive alternation in *Ecclesiastes* mirrors a restlessness that is innate to the dynamics of shame. Moreover, Hemingway's characters have reacted in a peculiarly *shamed* manner. Both his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), and the posthumous book, *The Garden of Eden* (1986), feature protagonists who are caught in-between conflicting desires. As if ashamed of their actions, the characters, at first adamant about pursuing their interests, often bow down in the face of setbacks. "Lost" in the loops of "passes" and "returns", Barnes, the Bournes, and the others are also caught in the "ups and downs" of the sensations of shame (*Ecclesiastes*). Together, the two novels that nearly bookend Hemingway's career capture the shame *in* and *of* modernity. Shame in Hemingway is not only depicted as a response to life but almost as life itself, manifested in the numerous strivings that characters have taken up before abandoning or returning. What Hemingway seems to suggest with his representations of shame is that it is a common and necessary reaction, which serves almost as a survival mechanism. Reading Hemingway in this sense helps us understand why shame is highly relevant and unavoidable in our time, and how shame, rather than being destructive emotional baggage, features as an agent for the self, and anchors individuals to a path of self-discovery. Focusing on shame also highlights Hemingway's concern with the code heroes and with the ordinary men who remain erect above their seven-eighths of shame.

To establish a connection between shame and the shamed modern response that is the central argument I will expand upon later, I start with two peculiar scenes of looking. Much in the same self-interrogatory manner that David Bourne chastens his pleasure in his unmanly haircut, the two spectators—Jake Barnes and Catherine Bourne—confront themselves fully in the mirror.

> Undressing, I looked at myself in the mirror of the big armoire beside the bed. That was a typically French way to furnish a room. Practical, too, I suppose. Of all the ways to be wounded. I suppose it was funny. I put on my pajamas and got into bed. (*The Sun Also Rises* 30)

> When she came back to the room David was not there and she stood a long time and looked at the bed and then went to the bathroom door and opened it and stood and looked in the long mirror. Her face had no expression and she looked at herself from her head down to her feet with no expression on her face at all. The light was nearly gone when she went into the bathroom and shut the door behind her. (*The Garden of Eden* 115)

Jake Barnes and Catherine Bourne are absorbed by the images in the mirror. Both spend a long time engaging with the figure that looks back. Both possibly hope to find something alien in their familiar body. While Jake has been freshly reminded of his futile attachment to Brett in their recent meeting, Catherine has finally stepped outside of her heterosexual marriage with an afternoon tryst with Marita. Disappointment and disgust write across their faces but leave no new marks on their bodies. Gripped by the desire to look for a justification, an alibi, or a cause for their misery, both characters eventually give up their investigation. Confronted with the symbol of lost manhood, Jake moves quickly from the embarrassing finding to the French armoire. Determined as he us to question the damaged icon of his sexuality, Jake scrambles for distractions under the strain of shame. His pajamas are a welcome covering of his shame, and at the same time, an admission of his loss. As he resolutely zooms out and displaces one object of examination with another, Jake comforts his mind with the shift in focus, creating a line of interchangeable objects. But his wounded penis is not another object of interest like the mirror, the armoire, or the room. Looking at it side by side with other things does not chip away at its significance, at least not for Jake Barnes. Constitutive of his manhood is his desire for Brett, who demands to be taken as a woman. Glossing over this object of his shame does not help Jake dispel the shame-laden core of his manhood. Between the undressing and the putting on of the pajamas is the unbridgeable chasm of his damaged masculinity. The ease with which he reaches for just another set of clothes to cover it up bespeaks a habitual drill of this perhaps involuntary self-shaming. Frequently if not daily would Jake stand in front of the truth of his being and withstand the shame of passing as a complete man. For Jake, to walk around claiming the role of man and to always fall short of fulfilling such a description is as ridiculous as proving one's manhood by losing its primary signification.

Detached from its use value, the decorative marker of Jake's manhood is as meaningless as Catherine's feminine body. Having tarnished the embodiment of her fidelity, Catherine interrogates the incongruity of her womanhood by putting herself to shame. Examining closely and unabashedly the site of her mortification or the shameful lack of it, Catherine is apparently disappointed if not bemused by an utter absence of intrinsic meaning inscribed on the surface of her body, whereas Jake tasks himself with reassembling significance around an absent signifier. Unlike Jake's near-ritualized self-shaming, Catherine's act is unlike any of her previous mirror-viewing. No longer content with a glimpse of herself, she is now determined to examine "from her head down to her feet," going over every inch of her flesh to identify the culprit of her "fall". In both scenes, shame is unstated; whereas Jake quickly turns away from the object of his shame, Catherine confronts

hers for an unusually long period. In both scenes, Hemingway approaches his characters' shame indirectly and subtly, but his determination to register the shameful contexts remains. Similar to Jake's evasion, Catherine's commitment is not untainted by sensations of shame. The repetition of "no expression" is as much a denial as a self-bewitching chant signaling the extent of her efforts. The narrator's attention to her unmarked face signals the falsehood of her confessed total lack of feeling. As if to problematize such a profession of unaffectability, Hemingway takes pains to remark once and again the absence of any telltale signs. With the repetition, the unspoken context of her shame is highlighted, and the statement—"no expression [...] no expression [...] at all"—might well be translated into "yes ashamed [...] yes ashamed [...] so much" (*The Garden of Eden* 115). Regardless of her long and concentrated attention to the object of her study, Catherine's frustration is as overwhelmingly debilitating as Jake's with his seemingly absent-minded dabbling in the field of his inquiry.

Extant scholarship on Hemingway has captured the significance of the two scenes, mostly in terms of the characters' efforts at reconciling with their loss of gendered identity. What's left underdeveloped if not untapped is the connection between the assault of shame and a frantic search for meaning. The quest for meaning does feature in Hemingway's criticisms but usually serves as a background for more pressing issues. Jake Barnes' wound suggests to Wirt Williams a critical loss of life's intelligibility, which prompts him to explore alternative "avenues of meaning and self-definition" (45). But Jake's existential pursuit is only secondary, as a corollary to the overarching logic of loss and desire.

Similarly, for David Tomkins, Jake's actions are merely reactive to his original loss, as a prolonged pining after "that which is unattainable" (752). Günther Schmigalle, too, understands Jake's wound in strictly metaphysical terms, as "an emblematic representation of the will [with] [...] the infinite capacity to create desires and the impossibility of finding any lasting satisfaction" (12). What gets eluded in such a totalizing logic of loss is the response of the characters, which is related to the loss but not necessarily in a causal fashion. That they were initially conditioned by the loss does not render their contents and aims solely intelligible in light of that loss. It is not the desire for original wholeness that sustains Jake and Catherine's pursuit of meaning; their search for meaning has merit in and of itself. What Sally Munt labels a "change agent for the self" (8), shame contributes not only to the initiation of such a quest but to its maintenance as well. The shameful body both Jake and Catherine have to confront in the mirror poses as a site of disidentification that both characters are eager to displace with various meaning- and identity-engendering ventures. Shame, Elspeth Probyn argues, "goes to the heart of who we think we are"; our senses of what is *shameful* help

"reveal our values" (x). Refusing to allow their shame to dictate who they are, Jake and Catherine peer into the dynamics of their shame. In her studies on shame and the literary history of Christianity, Virginia Burrus contends that shame discloses "human limits" and underlies self-transgressing capabilities for intimacy, sociality, and ethical response (4). For Jake and Catherine, the difference between what *should* be counted as shameful and their particular embodied experience reveals the deficiency of known cultural scripts as well as the need to explore *other* viable forms. *The Sun* and *The Garden* could be taken in this regard as an in-depth negotiation *with* shame, in search of not *transgressive* possibilities per se but *possibilities* with which physical and affective realities can remain as they *are*, untagged by cultural knowledge of shame.

Shame inhabits a curious plane in relation to the two looking (-for) episodes discussed at the beginning of this section. The act of looking at one's inadequacy induces a sense of shame whereby the intention of interrogating that shame intensifies. Visually engaging with the source of their shame, the characters' experience of shameful sensation is further complicated by the cultural taboo on looking. The result is a powerful and unalloyed experience of shame. The extensive mirror-viewing in *The Garden of Eden* is not merely indicative of an ongoing search for identity that the characters undertake; it contributes as well to an anxiety that runs parallel to, if not conducive to such a quest. Blythe Tellefsen, for instance, assesses the various episodes of mirroring in regard to the characters' identity formation, cataloguing the purposes of such viewing as to "re/gain a sense of self," to "confirm," and to "indicate [...] uncertainty" (85-87). More than simply *reflecting* other problems, mirror viewing *is* a valid site of inquiry in its own right, and it is charged with incredible *affective* tension. In his explication of the human taboo on looking, Tomkins builds a connection between this time-honored custom and the cultural anxiety over interocular intimacy. Tomkins references psychoanalysis in his claim of the eye as "a symbol for the penis", as "an auxiliary to the mouth, to the hand and to the genitals" (374, 380-81). Interocular engagement is fraught, Tomkins reasons, because it could become interlaced with shades of shame in relation to sexuality. Repeatedly emphasized is the critical importance of the eyes, which are both the sender and receiver of affects and information. Because "the self lives in the face and within the face the self burns brightest in the eyes", for Tomkins, the eye invites attacks of shame as the prominent seat of the self (359). To the extent that "complete interocular freedom must evoke shame" (385), the variant to mutual looking—self-mirroring—most probably has an innate shamed component. On a social occasion, the nature of the shame response, Tomkins avers, is to discourage any further contact, mostly visual, between two people.

With mirror-viewing, if the object of attention generates shame in the viewer, then the quintessential shamed response—dropping of eyelids, of the head, of the upper body—should have effectively terminated the act and released the person from shame. But the remainder of interest might prompt the head to turn up again, thereby locking the self in the unrelenting grip of shame. As they look on, Jake and Catherine are trapped in the self-sufficient feedback loop of shame, and both are saved when the object of their interest becomes almost out of sight—Jake puts on his pajamas and Catherine loses the daylight. Hemingway focuses on shame's fraught relationship with looking and its power to problematize socio-cultural scripts such as the taboo on looking and value judgments of masculinity and monogamy. Catherine's and Jake's shame forces them to question the established ideological conventions and makes readers pause at the dubious 'limits' of their existence as 'honorable' human beings. In the face of their affective reality, the cultural norms that police their gender and sexuality reflect back as indeed fantastical.

Up close, the two scenes of looking in Hemingway are also performances of looking *for*. In light of Floyd Watkins's 1971 reading of *The Sun Also Rises* as "a search for meaning" (97), Jake's shame over his castrated penis is critical in prompting him to look elsewhere for meaning. The search for other expressions of his compromised masculinity triggers a more general pursuit of meaning-bound sites. The damaged phallus stands for Jake as the difference between the adequacy of his desire and the absence of his behavior. The disjunction undermines a consistent sexual identity, while at the same time alerting him to the arbitrary nature of such a signification of his own gendered behavior. Catherine Bourne, too, becomes burdened with the lightness of her being, when traditionally meaningful venues—marriage, gender, heterosexuality—fall short of adequately weighing her behavior. Their lack of meaning drives her to sites of perversion and madness as the only alternative. Freed from traditional meaning-laden bonds, Catherine sets on realigning meaning with its signifiers on her own. Initiating sodomy, triangulating the heterosexual coupling, burning David's clippings and manuscripts, Catherine keeps pushing the socially conditioned boundaries of shameful behavior. She seems to have become addicted to the power of shame in furnishing arguments in challenging sociocultural norms. She needs constant access to shame as an abiding source of power to blast apart the meaningless scripts of her life, even if the shameful sensations are debilitating and devastating at times. Reviewing her recalcitrant body in the mirror until the natural light goes out, Catherine goes into the bathroom possibly not only to weep over her meaninglessness but to resort to a manmade illumination source on the conundrum of her being. Incidentally, this perspectival change from the 'natural' to the 'unnatural' is the opposite of what Jake Barnes has

done. Only after turning off the artificial light does he become vulnerable to the source of his shame and existential crisis. Such a contrast is perhaps explainable in terms of the two characters' opposite attitudes towards established schemes of meaning. Whereas he allows mainstream discourses on gender to dictate his sense of shame and resigns himself to the debilitating sensation, Catherine chooses to redefine marriage, sexuality, and gender with her tonsorial adventures, her sexual experimentations, and her ventures into sodomy and homosexuality.

In time, Hemingway would suggest possible avenues through which many characters in *The Sun* and *The Garden* regain meaning. Shame is the first step towards a recovery of meaning and victory over a modern rootlessness. One of the functions of what shame theorist Carl Schneider calls "mature shame" is to "protect things of value in their vulnerability to violation" (8). Shame in Hemingway's texts might not have served the role of *protection*, but it highlights sensitive areas of personal experience and alerts the individual to the meaning of such "sensitivity." More than celebrating shame's boundary-protecting, anti-exposure functions, Hemingway's novels problematize the limits of 'human' vulnerability and feature characters who wouldn't recoil from crossing the line of shame. William Doty observed in 1981 that contemporary culture had "lost all foundations" (18), which he retraced back to Pound's emphasis upon the Now and the subsequent loss of continuity. Citing the post-WWII media culture as a "fictionalization of history," Beatriz Ibáñez cautions against "a banalized world of reference" and its power to "empt[y] post modern experience of ontological weight" (93). Interestingly, she denounces the frantic search for meaning in *The Garden of Eden* as a symptom of such a banalization. David Bourne figures for her as the tragic hero who is unable to stop the draining of significance from "life, love, and friendship" (93). What she takes as David's heroism is his lamentable adherence to the established rhetoric of heterosexuality and masculinity. David's blind faith in the prescribed patterns of behavior renders his shame as conducive to productive self-reflections. If Catherine or Jake is able to take advantage of their shame as what developmental psychologists deem as a primal place of self-formation (Sedgwick and Frank 6), David follows the dictates of his shame to turn away from 'abnormal' self-expressions. Ashamed of Catherine's gender-bending experiments and their appearance in his narrative, David terminates both endeavors in favor of more conventional and thus honorable behaviors, replacing the "mad" Catherine with the docile Marita, restoring his household to a heteronormative and gender-specific site, preferring topics of hunting, friendship, and family over gender, marriage, and sexuality, and abandoning a counter-normative present to return to a colonial and patriarchal past. Whereas Ibáñez laments the early-postmodern condition that

detaches meaning from the dynamics of signification, Hemingway's portrayal of shame in the novel clearly complicates such a condition by pointing to the productivity of such a decoupling.

Shame sponsors a flow of *affect* and energy which sets the characters in motion. According to George Cheatham, "the war's excess" with its "financial and moral inexactitude" has made Jake Barnes an ardent believer in equivalence (103). The discomfort he feels towards surplus or deficiency marks him as an easy victim to shame whose intrinsic mechanism is built upon the logic of inequality. Tomkins's understanding of shame as activated by "the incomplete reduction of interest or joy" (353) highlights a built-in principle of difference in the *affect*. A difference in the level of affects between the partners conditions the attack of shame and humiliation. Thus, the pain of shame is inseparable from a sense of inexactitude. Just as the excessive affective positivity would invariably lead to an overflow of shame, Jake is ravaged by the critical difference between his professed and practiced masculinity, between his love for Brett and her demand of being loved in a particular way, and between his desire for homosocial relations and his expulsion from the aficionado community. Shame emerges along the fault lines of imbalance and snowballs as the difference increases. William Dow has built an intriguing case for the virtue of irony in *The Sun Also Rises* which might well apply to the affect of shame. He describes the innate dynamic of irony as "the *discrepancy* between reality and appearance" and attaches its significance to the "communal, interrelational" interests (179; my emphasis). He also understands irony as a tool of self-exposure, through which one becomes aware of the freedom and limitations of self-determination, before reaching self-knowledge and self-transcendence. The rhetoric of exposure, difference, and relationality is redolent of shame. As the site of heightened self-awareness, shame features episodes of exposure that are occasionally voluntarily sought. Whereas Brett Ashley has to bear the shaming and shame-engendering stares from the traditional neighborhoods in San Fermin, David, Marita, and Catherine often gaze into the bar mirror at their unconventional "co-habitation." Understood by Helen Lynd and Léon Wurmser as a particular manner of exposing one's inner reality, shame in Hemingway sometimes ushers in occasions of self-reflection following a deliberate "quest" for shame. Exposed, vulnerable, and desirous of interpersonal connections, Jake Barnes, Catherine Bourne, and the others are primed for attacks of shame, which Gershen Kaufman defines as a "sudden, unexpected exposure coupled with blinding inner scrutiny" (18). Following Kilday and Nash's studies on shame in modern Britain, such a quest for shame could figure as a necessary component in identity-building projects outside the queer and non-heterosexual communities. Shame becomes disassociated from a "shame-ridden sexual identity" (Kilday and

Nash 267) for Hemingway's characters and conducive to other possibilities of *being* in response to the demands of modernity. The "sensitive, intimate, and vulnerable" aspects of the self are no longer to be purged from an otherwise "wholesome" identity (Nathanson 4); they are to be taken as points of entry to a life-long project of identity formation.

In response to the loss of meaning upon their close contact with shame, the characters in *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Garden of Eden* turn in various directions for meaningful substitutes. Under most circumstances, their endeavor to recover meaning becomes a site of meaning itself. Catherine's body is one such location where she works diligently to create meaning. Donning provocative hairstyles, wearing men's clothes, practicing nontraditional heterosexuality, Catherine engages her body with religious piety. Continuing the feminist tradition of critique, Kathy Willingham goes beyond Steven Roe's sympathetic reading of Catherine, and explores what a female artist goes through in her creative odyssey. As a literary realization of the theoretical model of *l'écriture féminie*, *Garden* presents the female body as a legitimate venue for creativity. Willingham tries to salvage the 'text' Catherine has created with her body, connecting her gesture with the Cixousian idea that "the female libido [...] best expresses reality" (223). Willingham positions her mirror-reviewing desires as manifest of her wish to live in "the Imaginary or pre-Symbolic condition" (228). The medium of her artistic choice, her body, is only signifiable via a "feminine language," whose "atomized, nonlinear, and unorthodox patterns of speech" are only 'mad' in the phallogocentric discourse (234). The proprietary pride she feels towards her creation is fully registered in her statements that she is "a great success in [the] world" which she has "made up" (*GE* 53), that she has taken upon herself the "project" to remake David's life as a "present" to him (188), and that it is she who has "invented" the "wonderful" new Bournes (191). Everything she creates serves as an extensive and subversive footnote to her declaration at the very beginning of the book when she reveals, partly in jest and partly in jealousy of David's assertion that he is "the inventive type," that she is "the destructive type" (5). Catherine breaks down set grids of intelligibility in the writing of her own text—her gender, her sexuality, marriage, love, and madness. Her protests against phallogocentric meanings are also efforts with which she contests known shame scripts. And instead of letting responses of shame terminate her endeavor, Catherine lets these 'meaningless' feelings of shame guide her adventure forward. In contrast, David Bourne habitually stops where his shame arises. Choosing a far more traditional means of writing, David sets out to create meaning that would align with the conventions of shame. No sooner than the image in the mirror grows to be alien and meaningless does David stop working at the honeymoon narrative (*GE* 84, 93), and when

his image has become too shameful to see, David abandons the narrative altogether (177, 188). But it is in writing that he retains a constant ashamed position—both phenomenologically, with his head down, eyes down, upper body down (Tomkins 352, 630), and psychologically, when he reencounters the shameful experiences of sodomy and betrayal (*GE* 17-20, 181, 216). Thus all the benefits that writing promises—a sense of progress, a clear conscience, meaning, and aliveness (*GE* 166, 146, 128, 107)—are to some degree boons of shame. As critics such as Miles Richardson, Robert Fleming, and Rose Marie Burwell recognize how significant writing figures for David and his identity formation, they have overlooked the role shame plays. Even as he concedes to the biting sense of shame from time to time, his decisions have been almost invariably in response to shame. Not only his career as a writer, but his life in general thus features a 'shamed' trajectory.

For Jake Barnes, work is the meaningful substitute that scrubs the "funny" taste of his identity-shattering wound off his mind (*SAR* 26-27, 30-31). He keeps a schedule that is interspersed with "respites" of shame. Working from early morning to late night, Jake rejoins his shame in front of the mirror every day before he goes to bed. Each year, taking his vacation in Spain, Jake is to encounter emblems of macho masculinity that remind him of his shameful lack. Shame prompts him to be hyper-mobile. A case in point would be the day after his painful union with Brett Ashley. A whole night of shame sends Jake running around town—down the Boulevard to rue Soufflot, through Luxembourg Garden, taking the S bus to the Madeleine, along the Boulevard des Capucines to the Opéra, into his office, going out for a meeting at the Quai d'Orsay, returning to the office and going off to lunch with Robert Cohn (35-37).

As shame blasts his life apart, it also makes him hold on to it as a principle of life. Shame-induced work serves as a ready stand-in for meaning until more meaningful alternatives appear—fishing in Burguete and the fiesta in Pamplona. Staking his identity at these rituals, Jake Barnes helps bring into relief the importance of shame in the trajectory of the characters in *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Garden of Eden*. These meaning-making substitutes—Pedro Romero and the *corrida de toros*, David Bourne and his regime of writing, Catherine and her rites of change—are also shame-stimulated and shame-sustained projects with a peculiar ritualized character. Ritual furbishes proven formulas of order and purposiveness, and produces meaning through cyclicality and relationality.

The Ritualized Existence and its Affinity to Shame

Disenchanted with the loss of meaning in life, chastened by sensations of shame, the meaning chasers in *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Garden of Eden* have

developed practices with a decidedly ritualized nature. It is also through such activities that the characters maintain constant access to shame. Hemingway forces our attention to the extent to which shame sustains the life projects of his characters. In their scramble for meaning, they have more or less lingered over the sites of shame. In the cycle of activating and alleviating the experiences of shame, the ritual practitioners mobilize a cyclic regeneration of meaning that maintains a peculiar shaming component. The search for meaning has evolved to a certain extent into a veritable quest for shame. A closer look at two intricate scenes corroborates such a hypothesis. The first scene takes place in Napoule, France, where the Bournes are taking their extended honeymoon. After Catherine has consummated her relationship with Marita, whom she has brought into their marriage as a "present" and "future" for David (*GE* 103), David finds himself getting increasingly attached to the dark shy girl. On the occasion when Marita leaves the bar to check on Catherine, David

> felt of the girl's drink and decided to drink it before it got warm. He took it in his hand and raised it to his lips and he found as it touched his lips that it gave him pleasure because it was hers. It was clear and undeniable. That's all you need, he thought. That's all you need to make things really perfect. Be in love with both of them. What's happened to you since last May? What are you anyway? But he touched the glass to his lips again and there was the same reaction as before. All right, he said, remember to do the work. The work is what you have left. You better fork up with the work. (*GE* 127)

The second passage follows a short exchange between Juanito Montoya and Jake Barnes, when the latter arrives at the Hotel Montoya with his friends for the fiesta. The encounter, in which Montoya twice puts his hand "embarrassedly" on Jake's shoulder while they discuss real *aficion*, leads Jake to reminisce about his friendship with Montoya and the exclusive brotherhood of the *aficionados*.

> We often never talked for very long at a time. It was simply the pleasure of discovering what we each felt. Men would come in from distant towns and before they left Pamplona stop and talk for a few minutes with Montoya about bulls. These men were aficionados. Those who were aficionados could always get rooms even when the hotel was full. Montoya introduced me to some of them [...] When they saw that I had aficion, and there was no password, no set questions that could bring it out, rather it was a sort of oral spiritual examination with the questions

> always a little on the defensive and never apparent, there was this same embarrassed putting the hand on the shoulder, or a "Buen hombre." But nearly always there was the actual touching. It seemed as though they wanted to touch you to make it certain. (*SAR* 132)

Touching and being touched, Jake Barnes and David Bourne find themselves fluent in some covert language that has replaced the usual channel of communication. Despite Jake's sensitivity to Montoya's touching and David's qualms about his illicit pleasure, a tacit understanding arrives on both occasions. The hand and the lips have stirred up sensations and rigged up configurations of relations, the forms of which, regardless of their contents, have given rise to a temporary but strong assembling of meaning.

A sharpened responsiveness to physical contact characterizes both scenarios. David Bourne and Jake Barnes have primed themselves in a position to receive meaning. Poised with the glass and the hands, the two characters stage peculiar physical performances that are able to convey more significance than words. This 'analogic' means of communication is akin to the bee dance that Anthony Wilden references in his discussions on systems theory. Dance is the command to other bees "to put themselves into the same relationship" through which bees communicate important information to each other (61). The bee's command to dance and to copy a particular physical act results in a ritualized relationality between them. Similarly, both Jake and David have enveloped their bodies in a *dance* of meaning. Jake's *aficion* status depends on the particularity of his body and the incoming hands, while David's lips touch the spot of his entrance into the triangulated phase of his marriage. In the closed circuits they've established in the two scenes, codes of communication have been tacitly observed, meanings are generated that are independent of linguistic significations.

Although neither the hand nor the lip is significant for clinical and social scientific understandings of shame, they are in the two scenes proper conduits of both meaning and shame. Richard Fantina cites David's fondling of Marita's wine glass as evidence of Hemingway's interest in fetishism. Tracing an obsession with hair in both the literary and biographical realms, Fantina conducts a fetishistic reading of Hemingway that debunks the writer's larger macho stance. Originally a "fabricated object to be worn about the body" to signify its control over the bodily organs (Pietz 10), the fetish takes a sexualized turn within the frameworks of psychoanalysis when it becomes "a penis-substitute [...] hence a means of defense against castration anxiety" (Studlar 40). The fetish thus creates an illusion of both wholeness and macho masculinity, which wards off imminent attacks of shame, while, paradoxically, featuring as a generator of shame-faced anxiety.

When David presses his lips against the glass, he has positioned himself in a fetishistic relation to Marita, and has in that brief moment established a construct whereby meanings of his desire have become easily accessible. By the very nature of being once used by Marita, the wine glass has taken on a fetishistic character and become a veritable symbol for the girl of his desire. The pleasure it affords David in the simple gesture of touching makes him realize the extent of his feelings, which, for him, suggests the degree of his departure from the norms of marriage and love. Though at the time remaining uninhibited, his guilty conscience marks the strength of marriage discourses in the early twentieth century. Relying upon the 'infallible' rhetoric of fidelity and moral integrity, David shames his unfaithful thoughts and the depraved state of his being, only to realize the powers of his desire and his work. As much as he needs his writing to define and console him, David takes immeasurable pleasure in his shame as well, fueling one with the other. At times, his writing signifies for him as the compass to navigate his lostness, as a site of meaning whose force grows with sensations of shame. But David, unlike Catherine, subscribes to traditional discourses of marriage and sexuality, and will in due time forfeit his rebellious stance. His trust, in this case, in the rhetoric of monogamy, renders him vulnerable to the debilitating effects of shame. The marriage campaign of the early twentieth century creates a strong discourse of companionship that vows to transform "problematic gap" into wholesome "source of heightened sensitivity and connection" (Carter 77). The marriage reforms even dangle rewards such as "*via perfecta* of mutual joy" (Stopes 49). Such a positivist turn generates "a parallel process of abnormalization" that aims to attack one's identity instead of the acts themselves (Moddelmog 146). David Bourne's plausible subscription to such a stigmatizing ethics could be seen in the shame he experiences with his fetishizing gesture. The shame of indulging in fetishism further aggravates a similar sensation produced by infidelity and sodomy, reinforcing one with the other as David strives to assemble meaning out of his life.

The connection between ritual and shame plays out in two other realms—the affective dimension of ritual and the reactive nature of shame. Although David Bourne's fetishistic gesture with the glass and Jake Barnes' bodily connection with Montoya aren't strictly ritualistic per se, they do figure as gateways to time-honored traditions that furnish their believers with larger 'universal' truths. In those isolated, clandestine, and often disjoined moments, practitioners like David and Jake connect to larger frameworks of intelligibility and find themselves meaningful in light of these narratives. Many of the activities that attract the characters in *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Garden of Eden*—hunting, fishing, sexuality—are what Mircea Eliade identifies as premium examples of ritual. Eliade understands ritual as any "responsible

activity" modeled after those that have been done by the primordial actors—gods, ancestors, and heroes (28). Favoring the relation to the past, ritual is by nature always back-looking and reactionary. Ritual shares this backward temporal trait with the affect of shame. Like ritual, shame responds to a *previously* activated level of interest and joy. Both ritual and the shame response have privileged the past to the extent of dismissing the future. In responding to a past example, ritual initiates a circularity that doesn't see the past as fixed and unalterable. But the backward relationality might also fall into a phallogocentric mindset that honors the past as a new phallus. While ritual discourses might partake of blind faith and self-deception, they are also surprisingly helpful in generating personal significance and an acute sense of life. Similarly, as shame could be a prime tool to discipline abnormal bodies, it also highlights the places where the fault lines of norms become most obvious. Catherine confronts the shaming discourse of heteronormativity just as Jake disgraces the *toreo* hero. In the way shame provides points of departure within a culture that condemns sexual- and gender-bending, ritual enables Jake to reexamine the boundaries between American 'degenerates' and champion bullfighters. More than what Eliade characterizes as a man-making progress inside the "mythical time" (35), ritual problematizes temporal as well as epistemological frameworks as it rewinds a 'normally' disciplined individual.

Being touched by Montoya in a particular way confirms Jake's *aficionado* status, which makes the action itself symbolic of a ceremony that connects him to the timeless ritual of *corrida de toros*. The touching and its aficionado initiation connects to a larger ritualistic pattern that also includes the *paseo*, the *desencajonada*, the bullfight, and the cutting of the bull's ears. Relating to one another in light of an overarching theme, the actions have taken on a significance that transcends their individual existence. This transcendence occurs predominantly in the affective realm. Granted, with the intelligence of the *toros*, the fear, distress, startle, and anger that would have been invoked by *desencajonada* are overtaken by sensations of excitement and joy. Similarly, *toros* transforms the confusion of paseo, the terror of bullfight, and the disgust with *los máximos trofeos* (the ear as trophy) into interest, enjoyment, and unbounded passion. When Montoya touches Jake in the spirit of *aficion camaraderie*, embarrassment and shame give way to feelings of honor and sheer joy. According to mythologist Jane Harrison, the superiority of primitivism lies in its conception of life as "emotional and wholly experiential" (AO 207). Primitive magic rituals, she claims, are significant not due to any rational understanding, but to the sharing of emotional experiences. She characterizes ritual to be "not only [an] *utter* emotion [but also] *represent*[ing] it" (Harrison, AAR 34). Elsewhere in *Themis*, she

conceives of ritual simply as the "utterance of an emotion, a thing felt [...] in words or thoughts" (16). Understood in this way, ritual's affective component assumes an overwhelming degree whereas the contents of its actions are but placeholders with which the emotional reality could be articulated. And shame seems to be the premium channel of expression for rituals in *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Garden of Eden*. Catherine's sexual and gender experiments notwithstanding, David's rewriting of his childhood and marriage, Jake's healing of his war and love wounds, and Robert Cohen's chivalric romance are all steeped in sensations of shame. Clyde Kluckhohn and Dorothea Leighton identify the primary function of ritual as "the discharge of the emotion of individuals in socially accepted channels" (328). And it stands to reason that continuing ritualistic practices of *corrida*, chivalry, and (self-)writing enable the release of shameful feelings of inadequacy, betrayal, and monstrosity. Engagement in ritual is on one hand prompted by the access to shame and on the other sustained through shame-laden sensations. Supportive of this view is William Doty's interpretation of mythic narratives as a form of not simply knowing the "rational, ideational aspects of human consciousness," but also the "sensual-aesthetic, moral, and emotional" dimensions (24). The expression of desires in a relational manner also helps promote better social integration (Doty 48-49). The innate dynamic of the ritual function—transcendence of individual identity by way of an interpersonal bond—is not unlike that of the mechanism of shame, which gives rise to a heightened sense of the self while obliterating the boundaries between the object and subject of one's judgment. Interestingly, Evan Zuesse pinpoints shame as representative of the self-consciousness that is evoked by ritualistic performances. Embarrassment, shame, and guilt, he argues, mark the transition from "private eternity" to "public peripherality" (44). The benefits of ritual are inseparable from the boons of shame that render the self other-centered and transcendent of a reductivist selfhood. The ritual of shame opens up the self-identical and self-centered individual for more productive rewiring. And it is through the encounter with both ritual and shame that Hemingway's characters overcome their fear of rootlessness to reach a more wholesome in-between-ness.

The Shame of Life and the Shameless Communion

To the extent that ritual might be "primitive man's attempt to escape from the prison of time and history into the timeless" (Teunissen 223), discourses of ritual could be a powerful and ready escapist tool from the shameful immediacy of life. The rhetoric of escape, Robert Stephens proposes, becomes systematic in Hemingway's work. Not only does he engage extensively with the "possibilities and implications of escape," his novels utilize the concept of escape as a narrative motif (51-52). More than being a response to "an

intolerable situation" (Stephens 52), escapism entails a subtle but certain shamed dimension. Per Tomkins's explication of the mechanism of shame as the "incomplete reduction of interest or joy" (353), the sensation of shame figures as a failed 'escape' from joy. Unwilling to renounce one's interest in the object, one adopts the shame response to avoid further contact and attachment. Similarly, escapists often retain a physical if not affective connection to the situation, and their emotional investment weakens rather than completely disappears. In both *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Garden of Eden*, characters have renounced varied objects of interest even as their feelings linger—Jake Barnes and his unconsummated affair, Robert Cohn and his careers as a novelist and chivalric lover, Brett and her romance with Romero, David Bourne and his participation in sexual and gender experiments. In their frantic escape from the affective predicaments, they've taken up various alleviative strategies, and find solace in ritual and ritualized performances such as working, fishing, bullfighting, writing, and hunting. Unable to resume or relinquish their relationship, they are trapped in the limbo of shame. And as the two epigraphs in *The Sun Also Rises* indicate, to be "lost" in shame once is to forever experience its "return."

That shame could be conducive to interpersonal contact is no news. Since Aristotle and Freud's recognition of shame's power over antisocial impulses, other scholars have commented on shame's socializing potentials[4]. Halina Ablamowicz, for example, addresses shame's role in relation to the *lebenswelt*, paying attention to the "meaningful, value-specific, intersubjective communication" it establishes (48). In *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Garden of Eden*, Hemingway's portrayal of shame is similarly conducive to interpersonal relationality, but it also envisions a cross-species possibility. Communion with nonhuman animals plays such a perceptible role in Hemingway's conception of life in modernity. In his depiction of hunting and bullfighting, there exists a more than friendly relationship between the human and the nonhuman, one that approaches cross-species identification, if not bestiality.

Hemingway does not stop at the sympathetic identification when he sets out to explore the cross-species relationship. In *The Sun Also Rises*, alongside his depictions of the time-bending, capitalism-resistant, carnivalesque fiesta, Hemingway stages an elaborate presentation of the bullfight. And on at least two occasions, the details of the bodily dynamics suggest a relationality that is more than collaborative or sympathetic: it verges on being aggressively sexual. Luring the bulls with his cape and ordering them around with his playful moves, Pedro Romero acts in a peculiarly arousing manner.

> The bull charged as Romero charged. Romero's left hand dropped

> the muleta over the bull's muzzle to blind him, his left shoulder went forward between the horns as the sword went in, and for just an instant he and the bull were one, Romero way out over the bull, the right arm extended high up to where the hilt of the sword had gone in between the bull's shoulders. Then the figure was broken. There was a little jolt as Romero came clear, and then he was standing, one hand up, facing the bull, his shirt ripped out from under his sleeve, the white blowing in the wind, and the bull, the red sword hilt tight between his shoulders, his head going down and his legs setting. (218-19)

Throughout the bullfight, bulls have been consistently anthropomorphized as *he*, before entering a series of choreographed acts with their rival and seducer. The bull and his matador seek to lock down one another's vision during the many passes that both take pleasure in—Romero flashing the bull with triumphant smiles, the bull enjoying the tension and exhilaration. Tempting the bull to charge repeatedly at his body, Romero is as aroused by the bull's passion and stamina as the bull is by his panache and prowess. When Romero finally penetrates the bull with his sword, the two wrestling bodies merge. Throughout the performance, the two parties have tried to postpone this climactic fusion, delaying its occurrence to induce maximal pleasure in one another. Together with the "little jolt" and the "ripped shirt," Hemingway intersperses the scene with numerous sexual innuendos. For a writer who prides himself on the magnitude of subtext and understatement, his commitment to details in the scene seems all the more peculiar.

While critics have identified the sexual overtone of the bullfighting in *The Sun Also Rises*, they tend to dispel it in relation to larger symbolic significance. David Blackmore attributes the sexualized tension in the bullring all to Jake Barnes' narrative position, with which he releases his suppressed homosexual inclinations. Jake's description of the *aficionados*, Blackmore asserts, is "erotically charged from the start," beginning with the intimate *touching* between him and Montoya, and followed with his interest in Romero's good looks (56-57). It is not Hemingway the writer, but Jake the bisexual narrator who responds to the fights "in sexualized terms" (58). Taking the novel as articulate of other masculinities, Blackmore is responding to Nina Schwartz's earlier reading. Schwartz discusses the sexualized bullfight scenes as evidence of displaced feminine power, which sustains but is overshadowed by the value of the phallus. Blackmore's critique of Schwartz's heterosexist bias misses her larger claim of the bullfight as the breakdown of the phallic power. Although Schwartz establishes a parallel between Romero's moves and a woman's playful seduction of her lover, she also explores the parodic traits of such erotics and highlights the gender inversion and transvestism in the

scene, which exposes the limits of the patriarchal codes. In choosing to stay at the literal rendition of sexualized tensions between Romero and the bull, I do not intend to dispute the symptomatic readings of Blackmore and Schwartz, nor am I interested in defending the heterosexualist and phallic economy. The eroticization of a confrontational cross-species relationship founds itself at the intersticed crossings between ritual, shame, and relationality. And it is because of this intersectionality that I believe Hemingway's work deserves our attention.

Not only does ritual, in the cases of bullfighting and David Bourne's writing, breed shame, bend the linearity of time, and generate new relationalities, its effect on producing heightened self-awareness while situating the self in a larger relational grid is not unlike that of the shame sensation. Ruth Leys has envisioned shame as a possible "site of resistance to cultural norms of identity" (124), and this subversive potential of shame translates via Hemingway's imagination as a prolonged, deliberate immersion in shame-inducing, shame-related ventures. To practice the ritualized activity is to furnish meanings for self-celebration and at the same time sacrificing individuality for a collective identity. In a similar way, shame helps strengthen bonds, placing "a persistent reminder of obligations to others" (Treacher 288), while alerting the self to the validity and necessity of its boundaries. Positing the sensation of shame in between the self-centered and other-centered consciousness, Zuesse characterizes shame as *the* effect of ritual. An emboldened and celebratory glance cast inward, shame also entails a zooming out that takes in *other* interests and concerns. Ritual's rigid formality, or what Zuesse calls its "absurdity" (48), further encapsulates the ritual practitioners in a closed circuit between shame and shamelessness, retrieving desirable *meaning* from a strictly artificial format. To the extent that ritual doles out narratives of *logos*, it is not the diametric opposite of the existent patriarchal order that it seeks to undermine; its preference for affect over reason and its embrace of homosociality and non-hierarchical relationality, however, place ritual at a decidedly queer angle from phallogocentric discourses.

Affect, particularly shame, has replaced verbal discourse as the primary means of communication. In a way, affect is far more communicative than language, whose limitations and damages have been well recognized. Like Catholic grammars of grace, James Watson argues, the bullfight for Hemingway operates along channels of syntactic rules, rather than upon semantics. The individual acts could only gain meaning by their "place within the larger pattern" (473). Wade Wheelock too, in his earlier discussion of the problem of ritual language, observes "little or no information" in ritual communication (58). The superfluity of ritual utterances, Wheelock reasons, is the mark of ritual's significance, as the "culturally valued information"

should have been "already mastered by the participants" (66). It is not the communication of values but the repetition of experiences and affects that renders ritual meaningful. In this manner, ritual functions analogically in its communication of not information but meaning, and the meaning of shame in particular. As Anthony Wilden understands of the analog, a mimetic mode of communication could be far more effective in conveying meaning than the discursive means. Like the analog, ritual preserves 'meaning' in retaining a fundamental and probably essential ambiguity of reality.

As ritual celebrates cyclicality and relationality and discredits the linearity of time and history, it channels its meaning through formality, and relies little upon the semantic reifications. Writing, fishing, watching bullfights, the ritual practitioners invariably keep their eyes down, their head down, and oftentimes their upper body down. Much like the destroyed bull, with "the red sword hilt tight between his shoulders, his head going down and his legs setting" (SAR 218-19), the meaning-hungry modern men in Hemingway turn to the ritual of life in shame. But unlike the bull that died in "shame"—"his head went forward and he went over slowly, then all over, suddenly, four feet in the air"—Hemingway's men and women somehow manage to move on and find other conceptions of shame to contend with. Hemingway unveils a canvas of life that is energized by shame. In a subtle yet distinct manner, the rhythm of life is intimately bound to the rituals of shame.

Notes

[1] Michael Reynolds in his 1987 essay, "The Sun in its Time: Recovering the Historical Context," points out that this novel should be understood as "a study in moral failure, a jaded world of unemployed and irresponsible characters...a fable of ideological bankruptcy" (45). For Reynolds, the general moral indulgence in Paris undoes the more orthodox upbringing Hemingway receives in Oak Park, and allows expression of his otherwise suppressed erotic inclinations.

[2] David Savola faults pastoralism as supportive of "an anthropocentric vision of the natural world" in his essay, "'A Very Sinister Book': The Sun Also Rises as Critique of Pastoralism." The pastoral vision, he argues, operates by subjugating the "wild lands to human uses" (41). Savola interprets the passage from Ecclesiastes as "a powerful rebuke" against anthropocentrism because it depicted human beings as "tiny, fleeing, miniscule occurrences when measured against the indomitable rhythms of nature" (40).

[3] Günther Schmigalle reads the quote from Ecclesiastes as emphatic on "repetition" and the "vainness of the effort to create anything new" (11).

Notes

[4] Helen B. Lewis (1971) saw shameability as socially binding; Carl Schneider (1992) considered shame as revealing of human intterrelatedness and deep mutual involvement; James Twitchell (1997) characterized shame as a powerful socializing device, foundational to individual responsibility; Thomas Scheff (2003) regarded shame as a regulatory device in maintaining social bond; Elspeth Probyn (2005) found in shame an innate desire for connection.

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Biography

Wenwen Guo is Assistant Professor of English at Brenau University. She is interested in the questions of affect, subjectivity, consciousness, and mental health, particularly the ways in which literary texts complicate existing scientific discourses. Her published work has appeared on *Henry James Review, Science Fiction Studies, Cross Current,* among others. She teaches all level of English courses and helps build the Honors Program at Brenau.

Politics and Society in Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*

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Abstract

This essay examines the vision of society presented in Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* (1930). In contrast to critics who argue that Hammett brought a Marxist perspective to the novel, reflecting his support to the Communist Party later in the decade, this current article argues that *The Maltese Falcon* presents a vision of society with no fundamental order or meaning, in which all rules are arbitrary, and in which every attempt to present a grand narrative fails. This nihilist conception of society is in keeping with the rise of modernism and reflects the shift from a rural, agricultural, traditionalist society to an urban, industrial one. It is not, however, a Marxist view.

Keywords

Communism; Crime Novels; Dashiell Hammett; Great Depression; Marxism; Politics.

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This essay examines the vision of society presented in Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), the author's third and best-known novel. *The Maltese Falcon* was published during the opening of the Great Depression (although Hammett finished it before the Depression began). The economic devastation—with the rise of Hitler, the Spanish Civil War, and the ability of the Soviet Union to survive the collapse of the capitalist world—radicalized a generation of workers and intellectuals and saw the rebirth of a militant labor movement and the growth of mass support for Marxism.

Some critics assert that Hammett brought a Marxist perspective to *The Maltese Falcon*, reflecting his support for the Communist Party later in the decade. The current article, in contrast, argues that *The Maltese Falcon* presents a vision of society with no fundamental order or meaning, in which all rules are arbitrary, and in which every attempt to present a grand narrative fails. This nihilist conception of society in which traditional religious morality has failed and in which nothing has taken its place is in keeping with the rise of modernism and reflects the shift from a rural, agricultural, traditionalist society to an urban, industrial one. It is not, however, a Marxist view.

In the article "Dashiell Hammett's Social Vision" (1985), Robert Shulman argues that in *The Maltese Falcon*, Hammett "gives his social vision its fullest expression," and that "Hammett is concerned with stories and storytelling, with a market society world that systematically demands improvisation, acting, and the manipulation of appearances, people, and feelings." The novel, in this view, is "a judgement on the entire enterprise of single-mindedly pursuing wealth," and a critique of "early twentieth-century capitalism." Shulman continues:

> Because of the human isolation, betrayals, and obsessive pursuit of false goals, the novel renders a hell-on-earth, a kind of vital death-in-life that brings the outside American world to the test and finally brought Dashiell Hammett to an independent relation with the Communist Party (Shulman 400-402).

As I have argued about Hammett's earlier *Red Harvest*, there is a temptation to read Hammett's novels backwards, as advocating Marxism or at least pointing in the direction of Marxism.[1] For example, Norman Markowitz, a writer for the Communist Party's *Political Affairs*, describes Hammett as "a writer for the working class" and argues that he "wrote about the class struggle in America in works of popular fiction in the 1920s and 1930s and fought as a partisan of the working class in real life from the 1930s to his death in 1961." In contrast, this article posits that rather than Marxist, *The Maltese Falcon*'s social vision is ambiguous, reflecting the modernist dilemma of the meaninglessness of

industrial society without proposing an alternative political meaning.

The Maltese Falcon's Ambiguity

Most analyses of *The Maltese Falcon* emphasize that the novel plays with ambiguity, meaning, and truth. Frederick Burellbach observes that "a basic theme of the novel is ambiguity and illusion, or the questions 'What is truth?' and 'What is fiction?'" (3-4). Sinda Gregory describes the novel as "a declaration of the omnipotence of mystery and of the failure of human effort (on the part of both the reader and the detective) to ever dispel it" (89). Nothing is as it appears, nobody tells the truth, and it is impossible to cut through the deception to an underlying meaning. This ambiguity, while reflective of the politics of the interwar period, and of modernist literature more broadly, undercuts the argument that the novel was written from a Marxist perspective.

Sam Spade is central to *The Maltese Falcon*'s ambiguous and cynical vision. His very name points to this, as Burellbach explains: While Sam is short for the biblical Samuel (Hammett's own given name), which means "name of God," it could mean Samael, "who is a Satan indeed" whose "name means 'poison angel' and in rabbinic literature [...] is the angel of death and prince of demons" (5-8). Spade, as gamblers know, refers to the death card, and a spade is used to bury corpses. At the same time, the name invokes the need to "call a spade a spade," i.e., to tell the truth—something Spade does not often do.

Spade is both a hero and a devil. The detective, Hammett informs the reader in the novel's first paragraph, "looked rather pleasantly like a blond Satan" (1). Later, the novel describes how his "eyes were shiny in a wooden satan's face" (62). Unlike the serpent in the book of Genesis, who tempts Eve with the ability to know good from evil, Spade offers a different type of knowledge: good and evil do not exist, and God—and the divine meaning he represents—is an illusion.

The Falcon is a totem imbued with power by Caspar Gutman, Joel Cairo, and Brigid O'Shaughnessy, who dedicate their lives and their fortunes to finding it. Yet none has seen it or proven its existence. Shulman calls the statue "a Satanic embodiment of fabulous wealth" (400), but the bird can represent either heaven or hell. The figure provides a reason for existence—a reason that proves to be false. In a discussion with Gutman, Spade touches on the Falcon that could be referring to the role of God in modern life: "'Oh hell,' he said lightly, 'I know what it's supposed to look like. I know the value in life you people put on it. I don't know what it is'" (122). If we take the "oh hell" literally and not as an innocent interjection, Spade could be referring to Satan and divine punishment. Shortly after Spade's announcement, Gutman asks him, in reference to Cairo and O'Shaughnessy:

> "They must know," he said only partly aloud, then: "Do they? Do they know what the bird is, sir? What was your impression?" "I can't help you there," Spade confessed. "There's not much to go by. Cairo didn't say he did and he didn't say he didn't. She said she didn't, but I took it for granted that she was lying" (123).

The discussion between Gutman and Spade invokes the biblical encounter between God and Satan. Spade has already been compared to Satan in the text; Gutman, a large (and by his name, possibly Jewish) man, is, as the title of chapter seven indicates, the "G in the Air." However, where in the Bible God torments his follower Job to prove to Satan Job's loyalty and devotion, Gutman reveals himself as nothing more than a self-interested fat man.

At the end of the novel, when Spade indicates he would help Gutman obtain the Falcon in exchange for sacrificing Wilmer, Gutman agrees, telling Wilmer that although the young man is like a son to him, "but, by Gad! —if you lose a son, it's possible to get another—and there's only one Maltese Falcon" (228). Unlike Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac in the Old Testament, or God's sacrifice of Jesus in the New Testament, Gutman's sacrifice of Wilmer serves no divine purpose, only self-interest. Nonetheless, like these others, the sacrifice of Wilmer forms the foundation of an explanation of the world, that is, to help the police solve their case. But this narrative is a fabrication to allow Gutman, the other conspirators, and Spade to get away with the Falcon. Hammett suggests that religion comprises stories that explain the world but have no basis in reality. The Falcon is such a tale. It has no meaning except that which people invest in it, and when it is finally grasped, it turns out to be false.

The Police in The Maltese Falcon

The police as agents of state authority are central to *The Maltese Falcon* and Marxist theory, but Hammett's novel deals with the role of the police differently than Communists. In *The Maltese Falcon*, the police and the district attorney are the only characters unaware of the hunt for the Falcon, and, in this mystery novel, the only ones trying to solve a crime. The police represent an attempt to explain the universe rationally, but as with the other characters, their explanations are lies.

Police corruption is established when Lieutenant Dundy and Officer Tom Polhaus visit Spade's apartment at 4:30 a.m. to question him about the murders of Archer and Thursby. Dundy is wearing "a five-dollar-gold-piece [...] pinned to his necktie and [...] a small elaborate diamond-set secret-society-emblem on his lapel" (17). These accessories indicate Dundy's expensive tastes, and that his loyalties extend beyond the police department. Spade, who had

been drinking alone, refills his glass with Bacardi, offers the officers rum-filled wineglasses, and toasts to "Success to crime." Polhaus drinks his in one gulp, but Dundy "looked at his glass for a dozen seconds, took a very small sip of its contents, and put the glass on the table at his elbow" (18). Since police enforced Prohibition laws, joining Spade in drinking underlines their illegality. Polhaus's corruption is more enthusiastic than Dundy's, but the lieutenant's small sip indicates his willingness to break the law. Only after Dundy elaborates his theory that Spade killed Thursby does he finish his drink: even though he believes Spade to be a murderer, he is willing to drink with him.

During the discussion, Dundy tells Spade: "I've warned you your foot was going to slip one of these days" (19). This passage refers to the Old Testament's promise of divine justice: "To me belongeth the vengeance and recompense; their foot shall slip in due time: for the day of their calamity is a hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste" (Deuteronomy 32:35). This is the verse with which Jonathan Edwards began his sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (1741), to illustrate his argument, "There is nothing that keeps wicked Men at any one Moment, out of Hell, but the meer Pleasure of GOD" (5). Edwards asserts that only God's "sovereign Pleasure, his arbitrary Will, restrained by no Obligation, hinder'd by no manner of Difficulty" keeps man out of hell, and that God could revoke this at any time. *The Maltese Falcon* removes the concept of God from Edwards' vision, leaving only meaninglessness. It is predestination with no destination.

In chapter seven, the policemen arrive at Spade's apartment while Cairo and O'Shaughnessy are there. When Spade is reluctant to let them in, Dundy tells him: "It'd pay you to play along with us a little" (80). This underlines how the police create stories that lack essential, fixed truth. When Spade objects that the police are trying to blame him for killing Thursby and Archer, Dundy denies this. "But suppose I did," he adds. "There's a way of figuring it" (80). The three play verbal games—"charades" in Spade's telling—trying out possibilities, not believing any. Only when Cairo calls for help do the police insist on entering Spade's apartment.

When the police enter, Cairo accuses Spade and O'Shaughnessy of tricking and assaulting him. Brigid denies this, and Dundy responds: "What do you want us to think the truth is?" (85). After Spade's guests accuse each other, Spade intervenes and spins a tale of recently hiring Brigid, and trying to question Cairo. The police seek confirmation from Cairo, telling him to "try telling the facts." In response, Cairo states: "What assurance do I have that the facts will be believed?" (87-88). Spade changes track and explains to Dundy that the entire dispute was a joke on the police. When Dundy refuses to believe this, Spade replies:

> The point is that that's our story and we'll stick to it. The newspapers will print it whether they believe it or not, and it'll be just as funny one way as the other, or more so. [...] You haven't got anything on anybody here. Everything we told you was part of the joke (89-90).

The scene reinforces Spade's masterful manipulation. In the end, the police take Cairo in for questioning.

When he meets Spade after leaving jail the next morning, Cairo tells Spade: "You have always, I must say, a smooth explanation ready" (110). He claims he did not tell the police anything. He adds, "Though I certainly wished you had devised a more reasonable story. I felt decidedly ridiculous repeating it." Spade replies that the story's "goofiness is what makes it good" (110).

Later, Spade visits District Attorney Bryan, who asks him who killed Thursby. After Spade declines to speculate, Bryan replies,

> "Why shouldn't you, if you've nothing to conceal?"
> "Everybody," Spade responded mildly, "has something to conceal" (167).

Bryan assures Spade,

> "And please don't think I've any brief—much less confidence—in those theories the police seem to have formed" (167).

The dialogue underlines the falseness of all stories, which are guesses and theories that conceal.

The eighteenth chapter, "The Fall-Guy," returns to the theme of the state and the illusion of justice. Spade insists to Gutman that to avoid unwanted police attention once they obtain the Falcon, "The police have got to have a victim—somebody they can stick for those three murders" (204). When Gutman objects, Spade gives his theory of government:

> "At one time or another I've had to tell everybody from the Supreme Court down to go to hell, and I've got away with it. [...] I never forget that when the day of reckoning comes I want to be all set to march into headquarters pushing a victim in front of me, saying: 'Here, you chumps, is your criminal.' As long as I can do that I can put my thumb to my nose and wriggle my fingers at all the laws in the book. The first time I can't do it my name's Mud" (205).

When Gutman expresses disbelief, Spade continues:

> "Bryan is like most district attorneys. He's more interested in how his record will look on paper than in anything else. [...] I don't know that he ever deliberately framed anybody he believed innocent, but I can't imagine him letting himself believe them innocent if he could scrape up, or twist into shape, proof of their guilt. To be sure of convicting one man he'll let a half a dozen equally guilty accomplices go free" (210).

To Spade, the legal system—man's attempts to impose order and meaning on the world—is built upon lies. This is not, however, the Marxist concept of the capitalist state. According to Lenin's *The State and Revolution*, Marx believed that the state comprises "special bodies of armed men having prisons, etc., at their command" (394) that the ruling capitalist class uses to maintain power over the working class. To Marxists, the problem with the capitalist state is not that it lies, but that its role is to repress the working class to maintain the capitalist class in power.

Beams Falling and Capitalism Continuing

Spade spells out his vision of the world in the story of Flitcraft he tells O'Shaughnessy: "A man named Flitcraft had left his real-estate office, in Tacoma, to go to luncheon one day and had never returned" (68). In 1922, he left a successful business, a suburban home, a wife, and two children, "and the rest of appurtenances of successful American living" (69). In 1927, Flitcraft's wife hired Spade, who found Flitcraft, living under the name Charles Pierce in Spokane. When Spade confronted him, "Flitcraft had no feeling of guilt. He had left his first family well provided for, and what he had done seemed to him perfectly reasonable. The only thing that bothered him was a doubt that he had never told anybody his story before, and thus had not had to attempt to make its reasonableness explicit" (70). The tale is an example of constructing stories to rationalize and justify one's behavior.

Flitcraft explains to Spade that while he was walking to lunch, a beam from a construction site "fell eight or ten stories down and smacked the sidewalk alongside." This startled him, and "he felt like somebody had taken the lid off life and let him look at the works" (71). The experience demonstrated that life was not "a clean orderly sane responsible affair," but "could be wiped out between office and restaurant by the accident of a falling beam" (71). For two years he drifted throughout the Pacific Northwest.

> "I don't think he even knew he had settled back naturally into the same groove he had jumped out of in Tacoma [...]. He adjusted himself to beams falling, and then no more of them fell, and he adjusted himself to them not falling" (72).

The Flitcraft story exposes the absurdity of modern existence. For Steven Marcus, the passage highlights "the ethical irrationality of existence, the ethical unintelligibility of the world" (xvii). For Dean DeFino, "it is about the illusions of order, and how they reveal and conceal themselves" (76). Christopher Routledge describes the story as "a parable of modern life" that "takes the idea of the Modernist epiphany and exposes it as a fleeting moment with no lasting effect." Routledge adds, however, that the parable "lays down a vision of American life that reveals [Hammett's] radical politics and takes a pessimistic view of how much stomach people might have for principled and sustained resistance, even when issues affect their own lives." Bourgeois society with the "appurtenances of successful American living" has no meaning, but neither does rejecting this society. This parable demonstrates that cynicism and nihilism, not Marxism, permeate *The Maltese Falcon*.

Scholars have seen the Falcon as a criticism of capitalist society. Pointing to the story of the falcon as tribute from the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in 1530, Douglas Torgenson argues the bird "both is constitutive of the emperor's power and pays tribute to it in a manner that, in turn, serves to express the special status of the knights in relation to this power," particularly a "history of human domination" that the Crusades represent (210-211). Paul P. Abrahams and Andrea Marie Dominguez both see the story of the falcon as a parable about the role of the United States in international politics. Josiane Peltier asserts the novel "can be read as a commentary on value, worth, and monetary politics at a time when the United States was debating whether or not to maintain the Gold Standard," with the Falcon a metaphor for the lack of stable and fixed value under capitalism (21-22). These readings suggest deeper meanings of the Falcon, but do not succeed in turning the bird into a Communist symbol. In the end, finding *the* meaning of the Maltese Falcon is as frustrating as finding *the* meaning of *The Maltese Falcon* since it comprises layers of deception and meaning leaving one to doubt its existence in the first place.

A Communist Maltese Falcon?

The question of whether a piece of literature is Marxist or Communist (used here interchangeably) is complicated; does it refer to an author's attempts to use the writing to advance a Marxist perspective or a Communist program? Or does it mean the writing encompasses a vision of a world informed by Marxism? There is no consensus among Marxist thinkers or among writers (some of whom, especially those following in the tradition of Leon Trotsky, question the concept of Marxist literature altogether). Nonetheless, in the 1930s many authors sympathetic to the Communist Party attempted to create a body of Communist or proletarian literature. For example, Mary Heaton

Vorse published *Strike!*, a novel about the Gastonia, North Carolina, textile strike the same year that Hammett published *The Maltese Falcon.* Vorse, a longtime pro-labor writer who was sympathetic to the Communist Party, clearly favors the strikers in her novel. While one can parse the novel to examine if Vorse contradicts elements of the Communist Party's line (including by observing the fact that none of the characters are openly Communist), the general political perspective of her novel is clear. In 1935, Communist Party spokesman Joseph Freeman argued that "art, as an instrument in the class struggle, must be developed by the proletariat as one of its weapons" (9). Unlike Vorse or Freeman, Hammett does not use *The Maltese Falcon* to articulate a clear political—much less a clearly pro-working-class—vision of society.[2]

Hammett joined the Communist Party *after* he wrote *The Maltese Falcon.* It is likely true, as John Howarth argues, that the novel exists "as once a gripping mystery and a social comment" (32), but Hammett's commentary is ambiguous. The world of *The Maltese Falcon* is corrupt. Markowitz, writing on the website of the Communist Party's *Political Affairs*, argues that Hammett "took his experiences with the Pinkerton Detective Agency" as "the basis for a literature in which greed, exploitation, and corruption were motivations for both criminals, elites, and authorities." This describes Hammett's world, but not a Marxist analysis of twentieth-century capitalism. David Glover's reading is more nuanced. He describes the world of Hammett's fiction as one where "the line between crime and business, individual private gain and public affairs is hard to draw" and concludes that although there is no "overt display of political commitment" in Hammett's writing, they are "an index of Hammett's sharpening social vision" (29-30). What distinguishes Marxism is not recognizing corruption in the United States of the 1920s but offering a political program to change society. Marx and Engels saw class struggle as central to modern capitalist society and stressed the need for the working class to seize power through a socialist revolution. This is absent from *The Maltese Falcon.* Spade's society is steeped in the cynicism and corruption of modern capitalism, but he lacks the desire, vision, or means to transform society. In the novel, there are no classes, no class struggle, and no conception of transcending capitalism. Nor do the characters see themselves as belonging to any collectivity.

The Failure of Community in *The Maltese Falcon*

A central element of Marxist politics is the concept of collectivity. Marx argued that while society was divided into hostile classes, the future of humanity lay in the destruction of class oppression and the creation of a society in which the wealth of society belonged to society as a whole. Marx stressed in the

"Critique of the Gotha Programme" (1875) that:

> In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly – only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!

The Maltese Falcon presents a completely different vision. No community is possible in the novel since relationships are temporary and meaningless. The most benign example of a relationship was Flitcraft, who "loved his family [...] as much as he supposed was usual" but "his love for them was not of the sort that would make absence painful" (72). The novel's other relationships are emptier. Nils Clausson describes how "characters are constantly scrutinizing and appraising one another, calculating their value, usefulness, or disposability" (19). As David Glover describes Spade, "he expects to be used unless he can use others first" (28). Take Spade's partnership with Miles Archer: "'Miles,'" Spade tells O'Shaughnessy at the end of the novel, "'was a son of a bitch. I found that out the first week we were in business together and I meant to kick out as soon as the year was up'" (252). Spade's affair with his partner's wife may have influenced his view of Miles Archer, but his relationship with Iva Archer is no more sincere.

Spade's relationship with O'Shaughnessy is more heartfelt but means nothing. The relationship cannot be genuine because neither partner is genuine, and neither possesses a true self to share with the other. In justifying turning O'Shaughnessy to the police, Spade declares:

> "But suppose I do [love you]. What of it? Maybe next month I won't. I've been through it all before—when it lasted that long. Then what? Then I'll think I played the sap" (253).

Sexual relationships and gender identities are central to the novel's vision of the human condition. From Hammett's correspondence with his editor in July 1929, we know that Hammett resisted his editor's entreaties to excise what Hammett called "the to-bed and the homosexual parts" of the novel (qtd. in Layman 165). Much ink has been spilt over determining which, if any, characters are homosexual. Daniel Linder offers three possible

homosexual characters: Joel Cairo, Wilmer Cook, and Caspar Gutman. He argues that "Hammett wrote them in such a way that these characters could be identified as both homosexual and heterosexual depending on the key in which these segments were read." Linder concludes that "in no case are the sexual identities of these three characters made unambiguous and absolutely clear" (267).

Taken at face value, the novel *reinforces* traditional gender and sex stereotypes that are sexist and anti-homosexual; sexually active women are treated as deceitful harlots and gay men are subjected to stereotypical insults. One suspects most readers of the novel as serialized in *Black Mask* or published as a book would only see anti-gay and anti-woman tropes. Yet the novel's presentation of homosexuality could also be calling into question long-established gender norms. To use (post)modern terminology, *The Maltese Falcon* critiques essentialist concepts of sexuality and suggests gender and sexual identities are fluid rather than binary. The novel's treatment of sexuality can be read as an example of what sociologist Stephen Tomsen labels the "discursive deconstruction and a constant playfulness with sexual identities" offered by theorists to overcome an essentialist sexual dyad (390). In the case of Cairo and Cook, the characters' masculinity clashes with their sexual identities. As David Blackmore observes, "Cairo is the perfect stereotypical effeminate gay man, marked throughout the text by signifiers of conventional femininity" (70). For example, Cairo enters the novel after Spade's secretary, Effie Perine, presents the detective with Cairo's "engraved card," and declares, "This guy is queer" (46). When introducing Cairo, Hammett emphasizes his "slightly plump hips," his clothing, "his fawn spats," his "fragrance of *chypre*," his "short, mincing, bobbing steps," and his "high-pitched thin voice" (46). Cairo is weak, unsympathetic, effeminate, and ineffective.

Marc Seals observes that "Hammett's description of Cairo seems to be almost a parody of the physical markers that make up the cultural stereotypes of the Thirties toward homosexuality" (190). Seals concludes that "Hammett may be playing to his mainstream readers' homophobia, reassuring them that it is appropriate to ridicule and even despise such distortions of 'normal' masculinity" (190). *The Maltese Falcon* can be read as a criticism of the essentialism of such "cultural stereotypes" even as the novel reinforces those same anti-homosexual attitudes. That the novel can be read *both* as reinforcing and undermining traditional social norms of sexuality underlines its complexity but does not point to a clear political message.

An example of this ambiguity is Wilmer Cook. The character "is not nearly as identifiable [as gay] as Joel Cairo," according to Blackmore, "largely because Wilmer's most visible gender attributes mark him as conventionally masculine, which in popular terms makes him heterosexual" (77). Cairo is

effeminate and soft, but Cook's appearance has a "hard masculine neatness" (106). At the same time, Cook is described as "boy" nine times in two pages the first time he enters the novel. In the middle of this sequence, in the Hotel Belvedere, Spade asks Luke, the hotel detective, "What do you let these cheap gunmen hang out in your lobby for, with their tools bulging their clothes" (108). The comparison to prostitution is evident. The novel cuts down Cook's masculinity: "The boy looked at the two men, at their neckties, from one to the other [...]. The boy looked like a school-boy standing in front of them." This belittles Cook's masculinity and confirms Spade's judgement of Cook. Later Spade tells Gutman, in reference to Cook: "Keep that gunsel away from me while you're making up your mind. I'll kill him." (126).

The meaning of this passage, as endless commentators point out, hinges on the word "gunsel." If the word means gunman, as many readers assume, then Spade is simply telling Gutman to tell his paid thugs to lay off. But the primary meaning of "gunsel" is "catamite" (i.e., a boy kept for homosexual practices) from the Yiddish *gendzel* or gosling. Read this way, the passage is an eruption of anti-gay hostility. It is almost certain that *Hammett* knew the "true" meaning of the term, but decoding the passage requires understanding whether *Spade* is familiar with this meaning. Yet even if we allow that Spade understands the term, we still do not know how he means it to be understood since sexual insults are often not meant literally. Hammett could be making another point: inside every macho *gunman* is a kept *gunsel*, that is, machismo often is an envelope for homosexuality. Since a *gunman* is active, while a *gunsel* is passive, the passage suggests the difference between one and the other is interpretation.

There is no essential or fixed truth in sexual or gender narratives, and people no more have essential or stable sexual identities than they do other essential identities. According to Marc LaViolette, the novel presents truth "in a pragmatic way as malleable and ephemeral," and once proven, an "explanation of events is true until a better truth is thought of and proven by testing" (99). In this context, everlasting sexual or gender truth is no more possible than other everlasting truths.

If the relationship between Cairo and Cook is one of dominant and passive sexual partnership, there is another contradiction: the dominant effeminate man and the subservient tough guy. Taken together, the two characters emphasize the limitations of sexual stereotypes. Before becoming a writer, Hammett inhabited homosocial worlds as a Pinkerton detective and soldier in the First World War, where he likely met men with different mixes of masculinity and sexuality, including effeminate heterosexuals and hyper-masculine homosexuals. To read *both* Cairo and Cook as *homosexuals* means accepting that sexual orientation and gendered norms could clash,

because Cook's masculinity does not mean he is heterosexual. If we read both characters as *heterosexual*, we need to accept that Cairo's femininity does not make him homosexual. We could read Cairo as homosexual and Cook as heterosexual, but there is no textual evidence for this except a recourse to accepted gender norms. No matter how we "read" the characters' sexuality, that a character's sexuality depends on how he is "read" is a statement about the non-essential nature of sexual identity in the first place.[3]

Linder proffers another possible gay character, Caspar Gutman: "There is no direct textual evidence that would allow us to say that Gutman is homosexual, but there is evidence that Hammett wanted the reader to think of Gutman in some evidently sexual way" (269). Since Gutman "keeps" the gunsel Wilmer, he may be homosexual. Gutman's daughter, Rhea, appears in the novel which suggests, in Linder's reasoning, that Gutman is heterosexual. In any case, Linder asserts, "Hammett wanted us to perceive Gutman as a man of ambiguous sexuality" (270). In 2023, it is not difficult to imagine Gutman as a father *and* a homosexual. Again, there is a dissonance between elements of Gutman's sexual persona that would indicate that sexual identity is not clear-cut. It is possible that Gutman is a "father" in the literal sense (toward Rhea Gutman) and in the figurative sense (toward Wilmer Cook).

There is another possible homosexual character: Sam Spade. In addition to the moral ambiguity in the name "Sam," there is a sexual ambiguity: it is a shortening of both the male Samuel and the female Samatha. Spade exudes exaggerated masculinity. He has an affair with his partner's wife and sleeps with his client without creating a lasting or meaningful relationship with either woman. Then there is Spade's almost pathological hostility toward Wilmer Cook. While Spade assumes a detached disdain for the effeminate Joel Cairo, he threatens Cook with violence several times. Blackmore argues that "Wilmer so threatens Spade precisely because the young man is not easily recognizable as gay, because, unlike Cairo, he seems in fundamental ways to be similar to Spade." Blackmore continues, "Wilmer could be read simply as [Spade's] homosexual double, as a man who replicates Spade's identity in all respects except for his age and his sexual orientation" (79). In the novel, however, nobody is what he seems to be, especially Spade. Gregory observes of the detective: "His personality seems to be an endless series of roles and masks. Even when he is completely by himself, we cannot be sure we are seeing the 'real' Sam Spade" (104). The only time Spade allows himself to become emotional is when he is threatening Cook, but the reader cannot know if this is a glimpse into Spade's true emotions or another contrived persona. Is it possible Spade senses—even if on an unconscious level—that the line between him and Cook is as ambiguous and malleable as other divisions between truth and falsehood in the novel and his threatened violence demarcates the two

characters?

Here the term "gunsel" comes into play again. The term could be a shibboleth, a word used to distinguish members of a group from outsiders. In this reading, "gunsel" only has meaning in the sexual sense if Spade assumes Gutman understands its real meaning. Yet Spade would be indicating *he* understands its sexual meaning, which raises the question, how? As a private detective, Spade is familiar with the argot of diverse subcultures. Yet, unlike a uniformed policeman, Spade's value as a detective is that he can understand and operate in these milieus. In other words, Spade may not "be" homosexual, but he has enough familiarity with homosexual culture to call into question his own essential heterosexuality. This may explain his violent reaction to Cook: Spade does not want others to assume *he* too is a cheap gunman with his tool bulging in his clothes.

The Maltese Falcon does not allow the reader a peek inside the internal thoughts of the characters. To divine any character's sexuality requires evaluating the character based on his (or her) behavior. In other words, to gauge how each character measures up against a presumed sexual stereotype. Yet, this process in the end says more about the reader than the character. More fundamentally, since the characters seem to be willing to change their identity when suitable, how can we read the essential sexuality of characters who have no essence? The characters are not essentially heterosexual or homosexual because they are not essentially *anything*. Sexuality is a clear example of how modern society robs life of meaning.

No relationship in the novel is permanent or based on lasting sentiment. All are momentary and transactional. Gutman and Cairo are willing to use Cook as the fall man, albeit reluctantly, as the price to obtain the Falcon. Spade's hostility toward Cook, in this reading, stems not from the suspicion that Cook has sexual relations with men, but that he assumes the weaker position. Similarly, when Spade justifies handing O'Shaughnessy to the police, he announces, "I won't play the sap for you" (254). Sap, a word Spade uses repeatedly, highlights his ambiguous nature. The standard reading of this word in the novel connotes weakness, in the sense of a foolish, gullible person. Hammett (and Spade) no doubt knew the word could denote strength as a synonym for the old standby in hardboiled detective stories, the blackjack. Christopher Metress sees Spade's refusal to give in to his desire for O'Shaughnessy as "self-denial" that serves as "a way out of the individualism of the Gutman-Cairo-Brigid trio" (224). In this reading, Hammett "takes his hero from a self-indulgent individualism to a new individualism which seeks to wed collective and personal interests via self-denial" (226). This reading ignores that Spade's self-denial is self-interest: he turns O'Shaughnessy in to the police not out of a sense of justice, but to satisfy his own view of himself

and to extricate himself from legal danger—i.e., to free himself from secular attempts at morality.

Rather than weld his individual interests to the collective, Spade's actions cost him a possible romantic relationship with O'Shaughnessy and destroy the one genuine (if platonic) relationship he has enjoyed, with his secretary, Effie Perine. Keli Masten argues that Perine embodies the *femme fiable*, who represents trust, domesticity, and other human traits that hard-boiled detectives otherwise lack and "help show the detectives at their best, revealing their inner sentimentality" (38). When Perine reads in the paper that Spade betrayed O'Shaughnessy, she reproaches him. After Spade justifies himself by stating that O'Shaughnessy had killed Miles Archer, she "brokenly" replies: "I know—I know you're right. You're right. But don't touch me now—not now." In response, "Spade's face became pale as his collar" (256).

The book does not end yet, however. Perine returns to tell Spade that Iva Archer, his partner's widow, is calling. Spade shivers and replies, "Well, send her in" (256). When the book ends, Spade is not *physically* alone since Perine and Iva Archer are with him. But he is *spiritually* alone since one woman mistrusts him, and he mistrusts the other. It is possible Hammett's intention was to critique Spade's individualism as morally empty and a dead end. More broadly, one could argue that Hammett's social vision was a parody of human relationships under capitalism. After presenting such a nihilist vision, Hammett offers no alternative. This novel's inability to transcend modern alienation emphasizes its non-Marxist perspective.

Conclusion

The Maltese Falcon presents vision of the modern world bereft of essential meaning, in which men (and women) are incapable of creating effective communities. In this sense, Hammett's novel can be read as social commentary, but should not be read as offering an alternative, positive vision of society. Paul P. Abrahams asserts that Hammett's novel, along with its subsequent portrayal on film, "established the fictional detective as a fully-fledged social observer and critic" designed "to mock bourgeois pretensions of law, order, and progress." Spade, in this reading, "is neither immoral nor amoral," but embodies "syndicalist egalitarianism" and "the morality of anarchist/syndicalist freedom espoused by the International [sic] Workers of the World (I.W.W.) and associated with the wandering life of the unattached male" (97, 101). How a private detective—stool pigeon and labor spy—could represent the concept of freedom espoused by the radical Industrial Workers of the World, a victim of severe government and employer repression, poses a greater mystery than any *Black Mask* story. Beyond that, there is no textual evidence that Spade is a fully-fledged social critic, much less a working-class one.

Dominguez asserts, "hard-boiled narratives offered working-class stories for an emerging working-class readership" (163). Yet there are no workers in *The Maltese Falcon*'s San Francisco, and nothing *productive* happens in the novel; most protagonists are parasites (at least from a Marxist perspective). The San Francisco Bay Area had a significant labor movement: a few years after the book was published, the city's maritime workers shut down the city for 83 days in the 1934 general strike. Such a collective vision is absent from the novel.

Shulman writes, "It is not surprising that within a few years of *Red Harvest*, *The Maltese Falcon*, and *The Glass Key*, Hammett had become actively engaged in the politics of the left, as if to achieve in the outside world the transformation he shows is necessary but which he refused to imagine in his fiction" (419). Hammett's becoming a Communist is no more surprising than anything else in his writings. Steven Marcus may be right when he writes in reference to Hammett's early stories that "the point of view is pre- rather than proto-Marxist, and the social world as it is dramatized in many of these stories is Hobbesian rather than Marxist" (xxxiii). Nonetheless, there is no straight line from Hammett's novels to his later political commitments. Hammett's writings are "pre-Marxist" only because he wrote them before joining the Communist Party. If with hindsight we can discern a deepening interest in politics in *The Maltese Falcon*, we cannot extrapolate a political vision. Like everything else in the novel, there is not one political truth; ambiguity, skepticism, and cynicism dominate. It is legitimate to analyze the political implications of *The Maltese Falcon*, but critics should avoid shoehorning it into the category of Marxist literature because Hammett later became a Marxist. The roots of Hammett's politicization do not lie in his writings, but in the 1930s: the Great Depression, the rise of Hitler, the Spanish Civil War, and the birth of a militant labor and socialist movement. In a sense, Hammett's trajectory disproved Flitcraft's parable. The "beam" of the 1930s nearly fell on top of him, and he adjusted his life and became a Communist until his death—even as much of American society turned from radicalism in the Cold War. No reading of *The Maltese Falcon* would have predicted this development, since the novel was not influenced by Hammett's subsequent political outlook.

Notes

[1] This article uses the terms *Marxist*, *Communist*, and, in relation to literature, *proletarian*, interchangeably because the differences between them, while real, are beyond the article's scope.

[2] This paragraph draws heavily from Zumoff 2007, 122-23. For Vorse's relation to the Communist Party, see Zumoff 2021, 119. It should be noted that in arguing that *The Maltese Falcon* is not a Marxist book the current article does not imply that the book cannot be fruitfully examined from a Marxist perspective; a Marxist critic can examine the Epic of Gilgamesh or the Tale of Genji even though it is obvious that neither could have been influenced by Karl Marx.

[3] It is possible that Cairo is heterosexual, and Cook is homosexual. The lack of such a critical reading suggests more about the critics' reading than about the text.

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Biography

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More than Lost Cargo:

Fragmentation in Craig Santos Perez's *from UNINCORPORATED TERRITORY* series

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Abstract

Contemporary socially engaged poets have been for over a decade challenging the notion that either experimental form is detrimental to a poem's political message or that a transparent agenda forecloses its chances of being considered high art. The work of Chamorro poet Craig Santos Perez rebuts this dated conception of the ties between avantgarde art and social commitment. With his ongoing epic *from UNINCORPORATED TERRITORY*, Santos Perez recovers the land, culture, and language of his native Guam from the hands of the islands' historical colonizers, gathering the fragments he founds in the local oral history, court cases, songs, myths, and more. If Michael Dowdy is right when he claims that "if the political content of a poem is obscured or inaccessible, it will likely fail as a political figure of voice," there must be something in Santos Perez's poems that clarifies and makes that content accessible. Said thing is found in the numerous paratextual elements that feature in the series, most notably in the epigraphs. Furthermore, the fragments collected by Santos Perez can be regarded as the product of Guam's colonial history which the poet repurposes to create a new Chamorro identity.

Keywords

Chamorro Poetry; Craig Santos Perez; Experimental Poetry; Fragmentation; Socially Engaged Poetry.

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"On some maps, Guam doesn't exist" (*[hacha]* 7). With this opening statement, Craig Santos Perez's multi-book poetic project *from* UNINCORPORATED TERRITORY soon introduces the reader to the uncharted philosophical terrains the collection explores. While many scholars have addressed the matter of *where* Guam is, the other question the books in the series unconsciously but tirelessly ask revolves around *what* Guam[1] is. Thus, Santos Perez's oeuvre presents an aesthetic-ontological challenge where the work's main experimental feature, estrangement-producing fragmentation, requires at the same time the existence of some meaningful substance that glues the pieces together in order to effectively transmit its unequivocal political goal. Thus, while exploring the limits of fragmentation in socially engaged poetry, I will first suggest that all paratextual elements in the series are integral parts of the poems whose purpose is to help decipher their meaning. Furthermore, I will show via Homi K. Bhabha's notions of mimicry how Santos Perez's fragmented work helps to create a unique Chamorro identity that organically grows from Guam's multiple hybridizing encounters with its historical colonizers.

With the poems in the *from* UNINCORPORATED TERRITORY series, Santos Perez's goal is to "provide a strategic position for 'Guam' to emerge from imperial 'redúccion(s)' into further uprising of meanings" (*[hacha]* 11). These meanings arise from the fragments of Guam's colonial history, and this scattered nature is reflected in the form and the content of the series.[2] All five books and each poem in them are preceded by the obsessive repetition of the preposition "from," which for Santos Perez "indicates a particular time or place as a starting point; *from* refers to a specific location as the first of two limits; *from* imagines a source, an agent, or an instrument; *from* marks separation, removal, or exclusion; *from* differentiates borders" (*[hacha]* 11). Thus, the sense of incompleteness is balanced by the unending possibility of continuation.[3] The poems in the *from* series not only remain forever open, but some fragments return incessantly, sometimes intact, other times eroded by the sun, sea salt, or toxic spills.[4] Every poem in the series, then, can be seen as a porthole to an immense ocean that keeps moving around the reader, as the reader herself cannot remain still.

The main coordinates to navigate the series are already present in *[hacha]*. Its long preface is preceded by two epigraphs: first, an excerpt from Article IV of the U.S. Constitution stating Congress's control on the national territory, followed by an initially puzzling passage from the New Testament, namely, John, 6: 12-13, where Jesus commands his apostles to gather the leftovers of a communal feast. This passage not only illustrates how ingrained and lasting the influence of Catholicism in the islands is, but it also gives an early clue as to what the main feature of the series will be: a dialectics of unity and fragmentation that represents the status of both the unincorporated

territory of Guam and the poems themselves. As Stefanie Mueller explains, the annexation of Guam and Puerto Rico was played on the notion of "incorporation" as a key metaphor in the *Insular Cases*, a series of lawsuits that set the relationship between the US and the newly acquired territories after the Spanish-American war. In particular, the ruling of *Downes v. Bidwell* in 1901 "introduced a new twilight status to territories in which statehood was no longer a prospect and which effectively condemned the territories to dependence on Federal government" (98). That is, Guam became property of the US, but not part of it. Unlike the rulings that take for granted a notion of wholeness and unity which is based on racist and colonialist grounds, *from* UNINCORPORATED TERRITORY, claims Mueller, challenges the concepts of territory, nation, and the body politic.

The ideas of Epeli Hau'ofa, quoted as an epigraph in *[guma']*, are of great importance in this respect. In "Our Sea of Islands," the Tongan scholar and activist challenges the imperialist conception of the Pacific Islands as small, remote, and resourceless pieces of land that cannot afford to lose their subjugate position. Instead, he points to the unofficial existing relations, "making nonsense of all national and economic boundaries, borders" (154), between the inhabitants of Polynesia and Micronesia. The presence of a fragment of Aimé Césaire's *Cahier*, where the Martinican poet claims that "reason will not prevent him from 'casting' the 'deformed islands' of the Caribbean into coherence, into one common 'form'" (Edwards 43), further helps outline Santos Perez's postcolonial theoretical grounds. The humanist strand of thought that the former professed contrasts with the position held by some postcolonial thinkers who, focusing too much on "the critique of the sovereign subject" and the "deconstruction of Western metaphysics," risk brushing aside an "efficacy of collective political action" (Morton 172) which, for Perez, as for many contemporary scholar-poet-activists, is essential. Producing what Mueller calls an "archipelagic aesthetic" that "combines the forms of network and bounded whole" (109), Santos Perez replaces Charles Olson's idea of the poetic field understood as open *land* for the image of the *ocean* as total openness. In his poetics, Santos Perez describes "the blank page as an excerpt of the ocean," a book as "an island with a unique linguistic geography and ecology, as well as a unique poetic landscape and seascape" (330-31), and a collection of books as an archipelago. The quote by Muriel Rukeyser that appears as an epigraph for the last section of *[saina]*, "There is no *out there*. / All is open. / Open water. Open I." (qtd. in Santos Perez, *[gumà]* 113), confirms a link between the self, the ocean, and the page that will run throughout the whole series.

Edward Soja has commented on the field overlapping between geography and literary studies, claiming that a split exists that divides

one segment which "thrives on spatial metaphors like mapping, location, cartography, and landscape" from another that "tends to sublimate its overtly spatial emphasis, eschews metaphorical flair, and strives for solid materialist exposition of real politics and oppression" (x). Santos Perez's *from* series combines both aspects and has evinced both responses in scholars. Of particular interest is Huan He's exploration of the connection between Hau'ofa's and Santos Perez's ideas in the literary field. He begins his analysis from an anecdote told in the poem titled "ginen (sub)aerial roots [13° 28' 0" N / 144° 46" 59" E]," which appears in the third book of the collection, *[guma']*. There, Helen Perez, Chamorro author and mother of Craig Santos Perez, narrates how as a child she had been unable to locate Guam on a map during a school lesson. Distraught, she eventually asked her teacher to please "help her find Guam on the map" (17). In the anecdote, He sees what may be taken as a failure by the child as a capital moment in the "disintegration of dominant mapping logics" (186); in the *from* series, he finds both an answer to the girl's plea and the creation and development of new literary and solidary cartographies.

To do this, He highlights "how fragmentation is also a relational and networked aesthetic" (187). He draws on Yến Lê Espiritu's notion of "critical juxtaposing," that is, "a productive mode of alternate historiography" (197) that generates unusual relations through formal similarities, to create new literary migration routes. As an example, He proposes Santos Perez's "invocation" of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* as "a decolonial impulse of solidarity" (197). Cha's work is an essential text both in Asian American literature and in experimental poetry. Composed of fragments of letters, course books, translations, pictures, it deals with the invasion of Korea by the Japanese. According to Juliana Spahr, in *Dictee* Cha "decolonizes reading and challenges dominant patterns of thinking" (122). This "refusal of discursive intelligibility," claims He, "becomes the abstract, textual ground in which another text can engage its content and enter into visibility" (199). This act of "relational generosity" is what would permit the fragments in *Dictee* to travel through oceans of space and time into Santos Perez's poems. Indeed, the influence of Cha's work on Santos Perez's is as incalculable as it is overt. Santos Perez himself explained in "Reading Across" that he was inspired by the "creative sophistication of the field [of Asian American Literature]" when he could not find courses on the literature of the Pacific Islands. More specifically, Santos Perez declares he "saw [himself] in Cha's words" ("Reading"), in reference to the verses he would later cite as an epigraph in the first part of *[hacha]*:

> From another epic another history. From the missing narrative.
> From the multitude of narratives. Missing. From the chronicles.

> For another telling another recitation.
> Our destination is fixed on the perpetual motion of search.
> Fixed in its perpetual exile. (qtd. in Santos Perez, *[hacha]* 13)

Thus, the networks He traces between *Dictee* and *from* UNINCORPORATED TERRITORY are based on both "formal and historical resonances" (10). However, the relating fragments can fulfil a more didactic role when conceived as parts of the new poem proper.

While He supports the meaningful materiality of the poem, that is, the fragment's capacity to remap through visual signifiers, he acknowledges that "fragmentary poetics disorient the reader" (190). Following Kandice Chuh, he nonetheless celebrates this estrangement, claiming that "confining a text to what it is 'about' tames aesthetic experimentation by minority writers in order to map it onto an already recognizable history or geography" (192). Furthermore, He claims that "through interpretation, aesthetic complexity is enclosed, bounded, and confined by its regional context" (192). Although this is mostly true when there are markers that steer the words towards a one-way street of meaning, this happens to be the case with Santos Perez's poems. All the books in the collection share a common feature in contemporary socially engaged poetry, i.e., the presence of more or less explicit didactic elements such as glossaries or explanatory notes and introductions, prefaces, endnotes, and informative multimedia material. These elements that secure the message and assist the transmission of meaning in the *from* series are too numerous to be ignored.

Gérard Genette's notion of "paratext" might help to organize the different fragments that compose the collections. Paratextual elements are all those instances beyond the main text, the "more or less long sequence of verbal statements that are more or less endowed with significance" (Genette 1), that work as mediators between it and the readers. These elements exist both within (peritext) and outside (epitext) the text in the form of titles, subtitles, intertitles, dedications, forewords, prefaces, epigraphs, epilogues, notes, and so forth. According to Genette and Marie Maclean, the study of a paratextual element depends on certain features that "describe its spatial, temporal, substantial, pragmatic, and functional characteristics" (263). Put differently, its analysis must respond to the questions of where, when, how, from whom to whom, and what the element is good for.

In Santos Perez's *from* UNINCORPORATED TERRITORY, paratextual elements abound. *[lukao]* features acknowledgements and explanatory notes that can be accessed through a QR code. The last part of "*from* lisiensan ga'lago," found in *[hacha]*, lists three website addresses after the words "please visit" (86). Temporally, the paratexts in the series function in all

directions. For example, *[hacha]* includes an endnote where an anecdote told in "*from* descending plumeria" is updated, permitting the edition of the poem itself by the reader. The second and third books in the collection offer explanatory comment sections at the end of the book that perfectly exemplify the paratextual fluidity found in the series. While in *[saina]* the notes appear in a section titled "acknowledgments," in *[guma']* they are part of one called "*from* sourcings," which is, in fact, a poem featuring in *[saina]*.

While most paratexts "will be themselves of a textual, or at least a verbal, order" (Genette 265), the *from* series is filled with iconic, material, and factual paratextual elements. The cover of all five books published by Omnidawn play with the contrast of traditional Chamorro culture and color pictures of American military battleships. Only *[lukao]* offers a different image: on top, a black and white picture of fishermen catching fish with *talayas*, the fishing net Santos Perez's grandfather teaches the poet how to use in the poem by the same name; below, a toddler, Santos Perez's daughter in an aquarium in Hawai'i, looking at a coral reef.[5] The special relation with maps is not just figurative or metaphorical. In *[hacha]* Santos Perez includes up to eight different ones, from nautical charts of the Spanish galleon trade routes in the Pacific to maps showing the main military bases or one depicting the impact of the brown tree snake, an invasive species I will discuss later. The complete fusion of literature and cartography occurs in what Santos Perez calls poemaps. Found in *[lukao]*, these visual poems denounce the pernicious effects of military bases on marine wildlife, like the existence of multiple toxic waste dumpsites on the island (see Figure 1).

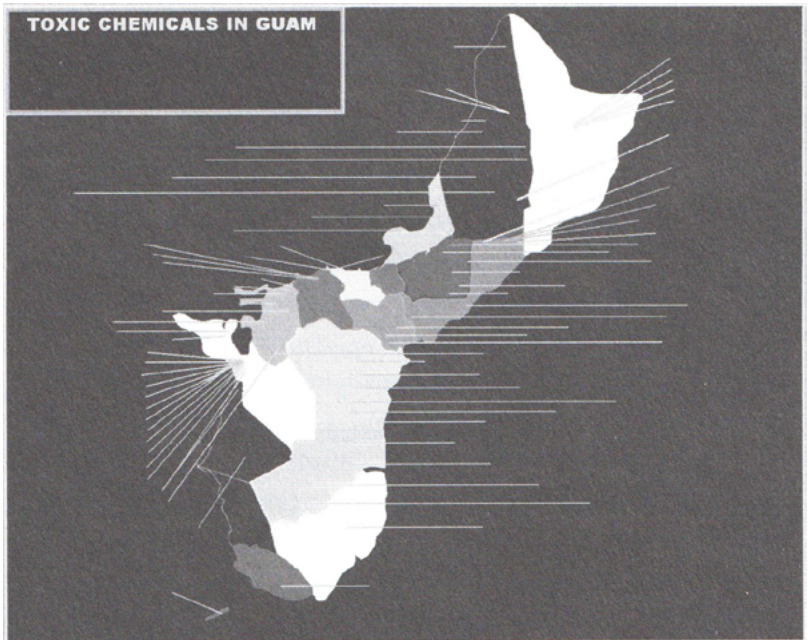


Figure 1: "Poeamap based on 'Toxic chemicals of Guam More than 100 Dumpsites with T. Chemicals, in a 30x8 Mile Islands (Source: US GRAL. Accounting Office; USDoD/FUDs & the US Agency Toxic Substances, Dis.registry), prepared by Luis Szyfres, MD, MPH—University of Guam" (41)

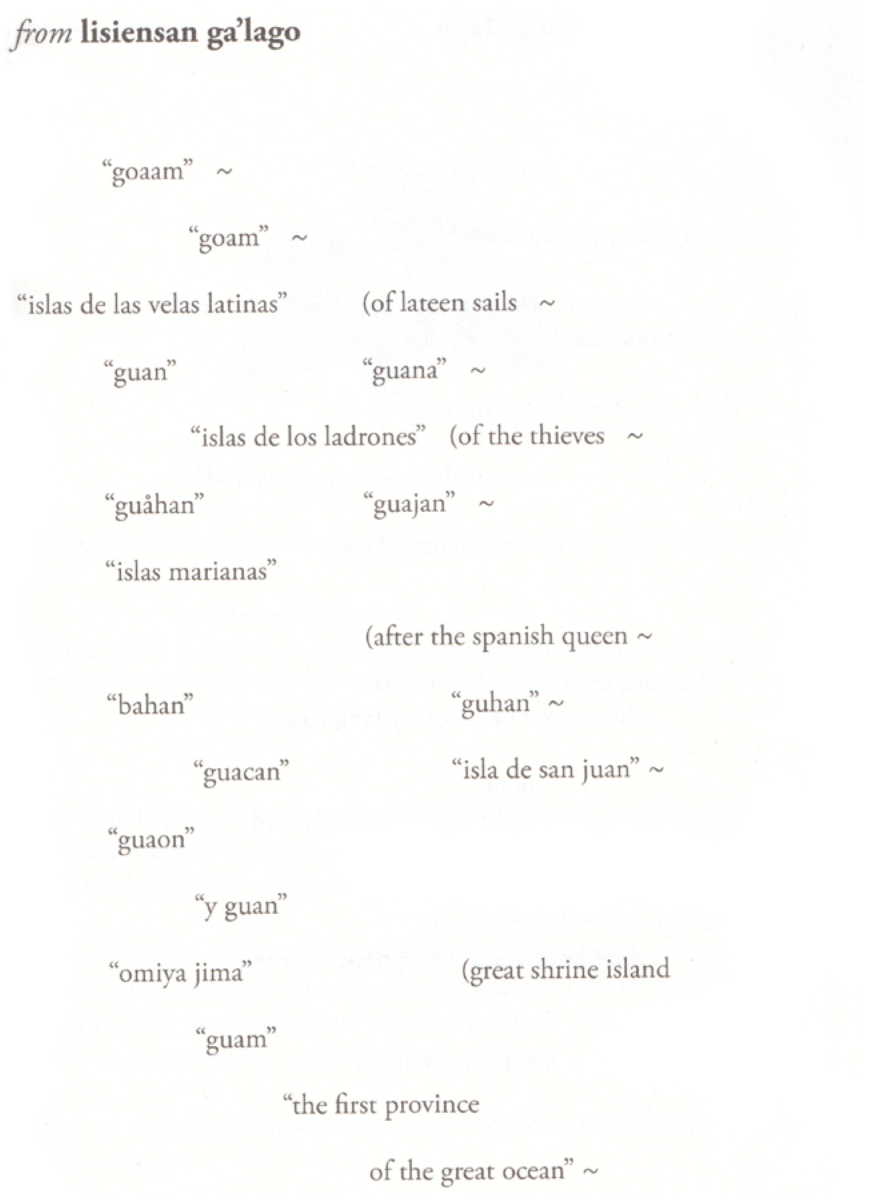
The more interesting elements, however, are those related to the pragmatic and functional status of the fragments. While the addresser of the paratextual message need not be the author, I am here interested mainly in the "authorial" paratext and in its public addressing. Borrowing from the philosophy of language, Genette speaks of the "illocutionary force" of the paratext's message: it can either transmit pure information or it may convey the author's intention, decision, advice, interpretation, and so on. As Genette and Maclean note, the pragmatic aspect of the paratext is intimately related to its function. However, while for him the paratextual element "is a fundamentally heteronomous, auxiliary, discourse devoted to the service of something else which constitutes its right of existence, namely the text" (269), I claim that authorial paratexts in the *from* series are essential parts of the poems in their own right.

While for Genette it is not clear whether these elements are always part of the text, they haunt its limits and sometimes expand them, all this in order to "make it present," that is, "to ensure the text's presence in the world" (1). For sure, this is reminiscent of Santos Perez's own words when he claims that his poetry "exists as continuous presence against continuous erasure" ("Poetics"). Hence, while the borrowed verses from Claude McKay, Aimé Césaire, or Cecilia Vicuña may well trace unexpected connections thanks to the "relational generosity" of the fragment, as He suggests, once they are quoted, they are not literary driftwood anymore but a constitutive part of the new poem. As a matter of fact, all epigraphs include the particle "*from*," thus actually binding them to the series on both a textual and an ontological level. Hence, against Santos Perez's own will and following Spahr's contention that we "need to question the poststructuralist assumption that works are constructed by readers, for this may be just another form of imperialism" (127), I claim that the fragments in Santos Perez's work act as special signifying elements that can be in turn scrutinized to help the poems ultimately get their political goal across.[6] These mosaics of fragmented verses together with the integrated paratextual elements that constitute the *from* UNINCORPORATED TERRITORY project transcend aesthetic ambitions. As Paul Lai points out, the "work-in-progress quality of Santos Perez's poetry mirrors the status of Guam as a place still in the midst of transformations and contestations, without a final act towards which a teleological narrative unfolds" (8). Those "transformations and contestations" are part of the decolonizing process of nations or, in this case, territories.

Commenting on the deconstruction of imperialist cartography, Nicholas Dunlop notes "a tendency in postcolonial writing to resist the enclosed, static and hierarchized perspective of the colonial agency and instead look towards the transformational possibilities of hybridity" (28). The notion is still

tied to ideas of difference and dominance, where the colonized are expected to learn the ways of the colonizer and behave like them, forever knowing that this is only a façade, a charade.[7] However, as Ania Loomba acknowledges, this need not necessarily be the case. In fact, oftentimes, anticolonial movements appropriated "ideas and vocabularies to challenge colonial rule and hybridised what they borrowed [...] even using it to assert cultural alterity or insist on an unbridgeable difference between coloniser and colonised" (172). Indeed, confronting centuries of oppression, Santos Perez devises an ironic strategy best captured by Bhabha's notion of mimicry: the result of the colonizer's "desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 122). This "not quite" is what Bhabha identifies with the excess that the colonized can repurpose subversively when it turns mimesis into mockery. In a way, by repeating historical wrongs the poet allows for the possibility of their transformation. Thus, in his poems, he unapologetically contaminates the Chamorro language, history and culture with the spoils of Guam's colonizers through history to move towards the territory's next form.

The most immediate and common effect of these subsequent colonizations in the poems can be found in language. *from* UNINCORPORATED TERRITORY is written mostly in English—the language Santos Perez claims "controls" him (*[hacha]* 11)—but is filled with Chamorro words that "remain insular, struggling to emerge" (12). Furthermore, Spanish and Japanese feature as well so as to make felt their role in the colonization of Guam. This soon becomes obvious in the first poem in the series proper, "*from* **lisiensan ga'lago**[8]" (Figure 2), where a list of the many names Guahan has received throughout its colonial history form the outline of the islands that conform the territory in calligram fashion, from Miguel de Legazpi's first transcription of the territory as "Goaam" to the official name given by the American government in 1908, "Guam."[9]



from **lisiensan ga'lago**

"goaam" ~

"goam" ~

"islas de las velas latinas" (of lateen sails ~

"guan" "guana" ~

"islas de los ladrones" (of the thieves ~

"guâhan" "guajan" ~

"islas marianas"

(after the spanish queen ~

"bahan" "guhan" ~

"guacan" "isla de san juan" ~

"guaon"

"y guan"

"omiya jima" (great shrine island

"guam"

"the first province

of the great ocean" ~

Figure 2. "***from*** lisiensan ga 'lago" (***[hacha]*** 15)

Santos Perez is well aware of the power of naming: in "*from* preterrain," it is said that "names are preparatory / name everything" (*[saina]* 18). The poem unfolds as a series of questions and answers, wonderings and doubts about language and identity played out in a dialogue reminiscent of the "tsamorita"—an "extemporaneous poetic song in dialogue form" (Santos Perez, "poetic territories" 262)—which can be found in the italicized verses that are preceded or followed by the verb "to say." What begins as the hopeful search for an origin in the "saina," the ancestors—where "I want to say" is followed by "*belief is almost flesh*" (*[saina]* 36)—soon becomes hesitancy, as the poetic voice later asks "I don't know if I can say *our language / will survive here*" (36). Despite the return of the will—"I want to say *we'll learn how to swim here*" (46)—the realization of the inevitable consequences of hybridization is

acknowledged when the poetic voice ventures that "maybe [we] / will find something else entirely" (ibid), harking back to Bhabha's contention that the "transformational value of the third space lies in the rearticulation, or translation, of elements that are neither the One [...] nor the Other [...] but *something else* besides" (41).

At various moments, Santos Perez reminds us that, as of 2010, the official name of the territory has been changed to Guahan, meaning "we have." What may be considered a victory, Santos Perez scornfully questions in "*from* ***the legends of juan malo*** *(a malologue)*," where he deadpan considers what Guahan actually has:

> deep water for the "U.S. [...] to home port 60% of the Pacific fleet [...] a last place ranking in annual per capita medical spending on Chamorro veterans [...] resources for the taking [...] tourism 2020 vision when setting forth a plan for the future [...] to change our name after Mariah Carey appeared on American talk shows with a dog she got in Mexico and named "Guam" ... (27)

In the last line, Santos Perez starkly states what Guam's ultimately possesses: "serious identity issues because our original meaning has been translated as 'lost'" (28).[10] In this quest for a self, however, Guam seems to be better served by a series of sarcastic answers to the implicit question of what it is before the inevitable fact of its numerous invasions.

In "***from/ginen*** all with ocean views," found in *[saina]*, Santos Perez offers a crude and honest report of Guam's introspection. This poem is divided into ten parts, and all follow the same structure: on top of the page, a hybrid of lune—the "american haiku" (*[saina]* 131)—and *carmina figurata*[11] form the shape of an island. The fragment-poem is composed of excerpted sentences extracted from leisurely travel brochures. After a volta[12] of sorts, Santos Perez constructs a second collage, this one in prose, from different articles selected from Guam's main online news hub. The objective is clear, and the result is as simple as it is effective: the juxtaposition of the first part of the poems that describes with hackneyed language the paradisiacal wonders of the island with the "re-mix of language" (131) generates a "discursive dissonance that exposes the pastoral rhetoric of travel magazines as an ideological screen masking Guam's exploitation by the US military and (primarily) East Asian tourists" (Hsu 298). The prose collage is always preceded by "**Guahan is**," thus presenting Guam as numerous illegal dumpsites, the destination of sketchy touristic schemes that bring Korean pregnant women to give birth on the island to receive US citizenship, polluted waters, soils and skies, US air military playground, endangered flora and fauna, among other things. The last line in

"*ginen* all with ocean views," part ten, reads "**guåhan is**" followed by the open space of the blank page.

This scarred reflection that the mirror offers finds in turn the defiant face of mockery. In the earlier mentioned "*from* the legends of juan malo (a malologue)," Santos Perez adopts the persona of the legendary mischievous Chamorro who gives the poem its title.[13] Trickster-like, Juan Malo typically outwitted the Spanish colonizers and, following his lead, Santos Perez cheekily has the rogue aborigine's birthday coincide with the controversial "Liberation Day," which commemorates the expulsion of the Japanese invaders in 1944, only to be followed by the second America invasion. The Juan Malo poems or "malologues" are weaved with the same type of thread as "*from* all with ocean views" from *[saina]* in that its first part picks up from where the previous one left off. To fill up the blank space left yearning, the poem offers a litany of both concerning and ludicrous predicates: Guam is

> "Where America's Day Begins" … Guam is a US citizen ever since the 1950 Organic Act … Guam is an acronym for "Give Us American Military" … Guam is mini Hawai'i. Guam is strategically invisible … Guam is frequent flyer miles. Guam is endangered … Guam is no longer "Guam." (13)

The final lines of the last part of the poem in *[guma']* offer a perfect example of Bhabha's notion of mimicry. After a diatribe about sausages, the poetic voice sentences: "I am not ashamed because somewhere on the Western coast of the United States, a shirtless Chamorro suffering from severe case of diaspora is kicking back with his Budweiser and a Vienna sausage saying, 'Ah, this tastes just like home!'" (*[gumà]* 67). Once Malo has seen through the cracks of the colonizer's culture, subversion is in order.

Although the influence of the Spanish colonization of Guam[14] is still noticeable in the language, the architecture, clothes, habits, and customs of Chamorros, perhaps the most salient aspect is the religious fervor they share with other Pacific colonies like the Philippines. As Santos Perez puts it, "the Spanish brought their god and bible, suppressed the story / of fu'na and puntan, and forbade the procession / to laso fu'a in humatak bay" (*[hacha]* 34). While religion is present throughout the collection—the repetition of sailing chants in *[saina]* or the pervasive *hanom* (water) read like mantras—, the poet's grandmother is the best incarnation of the ambiguous consequences of the Spanish invasion. In "*from* aerial roots," she does not recognize Chamorro words—namely, "hacha." The poem Santos Perez dedicates to her in *[saina]* and *[lukao]*, "*from* organic acts," mixes personal anecdotes with the history of Guam, official documents, and local mythology. In the third book, the poet retells the foundational tale his grandmother had shared with him

many times where a giant fish that stalked the islands was captured by the Virgin Mary with just a hair from her head. In Santos Perez's newer version, it is the Chamorro people who save themselves. This retelling of stories is not just coincidental. The last two parts of "*from* tidelands" that feature in *[saina]* ask the questions of who tells and who listens to them. Santos Perez's suggestion that "by listening to the decolonial voices of Indigenous poets, we can remember that the ultimate destiny of any territorialized space can be rewritten and reimagined" ("Guam," 118) is only valid as long as Bhabha's third space is understood correctly, that is, as constituting "the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity" (Bhabha 55), which permits those rewritings.

The poem that better exemplifies this malleability is "*from* **achiote**," included in *[hacha]*. The piece, which combines the poet's memories of collecting and manipulating the plant that gives title to the poem with his grandmother, stands as the only one where culture clash appears in its more felicitous aspect. However, it is also contrasted with what may be seen as the exchange that transformed the territory forever: the arrival of Father Luís de San Vitores, a Spanish priest greatly responsible for the colonization of Guam, with a group of missionaries on the island in 1551. "*from* **achiote**" is, indeed, consistently mentioned by scholars as an example of transpacific solidarity. What is usually left unsaid, though, is that the plant, which is typically described as having multiple benefits, was brought to the islands at some point by Spanish colonizers and is, in fact, an invasive species.[15] Thus, the insistence and zeal with which Santos Perez's grandmother prays the rosary throughout the series impede, if not the condemnation of the church's atrocities, the denial of the respite that religion offers her. In the poem, the verse "*bula hao* grasia" (full of grace) is constantly repeated. The recipient of the praise is not Virgin Mary but the poet's grandmother, of course. This ambivalence, this doubt, so pertinent when discussing the religious sentiment, can be explained again through one of *[hacha]*'s epigraphs, an excerpt from Federico García Lorca's 1930 essay "Juego y teoría del duende."

In the fragment chosen by Santos Perez, Lorca presents the idea of the bullfighter and the bull as two worlds coming together, which the Chamorro poet understands as a form of "violent transculturation" ("has duende"), suggesting a connection of Lorca's "duende" with Oswald de Andrade's *Anthropophagy Manifesto*. A milestone of Brazilian modernist literature, Andrade's text argues that the image of the cannibal fits the national character as eaters of other cultures. Fragmentary and experimental itself, Santos Perez includes a quote from it in *[hacha]*, too. "Routes. Routes. Routes. Routes. Routes. Routes. Routes. Routes," is a translation of Portuguese's "rotear,"

which means not only route, but also a traveler's log. As Leslie Bary suggests, this might point to "a rediscovery of America" (46) which matches Santos Perez's own goal of "re-territorializing Guam by way of the page" (*[hacha]* 12). "*from* achiote," then, plays with the changing meaning of words, objects, and events. From the conception of Padre Vitores as a saint to his revision as the main instigator of the colonization of Guam; from Vitores murderer's name, Mata'pang, originally meaning "brave" to becoming "mischievous" or "uncivil" after the arrival of the Spanish invaders. The fact that Santos Perez cites Lorca, a Spaniard, is significant in itself. In the end, the upshot of there being no essentialities is that the tables, or better the tides, can be turned.

The four-part poem from *[hacha]* titled "*from* ta(la)ya" is a perfect example of this dynamic. The piece is made up from various episodes from the biography of the author's grandfather, interweaved with Santos Perez's personal memories of learning how to prepare and cast fishing nets with him, facts about the colonial history of Guam—from Magellan's cry "'land!'" to the Japanese air raids destroying small villages—and the gradual disappearance of the *sakman*, the traditional Chamorro vessel. Above all, this poem presents one of the difficult decisions the defeated must face when they are commanded the Benjaminian task to retell history: either to reject or to absorb the trace of the oppressor. In the poem, Santos Perez's grandfather recalls that during his schoolboy years, monitors would address students in Chamorro only to punish them if they failed to answer in English. After the Japanese occupation, he spent two years in labor camps, forced to build "machine gun encampments" for the invader. An army man himself, he ended up working for the National Park Service War Memorial. The final lines of the poem, a transcription of Santos Perez's grandfather's speech, poetically express this contradictory situation: "he said 'my job was to preserve things / that I wasn't willing to build'" (85).

Significantly, "*ginen* ta(la)ya"—the continuation of the poem in *[gumà]*—is preceded by a long fragment by Ezra Pound where the poet, at his most provocateur, suggests surrendering the territories of Guam to the Japanese in exchange for "one set of color and sound films of the 300 best Noh dramas" (qtd. in *[gumà]* 21). Needless to say, Santos Perez cites this in reprobation. After all, as Michael Lujan Bevacqua has mentioned, the fragment is indeed "bewildering and insulting" (85). Yet if we are to judge by the rest of the derogatory or unpleasant facts about Guam that the poet sarcastically absorbs, there is in the reproduction of them and of Pound's comment the empowerment of someone who does not wish away the dirty parts of the self. Francisco Delgado is of a similar opinion when he claims that the inhabitants of Santos Perez's Guam do not grieve but take in "elements of colonial rule into their own sense of individual and collective agencies" (9). Examples of

this acceptance of and complicity with the (neo)colonial agents are numerous in Santos Perez's poetry. In the third part of the Juan Malo poems found in *[lukao]*, the poet describes how Liberation Day is one of the most popular attractions for tourists who, ironically, are mostly Japanese. In the fourth part of "*from* sourcings," found in *[saina]*, there is a chronology that covers Pan-am's construction of a hotel in 1936 to a government report announcing the arrival of over 1.1 million visitors in 2008, something Santos Perez somewhere else calls the "pimping" of Guam. Grinning Malo's grin, the poet's own honest proposal is to accept Japanese visitors' money as compensation.

The most important influence in the territory today, the USA's interest in Guam was unremarkable until after WWII. "*from* ta(la)ya" narrates the minimum effort put in safeguarding a territory of which Rear Admiral Richard Kelly said was not "really defendable no matter how many troops and fortifications you put there" (qtd. in *[hacha]*, 75). On December 8th, 1941, when the Japanese army reached the islands, Guam's defense counted fewer than 600 army personnel and insufficient weapons. After stating that in 1944 "the US military *invaded* Guahan" (*[lukao]* 34; my emphasis), Santos Perez lists all the leisurely activities like parades and carnival games that Chamorros engage in "to express [our] loyalty and gratitude to the US" (34). "They say," Juan Malo reappears to conclude in "*ginen* ta(la)ya" "that [we] enlist in the military at such high rates to pay the debt of liberation" (34). Incidentally, *tålåya* is the Chamorro word for "net"; but *taya* alone means "nothing." Lai has suggested that *ta* can also be seen as the adjective "our," and *la* as a particle of *lå'lå'*, which means "vivacious" or "full of life."[16] The result of this is ta(la)ya, which can be read as 'our nets that catch nothing lively.' The cruel obverse is that Guam, in fact, represents the (unincorporated) territory of the US where the military has most profitably cast its recruitment nets since the Korea war and until today.

A direct answer to Robert Tenorio Torres, who wrote that there are no "known migration legends in Chamorro lore" (qtd. in *[gumà]* 17), throughout the four-part poem titled "*ginen* (sub)aerial roots," Santos Perez mixes the description of the '*latte*'–the traditional Chamorro house—with personal anecdotes and information about military-related migration patterns in Guam. The nefarious consequences of the presence of the army on the islands are further explored in "*from* the micronesian kingfisher *[i sihek]*" and "*ginen* island of no bird song," whose first part is preceded by an epigraph referencing Rachel Carson's classic *Silent Spring*. There, the poet builds an analogy between the *sihek*, one of the few autochthonous birds that managed to survive the invasion of the brown tree snake,[17] although paradoxically owing to the shelter offered by different zoos in continental USA, and the Chamorro people. Santos Perez cleverly intersperses the pieces dedicated to

the army's recruiting schemes with fragments from the *sihek* poems related to the making of cages, inciting "the reader to consider how a cage might take the form of labor, [or] citizenship" (Jansen 14), thus underscoring how the Chamorro find themselves in a similar situation to that of the *sihek*, having to choose between staying and facing extinction or leaving under the occupants' rules.

For those staying, Collier Nogues fleshes out the consequences of the invasive infrastructure of the military buildup of 2008,[18] "ranging from temporary construction housing and support facilities to more permanent expansion of ports, airstrips, service-member and family housing, schools and exchange and commissary buildings" (22). Among the many disruptions, the scholar lists the building of a firing range and a wharf for "nuclear-powered aircraft carriers" in Apra Harbor. Indeed, the ecological consequences of the presence of the army on the islands are manifold. In the poem entitled "*from* understory," Santos Perez mixes parenting scenes with the disastrous consequences of human spoilage of the Pacific Ocean. His daughter's first contact with water, a capital moment in an islander's life, coincides with the 2014 RIMPAC (Rim of the Pacific Exercise). Warning about the "relationship between global climate change and the US military" (21), Elizabeth Deloughrey explains how war games destroy the coral reefs, disorient sea animals, and pollute the waters. Mentioning how in the mid-50s "rain clouds baptize guam / in strontium-90 fallout" (*[lukao]* 61), referencing the atomic testing in the Pacific that "has caused intergenerational harm [...] where the lasting effects of radiation beyond cancer extend to further generations" (Park 6), the poet has anguishing thoughts about "what downwind toxins" and "what wars of light" his child will breathe and see. In the face of ruin, the poet wishes his "daughter was derived / from oil so that she will survive / our wasteful hands" (*[lukao]* 13). However, his anxious worries might find some solace.

In 2008, Santos Perez took part in a group of Chamorros who traveled to New York to appeal to the decolonization committee. The first part in the second section of the poem, titled "***from*** tidelands," found in *[saina]*, revolves around this experience and the idea of never being heard. Each section's title has a footnote where Santos Perez graphically represents Spivak's conclusion that the subaltern cannot speak: his speech before the UN appears transcribed and crossed out. And still, while the buildup was not stopped, one of the environmental intrusions, the setup of the firing range in Ritidian, has been halted thanks to Chamorro activism. That very same year, a reconstructed *sakman* sailed the seas. In 2012, the Traditions Affirming Seafaring Ancestry (TASA) built a canoe house to facilitate newer *sakman* routes. In 2016, Barack Obama made the "Guam World War II Loyalty Recognition Act" a law, and compensations for victims began in 2019. All these achievements confirm

Jansen's contention that, in Guam, "the connections between environmental and colonial damage are evolving from a narrative of loss toward one of resilience and resurrection" (14), pointing to a glimpse of hope for both Guam and the Chamorro people.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, the first book in the from series opens with a Biblical passage, namely: "When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, 'Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.'" The excess of the successive empires that colonized the islands can be identified now as the breadcrumbs in the parable. In this paper, I have shown how the use of estranging formal resources like fragmentation, erasure, collage, pastiche, plurilingualism, and so on, is compensated with the inclusion of paratextual elements such as epigraphs, endnotes, glossaries, cover art, among others, which become part of the poems proper and secure the transmission of the socially engaged message. In addition, I have suggested that through fragmentation, Santos Perez reflects the current ontological situation of the Chamorro and their land, and by appropriating the pieces left behind by different colonizers, he builds a new and empowered Chamorro identity. In other words, while paratextual elements allow the reader to decipher the poet's social commitment, his gathering of the flotsam and jetsam of personal anecdotes, national histories, and Pacific Islander folklore has served to put Guam literally "on the map," and continues to do so. In the final two pieces of "from preterrain," Santos Perez invites the Chamorro people to "cling to every subtraction" (116), that is, the language, the lore, the sea, as the materials to build a new identity and new relationships with other insular communities. They are, indeed, their "only [...] possessions" (126). After all, these spoils of the empires may be, as the poem goes, "more than lost cargo" (126).

Notes

[1]Although since 2010 the official name of the territory is Guahan, Santos Perez consistently uses the denomination Guam. Consequently, so will I throughout the chapter.

[2] The five books that make up the collection so far are an attempt to rewrite that history, but also the lore, politics, and even the flora and fauna of the islands. Each of them bears a word in Chamorro, Guam's hybrid language, as a subtitle: *hacha* (2008), or "one;" *saina* (2010), Chamorro for "ancestor;" *guma'* (2014), meaning "house;" *lukao* (2017), "procession;" and *åmot*, (2023), or "medicine."

Notes

[3] Regarding form, that lack of punctuation throughout the series also helps to conceive it holistically. Furthermore, Santos Perez programmatically eschews both grammatical and "typographic conventions that diacritically divide up textual and semantic space, refusing such textual practices as indexical of a grammar of power" (Bloomfield 10).

[4] Some poems in *[hacha]*, namely "*from* tidelands" and "*from* aerial roots," reappear in *[saina]* and in *[guma']*; "*from* ta(la)ya," a poem about the poet's grandfather's experience as a POW during the Japanese occupation, originally found in *[hacha]*, comes back in *[guma']*, retold and mixed with shrapnel from other pieces.

[5] The scene is taken from a reenactment of a traditional *lukao*, or procession. That it has been doctored to look older than it is further proves my point of the meaningfulness of the paratext.

[6] Otto Heim seems to be of similar opinion when he says that Perez proceeds by "[s]ignposting ways to link and engage the diverse voices" and "offers us instructions on how to navigate his poems and actively participate" (193).

[7] From a purely political aspect, Mary Knighton rightly observes that in the case of Guam this is even stated in the 1901 Organic Act, which implies "in effect, that Chamorros could never become Americans and Guam as a colonial territory could never attain statehood" (340).

[8] According to Robert F. Rogers, the title of the poem is Chamorro for "dog tag" and it references the pass imposed on the native population of Guam during the Japanese occupation of the islands during WWII.

[9] This poem features for the first time the use of tildes, this wavy typographical mark (as in *ñ*), which Perez employs to transmit visually the tides that, according to him, guide his poetry. Furthermore, imitating the way tildes effect changes in pronunciation, whenever they appear in a poem, they signal a change in tone, register, or content.

[10] The recurrent theme of loss—"*voice doesn't measure what we've lost*" (28), "*whatever we lose it's always ourselves we find*" (57), "*we belong to what we lose*" (126)—points to Young's suggestion that "the third space is above all a site of production, the production of anxiety, an untimely place of loss, of fading, of appearance and disappearance" (82).

[11] Both the traditional haiku and the most popular version of the lune—Robert Kelly's—are divided into three lines. The difference is found in the number of syllables per line: 5/7/5 and 3/5/3, respectively. A *carmina figurata* is similar to a calligraph.

[12] Jansen suggests similarly, comparing the segment "Guahan is" with the "kireji," which, placed traditionally "in the middle of the haiku, [...] signals a shift from one thought to another, thereby inviting the reader to connect two otherwise potentially disparate thoughts" (16).

[13] This character is present throughout colonized countries. The mestizo version of the Spanish *pícaro*, it takes many names and personalities, always keeping some of that subversive character of the model.

[14] One of the names the Spaniards gave Guam was "Isla de los ladrones," or Thieves Island, after the ships of the first invaders to reach shore were looted.

[15] Lai is an exception here.

Notes

[16] Lai actually claims that "la" is a particle of "la'la," stating that the latter means "water" (9). However, the Chamorro word for "water" is "hånom." Lai's confusion might be due to a misinterpretation of Santos Perez's use of "la'la" in *[hacha]*, where he writes " [...] on the agility / to draw water / [la'la] skin friction and wave drag" (31). There, it is more likely that Santos Perez was actually repeating the particle "la" which means "a little bit more," or even the word "la'la'," that is, "dead skin."

[17] The brown tree snake is a foreign species that arrived as stowaways in boxes during WWII and colonized the island in less than a decade.

[18] A bilateral agreement between the USA and Japan to relocate more than 8,000 soldiers from Okinawa to Guam.

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Biography

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The Price of Virtual Utopia:

Ready Player One as American Dream and Dystopian Nightmare[1]

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Abstract

Ernest Cline's novel *Ready Player One* (2011) is among the most popular science fiction texts of the twenty-first century. Renowned filmmaker Steven Spielberg directed its movie adaptation in 2018 and following the success of the book and film, Cline published the sequel *Ready Player Two* in 2020. What renders the novel a prime example of contemporary science fiction is its detailed portrayal of an advanced virtual reality and its possible societal implications. Another key aspect is its bipolar structure, consisting of a dystopian reality defined by ecological and social crisis and the virtual utopia OASIS.

This paper will demonstrate that *Ready Player One* represents virtual reality in a highly intermedial manner via the thematization and transposition of video games, music, and films. As I will showcase, this portrayal of VR is essential regarding the novel's world-building, its narrative structure, and the depiction of its characters. Furthermore, looking at the implied worldview of the novel, I would argue that the OASIS is shown to be a virtual realization of the American dream, a world in which social outcasts and discriminated minorities find a chance to embrace who they are, make friends, find love, and rise from rags to riches. I will consequently show that the novel's juxtaposition of utopia and dystopia is specifically tied to its treatment of its themes of identity, friendship, and love, and that it utilizes these focus points to show the possibilities that VR might offer in the future, whilst also underlining the risks it harbors.

Keywords

American Dream; Dystopia; Ernest Cline; Intermediality; Science Fiction; Utopia; Virtual Reality.

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The red pill or the blue pill? This is the choice that Neo must make in one of the most iconic scenes of *The Matrix* (1999). The red pill offers knowledge of reality, whilst the blue pill would allow Neo to continue his ignorant existence in the virtual world of the matrix. Neo swallows the red pill, thus deciding to face reality. Quite soon this could be a decision that we all must make. Virtual reality is evolving, becoming harder and harder to distinguish from reality. Slowly but steadily, every area of human life is augmented and digitalized. Already in the 1980s, the influential French philosopher Jean Baudrillard argued in *Simulacra and Simulation* that we live in a world of "simulacra" (meaning imitations or substitutes), a hyperreality dominated by artificial constructs that do not follow certain models anymore yet are "a real without origin or reality" instead (1). Baudrillard argued that such a blurring of the lines between the real and the fictional might have dire societal consequences (121). He mused that consequently, the postmodern era would bring with it the destruction of true meaning altogether (160-61).

Certainly, the technological developments we see today in the areas of virtual reality and digitalization bring with them new fears and hopes. Might we one day lead completely transparent lives under constant surveillance as every drop of our data runs into the digital ocean of cyberspace? Could our idea of reality eventually lose its meaning? At the same time, visions of a virtual world without boundaries, a digital Eden, could offer a refuge for those grappling with the demands of modern life. What will the future of virtual reality hold in store for us? A dystopian nightmare or the final fulfillment of our age-long search for a truly democratic and egalitarian society?

Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One* (2011) deals with these questions. It is a fast-paced, action-packed SF novel filled with colorful imagery, myriads of intermedial and intertextual references, and a dose of cyberpunk-ish flair. It also contains many references to the popular culture of the Eighties, including music, movies, and video games, which are embedded in an intratextual virtual reality that is decisively oriented on contemporary conceptions of VR[2]. *Ready Player One* has quickly become a novel of cultural relevance, having sold over 1.7 million copies by 2020[3], its popularity peaking in a successful movie adaptation by Steven Spielberg (2018) and the release of the sequel *Ready Player Two* (2020). I have chosen *Ready Player One* to be the primary focus of this paper for two main reasons. Firstly, it has become one of the most popular works of fiction of the twenty-first century regarding virtual reality and its societal implications. Secondly, the novel deals with VR in a way that unites intermedial practice with a strong focus on the interplay between technology and the concepts of utopia and dystopia.

Thus, I will focus on the following research questions. Firstly, how is VR represented in the novel and what are its functions regarding world-building,

narrative structure, and the portrayal of the characters? Secondly, based upon this representation of virtual reality, can *Ready Player One* be viewed as a utopian vision of the American dream (the OASIS) or is it rather a dystopian nightmare? Perhaps both? Therefore, I will first carry out a dissection of Cline's vision of the OASIS, in terms of its central role in the narrative world of the novel and its intermedial utilization of video games, music, film, and other media. The following section of the paper will be dedicated to a close examination of the implied worldview that can be deducted from the representation of VR in *Ready Player One*. Here I will illustrate that the OASIS can be viewed as the final virtual realization of the American dream, as it provides an environment defined by seemingly unbounded freedom and individualism in connection with the vertical mobility central to the ideal of the self-made man. However, as I will also showcase, this possible utopia is embedded in the darkness of a dystopian reality. As I will demonstrate, this juxtaposition of utopia and dystopia is specifically tied to the novel's treatment of the themes of identity, friendship, and love and it utilizes these focus points to show the possibilities that VR might offer in the future whilst also highlighting the central risk that humanity might forget about the real world.

Introduction to the Novel

It is the year 2045 and the world has fallen victim to an extreme energy and climate crisis that has caused severe social problems. The primary escape for most people is a virtual reality called the OASIS, a large online game that also serves as a social and work environment. Five years earlier, the creator of the OASIS, James Halliday, placed an Easter egg in this virtual reality, hidden behind three gates for which three keys are needed. Whoever manages to open the final gate and solve the last riddle will inherit the OASIS and with it Halliday's large fortune. In the course of the story, the reader follows Wade Watts (Parzival), a poor teenager who lives in the trailer park slums with his aunt and dreams of solving Halliday's riddle. He is a "gunter" (egg hunter) who spends all his spare time researching films, books, TV series, music, and video games from the 1980s. His best friend is another player, named Aech. As Wade stumbles upon a clue leading him directly to the first key, a grand treasure hunt through the vast digital universe of the OASIS ensues, during which Wade finds new friends — a female player called Art3mis, with whom he falls in love, and the Japanese gunters Daito and Shoto—, yet is also confronted with the ruthless actions of the powerful company IOI (Innovative Online Industries). Eventually, the friends succeed against IOI, and Wade manages to find the Easter egg, therefore inheriting the OASIS. In the aftermath of the events, Wade finally meets Art3mis in the real world and learns a lesson about the preciousness of reality.

Establishing Key Theoretical Terms and Notions

In my analysis of Ernest Cline's novel *Ready Player One*, two theoretical concepts serve as the foundation. Namely, the typology of intermediality by Werner Wolf and Jean Baudrillard's concept of the 'simulacrum.' Wolf's system was chosen due to it being an exceedingly detailed and practical framework for the categorization of intermedial phenomena. Baudrillard's notion of the 'simulacrum' will be a key part of the analysis due to its applicability to common philosophical concerns with Virtual Reality and its long-lasting philosophical influence in this area.

Intermediality in a general manner is defined by Gabriele Rippl as a concept of relationships between the media (1). According to Rippl, it is a term that is primarily applied to cultural products involving more than one medium (1). More specifically, Werner Wolf categorizes intermediality as intracompositional or extracompositional (17). The former concept, which is slightly more prevalent for this analysis, is defined by Wolf as:

> [...] a direct or indirect participation of more than one medium of communication in the signification and/or semiotic structure of a work or semiotic complex, an involvement that must be verifiable within this semiotic entity. (17)

Wolf also suggests several sub-categories for both intracompositional and extracompositional intermediality (18-25). For the purposes of this paper, two of these categories suffice, namely 'intermedial reference', which is a kind of intracompositional intermediality (21), and 'transposition' (the transfer of content from one medium to another, a typical example of which is novel to film adaptation), a variety of extracompositional intermediality (18).

In Wolf's typology intermedial reference is further subdivided into explicit and implicit intermedial reference (23-24). Explicit intermedial reference (also termed 'intermedial thematization') is essentially any overt reference to another medium; for example, mentioning a song in a novel, or incorporating musicians and painters as characters in a literary work. Implicit intermedial reference (also termed 'media imitation') is, in contrast, focused on iconicity (24-25). As Wolf explains, this kind of intermedial reference 'imitates' traits of another medium or media product, which can be structural and formal elements and conventions (25).

From a more philosophical angle, my analysis of *Ready Player One* will employ Jean Baudrillard's concept of the 'simulacrum.' In *Simulacra and Simulation* Baudrillard argues that we live in a world dominated by artificial constructs, so called simulacra that constitute" a real without origin or reality" (1). Baudrillard (121) asks what would happen if the difference between the real

and the imaginary were to disappear eventually (121). His nihilistic conclusion is that with these developments of multiplying meanings in the media of postmodernity, our system of meaning will collapse from within (160-62). Indeed, I would argue that the core notion of the Baudrillardian concept of the 'simulacrum' is a dystopian one. To paraphrase the Baudrillardian critique, technology leads us toward a path of multiple realities and meanings that are not grounded in reality. As the line between reality and the simulacrum becomes increasingly more blurred, Baudrillard feared that our society would lose its common ground regarding the understanding of reality and truth.

A contemporary example of Baudrillard's notion of a collapse of meaning is how social media platforms like Facebook led to an explosion of different meanings and perspectives during the Corona crisis and hence to the sprawling distribution of fake news. Indeed, this diversification of meaning and the blurring of the lines was fostered and exploited by political figures, leading to a strong division between different societal groups[4]. It can be argued, that the 'Us vs. Them' mentality that grew from this division[5] on each side of the argument carried with it dystopian and anti-democratic implications since it is at its core a mechanism that is typical for totalitarian systems[6]. A more recent example of simulacra is the current trends in AI revolving around image creation. Examples of this, like Mid-Journey and DallE, are clearly evolving towards "a real without origin or reality". These photorealistic pictures can often not, or hardly, be distinguished from real imagery with the naked eye.

Literarily Programming Tomorrow: The Intermedial Future of Life and Work in the OASIS

The world of *Ready Player One* is distinctly split in two. On the one side, we have the reality; a dystopian future taking place in the year 2045 in which the world is suffering under extreme climate change, a continuing energy crisis, mass poverty, and widespread diseases and famine (1). Born into this catastrophic future, the protagonist and first-person narrator Wade Watts is shown to live in the so-called Portland Avenue stacks, a massively overloaded trailer park in which thousands of mobile homes are stacked on top of each other forming over 500 individual towers loosely connected (21). Here, he lives with his dubious aunt and her boyfriend Rick (20), in an area sprawling with poverty and criminality (22). On the other side, we have the virtual reality called OASIS; a seemingly utopian wonderland in which everything, from going to school (27), to socializing with friends (37), sports (72), video gaming (e.g. 78), and countless other kinds of entertainment is possible. It is a place that offers a level of individual fulfillment, upward mobility, and freedom akin to conceptions of the American dream, a potential safe space from the bleak reality that is already foregrounded via the virtual reality's name, 'OASIS.' This

chapter will focus on the intermedial representation of this possibly utopian virtual reality and its implications on the novel's world-building, narrative structure, and character presentation.

> Luckily, I had access to the OASIS, which was like having an escape hatch into a better reality. The OASIS kept me sane. It was my playground and my preschool, a magical place where anything was possible. The OASIS is the setting of all my happiest childhood memories. (Cline 18)

As this passage highlights early in the book, from the perspective of the main character the OASIS was like "a better reality" that shielded him from the influence of the run-down outside world and offered him a haven in which he was able to play and learn. It is explained that the OASIS has offered the protagonist Wade a childhood that he would not have had otherwise and has shaped his upbringing significantly. This fact is also illustrated via the explanation that Wade was placed in front of the screen as soon as he could "wear a visor and a pair of haptic gloves" (15), and that he essentially spent most of his childhood in the virtual world, where he learned "how to walk, talk, add, subtract, read, write, and share" (15). This exceeding importance that this virtual reality has in the protagonist's life also suggests that there might be other people in the novel's narrative world in whose lives the OASIS plays just as central a role. The book clearly implies this several times, most importantly on the first page, where it is stated that the OASIS is used by most of humanity on a daily basis (1), but also via the backstories of the other main characters, Aech, Art3mis, Daito, and Shoto.

The OASIS is explained to go back to the year 2012 (56). Gregarious Simulation Systems, the company of James Halliday and his business partner Ogden Morrow is said to have developed the "Ontologically Anthropocentric Sensory Immersive Simulation" (56) These five words already outline the essential features of the OASIS. Firstly, the word 'ontological' foregrounds that issues regarding existence and reality are central to the OASIS. After all, virtual reality is meant to provide an experience of a new kind of reality that has not existed before. Secondly, it is an 'anthropocentric' 'simulation' as it is centered on a human perspective and dedicated to human art and culture. Lastly, it is a "Sensory Immersive Simulation," which shows that it is portrayed as a virtual world that constitutes such a well-rounded simulation that it can immerse the player in a multisensory manner. As later examples in the novel display, this includes seeing, hearing, smelling, tactile sensations, and thermosensation (e.g. 192-93). Wade is depicted to use a specific kind of headset called the OASIS visor (26), and a haptic suit (193). *Ready Player One* also features haptic gloves (26), a completely adjustable haptic chair (191), a

so-called "Olfatrix smell tower" that can generate more than two thousand different smells (192), and an omnidirectional treadmill (193). It is noteworthy, that a quick look at today's VR industry unearths similar products, albeit in different stages of refinement[7]. In the novel, these technological gadgets allow players to be connected to the OASIS in a multi-sensory manner and are shown to enable them to perform a variety of activities during their time in virtual reality.

Furthermore, it is showcased that students can go to school in this virtual world. Through the description of several highly immersive lessons the novel illustrates what this virtual school in the OASIS looks like. For example, during a World History lesson, the teacher utilizes a simulation to take Wade and his classmates to Egypt in the year 1922 AD to experience the day that archaeologists found the tomb of King Tutankhamun (48). Here, it is also highlighted that just the day before, the class had been taken to a simulation of the same place in 1334 BC to witness the empire of Tutankhamun during its prime (48). On this page, the description of such wonderous lessons is continued as it is said that the class travels through a human heart in their biology class, visits the Louvre in Art, and journeys far away to the distant moons of Jupiter. These simulations might still have seemed slightly futuristic in 2011 when *Ready Player One* was published, yet today gadgets like the Oculus headset would allow teachers to take their students to the moon and back.

Indeed, as Eva M. Frick and Daniela Leopold (66) underline, video game simulations are already in use when it comes to environmental education. They argue that this kind of gamified education allows students to observe environmental issues regarding their causality as the consequences of certain actions can be seen and experienced right away. Furthermore, as Kyle A. Knabb et al. point out, VR is also used in archeology, which is a field that works with data that is well-suited for "3D modeling and visualization" (228). They further state that their institution, the Qualcomm Institute in San Diego, California, employs three particularly immersive, so-called CAVE (Cave Automatic Virtual Environment) environments that enable people to experience a realistic simulation of the archeological sites (Knabb et al. 228). According to the website Viar360.com, VR devices are already in use at several universities and schools for teaching purposes – for example, at NC State University, USA, in biology classes with a focus on field-based experiences, at The Mendel Grammar School in Opava City, Czech Republic, where the Oculus Rift is used to teach students the anatomy of the eye, or at Drury University in Springfield, USA, in architecture classes.

Aside from educational purposes, the virtual world in the novel provides users with the possibility to take part in a variety of sports and numerous leisure time activities, including both typical sports like volleyball,

soccer, and football, and sports that only work in a virtual environment like "Quidditch" and "zero-gravity Capture the Flag" (Cline 72), chat rooms for socializing purposes (37), dance clubs (183-85), access to the collected art and knowledge of humanity (16), and thousands of worlds to explore (57).

Furthermore, the OASIS is also presented as a place of economic and political importance. For example, it is foregrounded numerous times that a considerable number of people work within the OASIS, for example, telemarketers (15), escorts (15), teachers (e.g. 48), programmers (51), professional players who work for IOI (140), and technical support (e.g. 206, 285). Moreover, the virtual reality has its own currency, the OASIS credit, which is said to be more stable and higher in value than established currencies like the Dollar, Pound, Euro, or Yen (28). It is also made clear that the OASIS is a place of considerable economic opportunities as businesses that want to sell their goods in the virtual world must rent virtual space (59). A final essential point regarding life within the OASIS is that there are even elections that take place in the virtual world (201). Here, once more, the virtual world is decisively contrasted with the real one. Wade is displayed to state that the 'real' elections do not matter anymore as they are only for show and people can only elect "movie stars, TV personalities, and radical televangelists" (201). Amusingly, however, he explains that he votes for the SF author Cory Efram Doctorow and Wil Wheaton in the OASIS elections, one of the actors from the SF series *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (201).

Now, beyond these technological aspects and the sheer endless activities that the OASIS is shown to offer, the core activity within the OASIS is still gaming. Throughout the novel, VR video gaming is presented in a decisively intermedial manner as the novel continuously evokes and highlights typical video game features, concepts, and aesthetics, thus practicing intermedial thematization. As I will demonstrate, this process of thematization is arguably an essential aspect of the novel's world-building, narrative structure, and the portrayal of Wade Watts.

Right at the beginning of the novel (5-6), it is explained that the deceased designer of the OASIS, James Halliday, has hidden an elaborate riddle within his virtual realm and that the person who manages to solve the riddle and finds the Easter egg will inherit the OASIS, and with it immeasurable wealth. To some extent, the OASIS presents the people's paradise, as it is their primary form of escape from their nightmarish reality. Hence there is an almost religious significance to this epic quest for the egg. In a sense, the God and creator of utopia has died, and now he offers the one who can complete his trial to take his place. One important example of intermedial thematization is the 'Easter egg' that lies at the end of the quest. Easter eggs are a typical feature of video games. They are usually simply hidden secrets that sometimes

reference other works of fiction or art[8]. This revolving of the novel around an Easter egg is one of the key aspects concerning its narrative structure and logic as it renders the text a typical video-game treasure hunt comprised of quests, riddles, and adventures. Indeed, in the novel, there is a vast array of different explicit intermedial references (intermedial thematization) to video games, adding to this narrative structure and the aligned process of world-building. There are, for example, scenes in which Wade is shown to play a video game within the OASIS (e.g. 81-82, 105, 222), thus playing a game within a game which constitutes an interesting example of *mise en abyme*. Essentially, these games within a game mirror the underlying concept of the OASIS and the novel's story in a straight-forward structural sense. Moreover, as classic games such as *Joust* (81-82), the text-based adventure *Dungeons of Daggorath* (105), and *Pac-Man* (222) are not only alluded to but also explained in detail regarding their rules and game mechanics, I would argue that their incorporation also qualifies as intermedial transposition. This aspect is particularly important for the reader's imagination of the novel's narrative world as these video games are employed in a manner that stirs the individual game graphics and aesthetics into the imaginative mix that is the novel's representation of its fictional world.

There are many smaller examples of intermedial thematization scattered throughout the novel that invigorate the readers' impression that they are immersing themselves in a video game narrative and environment. For instance, there are the highly game-like elements of the dungeon that the protagonist is traversing on his search for the first key, the Tomb of Horrors. Examples of this are the importance of the map as a tool that displays where the monsters will appear, hidden treasures, and magical items, and Parzival gaining experience points through his actions (77-78). Another interesting detail is the implementation of no-pvp zones (e.g. 89 and 162), which are areas in the world of the OASIS where players cannot fight with one another. The employment of these zones in which characters cannot attack each other, not even during an all-out war scenario (162), creates again a somewhat paradoxical and amusing effect, especially when bombs exploding in close proximity to players cannot harm them. After all, there are no such things as safe zones in the real world. Another typical game element is the recurring scoreboard (e.g. 113, and 160), which continuously ranks the top egg-hunters like Wade, Art3mis, Aech, and the IOI commander Sorrento and displays how many points they have gained.

One other example of combined intermedial thematization and transposition that needs to be addressed is the re-enactment of film scenes within the novel (108-12 and 356-58). In these scenes, Wade is shown to find himself in two interactive simulations of popular movies, namely *War*

Games (1983) and *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975). These scenes are interactive simulations of movies within a virtual reality that is depicted in a work of literature, thus constituting a kind of three-layered intermediality that utilizes the fact that the reader has already become familiarized with the idea of envisioning the OASIS as a virtual reality despite it being simply a concept within a work of literature. Because of the reader's familiarity with this first-order intermedial connection and the general two-sidedness of the narrative that renders the virtual reality the place to be, it is made decisively easy for the reader to take another imaginative leap and delve into a movie-simulation within a virtual reality within a novel. Both of these movie-references also classify as *mise en abymes* in the sense that their narratives share essential aspects of their fictional worlds and narratives with the novel, for example, hacking and war-simulations (*War Games*) and a treasure hunt with religious implications (*Monty Python and the Holy Grail*).

From a Baudrillardian perspective the multifaceted virtual world of *Ready Player One*'s 'OASIS' can be classified as a universe of simulacra. It is a virtual space that is, for the most part, detached from reality. It contains an array of avatars, planets, economic opportunities, sports, and entertainment that are essentially separated from the intratextual reality of the novel. Although a clear correlation between the 'liveliness' of the virtual world and the bleakness of the seemingly neglected dystopian reality within the novel is not part of the story[9], a certain negative influence of the OASIS is underlined by the character of Ogden Morrow, one of the two founders of Gregarious Simulation Systems. He is shown to state that he left the company because the OASIS had become "a self-imposed prison for humanity" and "[a] pleasant place for the world to hide from its problems while human civilization slowly collapses, primarily due to neglect" (120). This negative view expressed through one of the characters aligns itself well with Baudrillard's nihilistic stance on the overarching cultural power of the simulacra. Although this critical perspective is essential to the implied worldview of the novel (this will be shown later in more detail), I would argue that two essential aspects of the OASIS speak against such a purely negative view of the virtual setting of the novel.

Firstly, throughout the novel, the OASIS is presented as an archive that preserves the treasures of human culture containing the collected art and knowledge of humanity (16)[10]. This aspect of celebration and preservation of human art in all its forms is emphasized via the aforementioned intermedial thematizations and transposition of films and video games, as well as literary references (e.g. 62), paintings (e.g. 77), comic books (e.g. 15), and music (e.g. 259-63). This celebratory aspect is quite interesting, as one widespread and general fear regarding VR technology is that it might become so immersive

and addicting that eventually, other forms of art will not be able to remain within the realm of public attention. Instead, the novel showcases how a virtual reality like the OASIS could become a realm that celebrates human creative ingenuity in all its forms by rendering it accessible to everyone and inscribing it into the intermedial essence of the virtual world. Regarding the classification of the OASIS as a world of simulacra one would also have to critically assess what "a real without origin or reality" would be in this case. In fact, it could be argued that hardly anything in the virtual reality within *Ready Player One* is really without a connection to its outside reality, and particularly not the media products. Hence, it seems that Baudrillard's concept of the 'simulacrum' is better applied to a virtual universe as a whole and its illusory effects rather than to separate it into a web of individual simulacra.

Secondly, for the protagonist there is undeniably a strong positive side to the OASIS and its vast ocean of possibilities. As has been outlined, there are numerous scenes in which the fact is stressed that the virtual world offered Wade an education, a sense of happiness and purpose, and also a social environment that he would not have had in the outside world within the novel. These positive and partly utopian aspects of the OASIS will be dealt with in closer detail in the following chapter, however, it should already be noted here with regard to the world-building and character presentation of the novel that the virtual world is implied to be a source of meaning for the lives of Wade and countless other people, rather than a force of meaning-negation. One example of this is how the representation of human art is portrayed not only as an essential feature of the world but also of its main character. It is through shown or told media interaction that key moments of the protagonist's young life and his adventures are highlighted. For example, it is mentioned that the media research carried out by Wade on his search for Halliday's egg has become a central and positive part of his life (e.g. 19, 62-64). Furthermore, via the intermedial presentations of scenes like Wade's adventure in the Tomb of Horrors (e.g. 77-78) or his playing of the song "Discovery" by Rush on a virtual electric guitar (263), there is a level of excitement attributed to his experiences that renders his character tangible and relatable. Consequently, as has been shown through several examples in this chapter, the OASIS is not only a necessary part of the novel's world-building and video game-esque narrative structure but also of critical importance to a deeper understanding of the novel's main character.

Utopia or Dystopia

Regarding the positive aspects of VR presented in the novel, one quintessential question must be asked: Could a virtual reality like the OASIS become humanity's long-awaited utopia; the American dream complete? I would argue that the

novel aims to portray such a utopian virtual wonderland to which people can escape from their unpleasant reality. However, as I will show, the novel also clearly contains a critical perspective regarding the risks that such a utopian virtual reality could harbor. Entailed in this viewpoint is also a critical position toward its central concept, the OASIS. I will now demonstrate that both sides of the coin are fundamental to a deeper understanding of *Ready Player One.*

As has already been highlighted, the real world within *Ready Player One* and the virtual world known as OASIS are presented in a quite contrary manner. The reality in the year 2045 is a prime example of a dystopia. It is marked by climate catastrophes, hunger, poverty, sickness, and lack of electricity (Cline 1). It is a place where children like Wade are educated by technological tools as their fathers are killed on the streets (15) and their mothers fall victim to drug consumption (19), and where myriads of people are forced to live in decrepit trailer parks dominated by poverty, crime, and all-encompassing uncertainty (20-21). Schools are depicted as places ruled by unsafety and negativity as bullies and drug addicts threaten children both in school and on their way home (32). Additionally, it is emphasized in the novel that in this future, democracy has become an empty phrase (201), as there are no competent politicians to vote for anymore. Instead, the world is depicted to be ruled by powerful companies like IOI, who are shown to take whatever action is necessary to increase their economic power, for example, the killing of innocent people (145, 242) and forcing people into a form of debt slavery (278).

In sharp contrast to the extremity of the real-world dystopia of *Ready Player One*, the OASIS offers a utopian world in which everything seems better. The OASIS is portrayed as a safe place where people find friends (e.g. 38-39 and 243), fall in love (179), experience fantastic adventures (e.g. 334-40), get educated at "grand palace[s] of learning" (32), do sports (72), party (183-85), play video games (78), listen to music (16), and much more.

I would argue that one implicitly central idea to *Ready Player One*'s juxtaposition of utopia and dystopia is the American dream. The term "American dream" was coined by James Truslow Adams in his 1931 book *The Epic of America*. Here, he praises "that American dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all of our citizens of every rank" and calls it "the greatest contribution we have as yet made to the thought and welfare of the world" (7). As Reeve Vanneman and Lynn Weber Cannon explain regarding this cultural concept:

> More than any nation, America has celebrated itself as the land of opportunity. Immigrants came to the New World to escape European class barriers. In America, wealth and position were to be organized

> differently— open to every person of talent and hard work. The frontier beckoned to those seeking a new chance. (257)

As I will demonstrate in this section, these ideas of opportunity, freedom, individualism, and the very central image of the self-made man indeed align themselves well with *Ready Player One*'s virtual society. I would argue that the novel's treatment of the three themes of identity, friendship, and love in particular fits exceedingly well into the idealistic framework of the American dream, especially concerning the OASIS. It is in the virtual realm that the main characters find social and monetary opportunities through their actions and talents. The virtual world also becomes the new frontier, providing unoccupied space, new opportunities, and heroic conflict. Additionally, it is there that Wade and his friends find the social success that they are shown to be denied in the real world. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, it is also all the more telling that the group's 'professional' success as gamers in the virtual world directly leads to a high level of real-world success. Hence, the story is a clear example of the rags-to-riches mentality – one of the foundational notions of the American dream.

Throughout the text, it is discussed whether an authentic identity, especially in aspects such as character, friendship, and love, can be fostered through the use of virtual reality. For example, as I have shown, Wade and a considerable number of other characters are displayed as having become alienated from the real world and spending most of their time in VR. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that Wade is portrayed as having spent the greater part of his life within the OASIS from an early age. Considering these points, it becomes clear that people such as Wade spend decisively more time in the identity of their in-game avatars than they do in their real-world identity. This fact already leads us to question which identity the primary one is in such a case. Should we even consider Wade as Wade, or rather as 'Parzival'?

Firstly, the novel showcases how the OASIS allows people to free themselves from the shackles of their 'real' identities and the corresponding social discrimination. Suddenly, it does not matter anymore that Wade is chubby and poor (32), that Aech is an obese, African American lesbian (320), or that Art3mis has a birthmark on her face (370). In their digital identities, they are freed from the discrimination they face in the real world. The OASIS also serves as an essential foundation for their lives as it is highlighted that it provides free education and free access to the cultural riches of humanity to everybody (15-16). Also, in the course of the novel, the main characters are shown to become the engineers of their own identities, and tellingly, all three of them manage to escape poverty because of their success in the game

world in the course of the novel (e.g., 368), which aligns itself well with the individualistic and egalitarian notions of the American dream.

The next essential theme regarding the portrayal of identity in the novel is friendship. Throughout *Ready Player One*, it is repeatedly shown that people can actually find real friendships in a virtual world, despite everyone having a constructed identity. In general, this is exemplified by the teamwork of Parzival, Aech, Art3mis, Shoto, and Daito which eventually leads to their success against IOI (366-68). This aspect of cooperation of players from different parts of the world (the USA and Japan) also underlines the global idea behind the novel. Although the book takes place in America, it is foregrounded throughout the text that people from all over the world live, work, and play in the OASIS. Thus, the virtual fight against IOI is a worldwide affair in which people from different cultural backgrounds take part. Concerning the issue of genuine online friendships, one example is provided by the online 'brotherhood' between Shoto and Daito (243). These two Japanese characters are said to have bonded strongly over the activity of playing together, so much so that they truly consider themselves to be brothers even though they have never seen each other in real life (243). A similar kind of close friendship is also displayed in the relationship between Wade (Parzival) and Helen (Aech), who, despite having only known each other in their virtual identities, consider themselves truly best friends (321). This is explained in quite an interesting manner:

> I realized that we already *did* know each other, as well as any two people could. We'd known each other for years, in the most intimate way possible. We'd connected on a purely mental level. I understood her, trusted her, and loved her as a dear friend. None of that had changed, or could be changed by anything as inconsequential as her gender, or skin color, or sexual orientation. (Cline 321)

This is a strong passage regarding the novel's themes of identity and friendship. Via this example, the book puts forth a definition of friendship that is decisively focused on the interaction of two minds. Indeed, once again considering the state of things outside of the OASIS the explanation makes sense. These characters are portrayed as living in a world where virtual reality is seemingly the only world worth living in, and after all, they are said to spend almost all their time in this virtual universe. Hence, why would these characters value friendships fostered in 'reality' as more valuable than those that have come about in the OASIS? Even if we leave aside the social situation of the characters, this valuation of a purely mental friendship is an interesting concept. With this idea, the text reminds us that in essence, we are our

minds. Every other aspect of our identity, from the shape of our bodies to our ethnicity, our sexual orientation, and our financial and social situation does not determine our value as people. Only our personality does.

With the same mentality, the novel portrays the love between Wade (Parzival) and Samantha (Art3mis). Throughout the second half of the novel, it is repeatedly stated that Wade has fallen madly in love with Art3mis (e.g. 179 and 186). Just like the friendships depicted in *Ready Player One*, this love comes about via virtual interaction between the two players. Yet, Art3mis is portrayed as someone who is exceedingly critical of online friendship and love (186) and is shown to simply deny Wade's feelings as unreal. In this conversation with Art3mis, Wade already makes the same argument he puts forth later regarding his friendship with Aech. He tells Art3mis that he is in love with her mind, with her as a person, and that he will prove that even though they have only met online his feelings for her are genuine (186). Additionally, the depiction of their love contains an interesting twist that is significant for the implied worldview. When the two eventually meet in the final chapter of the novel, Wade is blown away by Samantha's beauty (371). In this scene it becomes clear that Wade's feelings for Samantha have, indeed, been genuine and that he truly loves her – an emotional bond that is not weakened by her birthmark (371). However, it is also made clear that the sensation of meeting one's love in real life is something that VR simply cannot simulate, a fact that is especially emphasized as Wade is shown to mention that for once he had no desire of logging into the OASIS (372).

The treatment of the novel's key themes of identity, friendship, and love lends itself to a primarily utopian perspective. In contrast to the outside world that is defined by prejudice and overarching negativity, the OASIS is portrayed as an egalitarian world in which questions of gender, ethnicity, and physical appearance can finally be left behind. In a time when the discrimination of people because of aspects of their identity is often at the center of social and media attention – such as issues regarding non-binary gender identities, discrimination of Muslims and African Americans, and the weight shaming of overweight people –, it is not too far-fetched to view the OASIS as a significant improvement and a final realization of the age-old promise of America. Yet, there is also a dark side to the novel's depiction of a virtual utopia.

What happens if we stop caring about changing reality because we have substituted it with a new and 'better' reality? And what is reality truly worth? These questions bring us once again back to Baudrillard's concerns regarding a world dominated by simulacra. At first glance, Baudrillard's nihilistic prophecy seems to be unwarranted as Wade and the other characters are shown to thrive in the virtual world and become the best versions of themselves by focusing on moral values rather than capitalistic gains. Yet all

the while reality has become a wasteland. Thus, from this angle, Baudrillard's fear of a world that has lost its values becomes strikingly true. On the one hand, *Ready Player One* showcases a seemingly utopian virtual reality, yet on the other hand, it displays earth in its death throes. A world in which people have become so immersed in the OASIS that they have stopped caring for the outside world. Accompanying this overt neglect of the real world is also the sinister implication of its repercussions. One day, the energy and climate crisis might become so extreme that electricity simply becomes a thing of the past and the people in the future of *Ready Player One* might all of a sudden find themselves back in conditions resembling the stone age, in a completely depraved, dystopian society. Virtual reality in *Ready Player One* is displayed to be both a blessing as it provides a form of escapism, which is shown to have led to humanity running away from its problems instead of solving them. Even though the egalitarian features of the OASIS are presented in a considerably positive manner that is reminiscent of the American dream, they also carry with them the unspoken implication that instead of simply fleeing from an unjust reality people should try to actively bring upon the change that they would like to see.

Conclusion

Ernest Cline presents an exceedingly bipolar vision of the future in *Ready Player One* as he combines a global dystopia, plagued by natural and societal disasters and controlled by corporate powers, with a virtual utopia. As has been demonstrated, the core intricacies of the novel lie within its portrayal of the positive and negative aspects of the virtual reality OASIS. One foundation of James Halliday's virtual world is its many intermedial details that render the OASIS and the experiences of the characters authentic and tangible. The other central aspect are exactly these experiences. Via the successful struggle of Wade, Aech, Art3mis, Daito, and Shoto for opportunity, identity, love, and friendship the novel showcases many of the positive sides a truly realized VR might have. From the thus fostered perspective, the adventures of Wade and his friends align themselves with the idea of the American dream as they rise from a background in relative poverty to stardom and social as well as monetary success through their own efforts. Moreover, the way the novel deals with themes of identity, love, and friendship also puts forth thought-provoking questions regarding what makes us human. Are we our minds? And could we thus realize our humanity completely in a virtual world? In connection with these echoes of Descartes's 'cogito, ergo sum,' the novel's portrayal of a virtual preservation of cultural treasures, and consequently of cultural meaning, becomes a philosophical counterpoint to the nihilistic concerns of Jean Baudrillard. Perhaps there will not be a complete loss of

meaning as our world is filled and augmented by the emergence of hyper realistic artificial constructs. However, as I have shown, the novel's implied worldview is not without a critique of virtual reality. Beyond the OASIS, the world of *Ready Player One* is a clear-cut dystopia and it is via issues such as the dangers of humanity's neglect of the real world, the uncertainty of the future of the OASIS, and most importantly, the unquestionable value of reality, displayed in its purest form as love, that the problematic side of humanity escaping into a virtual universe is foregrounded.

Consequently, I would argue that *Ready Player One* presents a multifaceted portrayal of the dystopian and utopian possibilities that the future might hold in store for us, both regarding the advent of virtual reality and the crises humanity might have to endure. Accordingly, the novel's implied worldview contains a deep sense of appreciation for that which is truly real, whilst also underlining the happiness that human ingenuity, both technological and artistic, can manifest within our hearts.

Notes

[1] This paper is a revised version of chapters from my (unpublished) diploma thesis: Generation Simulation: Representations of Virtual Reality in Novels by William Gibson, Haruki Murakami, Cixin Liu, and Ernest Cline.

[2] This employment of state-of-the-art VR technology in the novel is also foregrounded by Charlie Fink in his online article "The Reality of Virtual Reality In Ready Player One." He argues that Ready Player One was a quite prescient novel as many of its ideas of VR and VR culture have either already been realized or could soon be.

[3] According to Publishers Weekly.

[4] For example, this has been highlighted by Concordia University researcher Najmeh Khalili-Mahani regarding the divisive role of US President Donald Trump's Twitter use in the COVID crisis and the general social-media tribalism that emerged during the crisis.

[5] Indeed, according to Devlin Kat, et al. a public survey of the Pew Research Center in 2021 carried out in 17 economically advanced countries has shown that people from all around the world viewed their countries as more socially divided during the corona crisis. Most extreme were the results in the US with 88 percent affirming the division.

[6] For instance, this is highlighted by Chris Lebron, associate professor of Philosophy at Johns Hopkins University, in an article for the Boston Review (2017). He argues that the 'us vs. them' mentality is one of the central traits of totalitarian systems.

Notes

[7] There is, for example, the oculus rift VR headset, the HaptX haptic gloves, bHaptic body suits, the haptic chair by the company Razer, Olorama's smell software, and Infinadeck's omnidirectional treadmill, just to name a few.

[8] This definition is quite general. In essence, Easter eggs can be embedded references to all kinds of things, from history and mythology to typical cultural tropes and even politics.

[9] It is never explained in detail if people emigrated towards the virtual world because their reality had gotten so bleak, or rather if the real world went downhill due to the focus of humanity on the virtual world.

[10] In a similar spirit, the museum of videogames (Cline 217-18) is said to contain "at least one copy of every coin-operated videogame ever made" (217) and recreations of thousands of gaming arcades that used to exist in the real world serve as a nostalgic celebration of the history of video games.

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Biography

Philip Steiner is currently a PhD student at the American Studies Department at the University of Graz. His research interests include intermediality, science fiction, and metafiction. He has so far published one essay on portrayals of disability in science fiction and a paper on intermediality and virtual reality in Cixin Liu's *The Three-Body Problem*. Furthermore, Philip Steiner presented on postmodern aesthetics in modern science fiction at the sf-senses conference of the American Studies Department at the University of Warsaw. He is currently working as a journalist at RegionalMedien Salzburg. Aside from work, Philip Steiner is involved as a vocalist in the band projects AeonNihilation, Grey Skies Ahead, and Abditory. He also writes creatively and has published several short stories.

Climate Change Theater and the Interrelation of Human and the More-Than-Human[1]

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Abstract

Being one of the most pressing issues of our times, climate change threatens the safety of the planet. As of now, however, only a fraction of people is seriously affected by the looming crisis. This paper concerns itself with how climate change theater can help raise awareness of the already existing impacts, both for humans and the more-than-human. Considering the issue of culture/nature dualism and the necessity to recognize the more-than-human as equal in order to bring along change, it is argued that sympathy needs to be elicited from the audience to influence their opinion of the importance to combat climate change. Subsequently, the influence of arts on the general public on the basis of case studies as well as the concept of affective ecology are introduced to showcase how climate change theater can actually make a difference by influencing audiences through embodied simulation. An analysis of the play *Sila* by Chantal Bilodeau highlights in which ways both foreign cultures and places as well as different species can be utilized to evoke sympathy in the observer. The importance of relationships, shared spaces and shared emotions, as well as the traditional Inuit concept of *sila* – a component of everything in existence – emphasize the importance of interconnectedness in climate change theater. The play utilizes both humans and the more-than-human to portray the lived experience of climate change in the Arctic to an audience not yet affected by it.

Keywords

Affective Ecology; Climate Change Theater; Interconnectedness; Limited Generosity; More-Than-Human.

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Climate change is one of the biggest threats that humanity has ever faced. Considered a 'slow violence', a term coined by Robert Nixon that refers to a violence that due to its slow progression only unfolds over time and is not always visible, its repercussions on the planet are as of yet unpredictable. However, the increase in temperatures and frequency of wildfires, flooding, tropical storms, or draughts are indicators of its advance. Global warming is attributed to the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere that trap the heat and thus increase the higher average temperature (Van Aalst 6). The rise of greenhouse gases in our atmosphere has progressively increased over the span of the past 150 years, and the average world temperature has been raised by 0.74 degrees since 1901 (Giddens 18). This effect on the planet shows that humans have permanently changed an important part of the planets' environment. We are thus living in the Anthropocene, a term coined by Paul J. Crutzen that denotes an unofficial geological age marked by the dominant influence of humans on the climate and ecosystem of the planet (Crutzen 23).

Globalization has contributed to a connected and interdependent planet through cross-border trade of goods and cultures. Nevertheless, this connection does not help in distributing global issues equally – some regions bear the brunt of them, while others are barely affected either due to their location or power imbalances (Pooch 17). Climate change, for example, progresses quicker in the Arctic, with some studies even suggesting that it warms four times as fast as the rest of the globe (Chylek et al.; Rantanen et al.). Consequently, people living in the Arctic, and especially Indigenous peoples, are already disproportionately affected by the crisis:

> And finally, Inuit's fundamental right to their own means of subsistence was being denied as climate change was hurting almost every aspect of our hunting culture: the quantity and quality of wildlife, the length of the hunting season, methods of traveling, and the ability of our elders to pass on traditional knowledge. (Watt-Cloutier 237)

This is in itself a problem, as it highlights the unfairness of global issues. Most of the greenhouse gases released are emitted from only a small number of countries that do not yet experience the repercussions of the crisis. The connectedness at least allows for those already affected to express themselves on a global scale and draw attention to the issue. However, another problem becomes apparent when they draw attention to the issue: those not yet affected oftentimes will not listen to their warnings of the dangers of the climate crisis.

In psychoanalytical terms, this gap between the knowledge we possess of the threat and our behavior towards it – in this case, the lack of taking

actions in regard to climate change – is referred to as "splitting". Splitting, as Richard Kerridge puts it, "is the manifestation of a defensive response [...], which enables one to know the traumatic truth, yet simultaneously not know it" (364). It is a coping-response, because to really think about climate change and its repercussions on our lives would be immensely transformative and would never allow us to ever stop thinking about and worrying over it. Thus, as Joseph Dodds explains, one form of splitting is a kind of "intellectualization" that separates "abstract awareness of the crisis from real emotional engagement" (52). Splitting is a way for us to shield ourselves from the alarming truth, but in the long run it leads to even more damage by drawing out the inevitable. Additionally, the longer the crisis is not tackled appropriately, the larger its repercussions are going to be.

To tackle this issue, an approach is necessary that shows people the seriousness of the situation, without instilling a debilitating fear. Julie Sze states the following on this topic:

> The starting point here is that literature, arts, and the humanities offer a potential window into the lack of cultural recognition for the most oppressed and disenfranchised. In other words, art projects have the potential to highlight those places that are most unseen and unknown and at risk of climate disaster.

Sze argues that arts and humanities have the ability to transmit messages beyond different cultures, and her conviction is reflected within the climate change literature and performances we find on today's bookshelves and in today's theaters.

This paper will analyze how climate change theater (Balestrini "Climate Change Theater", Balestrini "Transnational") approaches the issue of portraying the current situation of climate change. After establishing the importance of the necessity to find a new approach to engage with the environment and discussing the role of eliciting empathy in the spectators, the impact of climate change theater on the audience will be discussed taking into consideration the approach of affective ecology (Weik von Mossner). Finally, an analysis of Chantal Bilodeau's *Sila* offers an example of the possibility to portray foreign spaces, cultures, and species to a Western audience while still appealing to their sense of duty to combat climate change by focusing on the topic of interconnectedness.

Climate Change, More-than-Human, and Empathy

The division between nature and culture in Western philosophy dates back to ancient Greece, where a culture/nature dualism can be found with the

beginnings of rationalism (Plumwood 72). Over the progress of time, Western society has shaped and reshaped the term 'nature' to fit to their current needs and standards at that particular moment in history. To talk about nature then, means to talk about the projected ideas of it as different societies and cultures perceive it to be (Williams 82). Due to being shaped by humans for their own needs, Western society tendentially views nature as something to be exploited for their own benefits rather than as having its own agency. This is a problem in relation to climate change, because in order to challenge the crisis, humanity needs to place importance on caring for the planet. Val Plumwood identifies the root of the lack of care as a result of the human/nature dualism. Binary oppositions depict the qualities, cultures and values of the dualized other as inferior (47). The master model, which is represented on the left-hand side of a dichotomy, is defined by exclusion and dominates over the marginalized that is situated on the right-hand side: "the term on the right-hand side of each pair is *instrumentalized* to, or made to appear as if created for the purpose of serving, the term on the left" (Mathews 5; emphasis in original). However, the master model is not recognized as such, "because this model is taken for granted as simply a *human* model" (Plumwood 23; emphasis in original). Humans cannot recognize the master model as such and thus they place nature as the inferior agent. That is why humanity fails to conceive themselves in nature. Plumwood argues that this is the reason that stops humans from being able to properly take care of the planet (71).

To overcome this dualism from an ecological point of view, Freya Mathews introduces a philosophical approach that is called an "alternative principle of individuation" (60). This approach considers entities according to their inter-relations with other entities with the following outcome in mind: "In a relational schema, in which identity and individuation are logically constituted through the interactivity of entities, mind and matter, intelligence and nature, cannot be dualistically divided and divorced one from the other" (61). Similarly, Mathews points out, human identity "is constituted, through and through, by its relations with other species and communities of life" (61). Western views of nature primarily see it as something to be dominated over and molded according to their needs.

To overcome this dichotomy, it is necessary to monitor the use of language in culture to shape a new perspective of nature. To quote Carolyn Merchant: "Because language contains a culture within itself, when language changes, a culture is also changing in important ways. By examining changes in descriptions of nature, we can then perceive something of the changes in cultural values" (4). How nature is regarded then by different cultures can to some extent be influenced accordingly by adapting the way that it is spoken about. Rather than talking about it like it is something that is only meant to

serve humans, a conscious effort can be made to give nature more agency. Semiotic choices operate covertly by shifting impressions and opinions towards intended objectives through the selection of a word within the same paradigm that is associated with a different connotation. One such shift in language is to refer to the nonhuman as something different instead that no longer distinguishes it as the opposite of humanity: the 'more-than-human'.

The term more-than-human was coined by David Abram and situates the human within a net of the more-than-human. Abram argues that humanity and its various cultures are inherently connected with and embedded in the more-than-human world. They cannot exist outside of it. To engage with the more-than-human correctly, according to Abram, means to situate the human within it as an experiencing subject (29-30). This erases the culture/nature dichotomy and establishes equality between the two factions.

Climate change literature, in particular those texts focusing on the current situation as a warning, can profit from this concept. By having characters recognize and acknowledge that nature and humanity are interconnected instead of separate from each other, readers and audiences get to experience nature from a new point of view that has the potential to shift their perception of it. To work with the term more-than-human allows to analyze literary works from a perspective that puts humans and agents of nature on the same level. Furthermore, it allows for the reader and spectator to recognize the nonhuman agents of our planet as equals.

By establishing equality between humans and the more-than-human, literature can elicit empathy for the more-than-human. Emotions such as empathy are influenced by a number of factors: "Some, if not many, emotions do have a biological basis, but social, which is to say cognitive, factors are also crucially important" (LeDoux 137). Hence, emotions can be influenced by social and cultural norms. In the following part, I will introduce the philosopher David Hume's definition of sympathy. Although there is a significant difference between empathy and sympathy that does not allow these two terms to be used interchangeably, I argue that Hume's interpretation of sympathy and how it is elicited in the spectator can be mapped on eliciting empathy as well, as both emotions require opening up to other people and allowing oneself to feel with/for them.

Hume defined sympathy not as an emotion in itself, but as a principle of communication. It is not possible for an individual to have direct access to someone else's emotions. Thus, in order to feel sympathy, the spectator needs to form an idea of the situation. Sympathy, therefore, emerges through judgement. It is an emotion that focuses not on oneself but the other. The spectator is more likely to feel for the agent if the latter renders their idea with much passion and conviction (Taylor 189-190; Broadie 162-163). Hume,

however, also identified the problem of *limited generosity*, meaning that sympathy is not only influenced by the spectator's impression of passion by the agent, but also by outside forces such as the physical distance and geographical differences between the spectator and the agent, habits, and customs, as well as the relationships with the other that one is to empathize with (Gaston 144). As Stuart Hall states, all cultures impose their classifications on the world in social, cultural, and political aspects, constituting a dominant cultural order (134). We can thus assume that a reader or spectator who conceives their culture to be superior to that of the literary agent might be less inclined to feel empathy for them. Additionally, if they perceive humanity to be above nature, speciesism might stop them from extending empathy towards other species as well. A key principle to counteract this issue when portraying the more-than-human in literature and on stage is to highlight the importance of interconnectedness between the human and the more-than-human agents.

The Impact of Climate Change Theater

A significant number of works in climate change literature aims to convince the public that climate change is a real and ongoing issue, and that something has to be done in order to curb it. Through different approaches, it demonstrates the dangers in hopes to influence readers and audiences positively to take action. This poses the question as to how much climate change literature, and in this case climate change theater specifically, can actually influence spectators. The power that the arts can have in influencing an audience has already been recognized by Plato, as Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett state:

> The sinister powers that Plato attributes to poetry and tragic theatre derive from his bipartite notion of the soul: the rational part of the soul, and the most noble, is guided by rational thinking and strives to achieve the overall good (politically and in matters of personal ethics). The second, and decidedly inferior, part of the soul is the irrational and emotional one which represents the 'appetive' side of human nature, on which poetry and the stage have the stronger effect. Consequently, when we are exposed to poetry and theatre, the rational component of the soul is overruled by the irrational, and that is when the arts become a corrupting force. (54)

Plato's belief in the power the arts hold over the audience if used correctly can be implemented to work for the public good (Belfiore and Bennett 54).

Climate change literature and theater can have a strong impact

on others, but the most important component in order for that to happen is how the issue is portrayed. The concept of affective ecology, coined by Alexa Weik von Mossner, helps to better understand how an audience can be influenced by being situated within the experience of the play solely through observing. Affective ecology works with empirical research in cognitive sciences to argue that embodied cognition is an important tool for engaging with environmental narratives and readers' emotional responses to them. Embodied cognition contends that an agent's physical body is also necessary to develop cognitive abilities (Shapiro and Spaulding). Affective ecology works through the concept of embodied simulation, which "mediates our capacity to share the meaning of actions, intentions, feelings, and emotions with others, thus grounding our identification with and connectedness to others" (Gallese 524). In simpler terms, embodied simulation is based on mirror neurons. These mirror neurons fire when an action is performed, but they also react when we observe someone else perform that action and subsequently trigger the same neural mechanism (Gallese 520). Further research suggests that these mirror neurons not only fire when we observe someone doing an action but also when we read about the action being performed by someone (Iacoboni 84-95). This process is not limited to a character's actions but extends to their attitudes and emotions (Weik von Mossner 23). Drawing on Vittorio Gallese's concept, Weik von Mossner argues that through this process of embodied simulation in literature, the audience of a play or a reader will get a sense of what it is like to be in the environment of the protagonist who shares their conscious experience with the reader and spectator. Thus, the audience will start to develop an empathetic affective response (48). By emphasizing the environment in a play either aesthetically or through the experienced narrative, affective ecology suggests that the motions and emotions of the character in that environment can be imaginatively transferred to and experienced by the audience. This in terms leads to influencing their perception of the real world.

To gauge whether or not climate change theater can actually make a difference, studies have been conducted to assess how plays can impact audiences. I will now be introducing three case studies that were conducted in Australia. They aimed to gauge in which ways performing arts have the possibility to engage with an audience in order to raise awareness of environmental issues. The results of all three studies stress the belief that the arts can have an impact on the consciousness of the spectator in regard to environmental awareness and behavior:

The first study by Reid et al. was conducted with the objective of uncovering "how the visual and performing arts shape environmental behavior, and how they might be better utilized by those promoting environmental sustainability, particularly in rural areas" (iii). Amid eight community-based

art and environmental activities selected for the case study, Nick Reid et al. found that there were three main pathways in which the different art and environmental activities had the ability to shape the audience's behavior to be more environmentally sustainable: First, by communicating information to the general public. Visual and performing arts have the advantage to present complex ideas in engaging forms. Second, by connecting the audience with the natural environment. Artists are often inspired by their natural environment, and, consequently, their artworks have the ability to draw a connection between said environment and the audience (3). Third, by catalyzing environmentally sustainable economic development. This pathway, Reid et al. note, is associated with arts offering a development of a stronger community (4). The work of an individual artist has the ability to influence the behavior of citizens through these three main pathways, depending on the person's values and individual characteristics. Most importantly, as should be highlighted, Reid et al. mention that "the accumulated result of society's collective behaviors leads to macro-level impacts on the environment" (5).

A second case study by David J. Curtis investigated the relationship between art and the artists, as well as the possible contribution that art can have on an emotional level to the natural environment by leading eighty-nine key informant interviews, split into two groups of 42 people working in the arts, and 47 people working in natural resources management (175). Curtis' results show two categories that art fits into: First, art as assisting in communicating environmental issues, which is a more didactic approach meant primarily to instruct and is already considered in Reid et al.'s study. Second, art as providing a sense of connectedness to the environment. Curtis summarizes the second findings as being non-didactic and highlights emotions by interviewees such as art providing a sense of wonder in the natural world and, therefore, helping to cherish certain places, steering attention to invisible parts of the natural world and evoking emotional responses by making the hidden parts visible. Furthermore, the art provided spectators with the opportunity to foster respect and appreciation for and providing new insights into the natural environment the artists represented (176).

The third study, which was conducted by David J. Curtis et al., examined the reaction of scientists and research students attending the 2003 ESA annual conference in Armindale, Australia, which had developed an arts program in order to, among other things, educate the attendees on alternative media to communicate science to society and show how visual and performing arts can be used to help a broader audience understand complex scientific information. Out of 500 participants at the conference, 239 answered an anonymous questionnaire with the following results: 86% found parts of the arts program entertaining, whereas around 50% had been

encouraged to think about alternative ways to communicate science to a non-scientific audience. About 50% also stated that they believed arts could help people understand complex scientific information better, although only 24% would consider using arts in connection with their research in the future, indicating that although they found the arts program to be entertaining, sharing their findings with a bigger non-scientific audience this way did not seem to appeal to the majority of respondents.

Based on these arguments, the arts are a useful, and more importantly accessible, tool to educate the public on climate change. As Timothy J. Wiles remarks, "the belief that art reflects reality is as old as Aristotle, yet equally persistent is the hope that art might affect reality as well" (1). Among the arts, theater is one of its most powerful weapons. As George Pierce Baker notes, the stage and all its features, such as scenery, lighting, and costuming, appeal to the senses of the audience. By reproducing texts on stage, the audience will react differently than if they were to read them, swayed by these ascendancies to perceive the same writing entirely differently (8). Elaine Aston and George Savona echo this sentiment: in the field of theater studies, both the text and the performance need to be taken into account, especially through the lens of semiotics: "In the case of the former, it permits structural investigation of the dramatic text. With regard to the latter, it furnishes a metalanguage with which to analyze the pictorial, physical and aural 'language' of theatre" (10).

Sila: Connecting Human and the More-than-Human on Multiple Levels

Sila by Canadian playwright Chantal Bilodeau premiered in 2014 as the first play of the *Arctic Cycle*, a series of eight plays dedicated to showing the impact of climate change on the countries whose territory reaches up into the Arctic. I would first like to acknowledge that Bilodeau is a French-Canadian playwright. The play was originally commissioned and developed by Mo'olelo Performing Arts Company (ix) and, according to Bilodeau's acknowledgement, went through a "development process that included residencies, workshops with actors and directors, and public presentations" (107) that included the help and influence of many Indigenous peoples and a research stay on Baffin Island. The play received the First Prize in the Uprising National Playwriting Competition of the Consortium for Peace Studies at the University of Calgary in 2011, the First Prize in the Earth Matters on Stage Ecodrama Playwrights Festival in 2012, and the inaugural Woodward International Playwriting Prize from the University of New Hampshire in 2014 (ix).

As Megan Sandberg-Zakian, the director of the world premiere, explains in the introduction of the play, the production's goal is to visualize the scientific reality of climate change to further the public understanding of science. In particular, this meant to highlight that there is no possibility to

return to the way things were before, which means that the only possibility left is to look forward and adapt to climate change (i). The two polar bears featured in the play, a mother and her cub, are supposed to be the heart and soul of the play according to Sandberg-Zakian. On the one hand, the audience has to fall in love with them, but on the other hand, they need to remain terrifying as well (ii).

The polar bears in *Sila* are portrayed by puppets that are approximately four fifths the size of the real animals (ii). Mama and Daughter call each other *Anaana* and *Paniapik*, Inuktitut words that translate to "mama" and "my daughter". Although the play is shrouded in the tragedy of death, *Sila* takes on a hopeful tone nonetheless. Both humans and animals equally suffer from the consequences of human-made problems such as climate change, which leads to a sense of unity. Despite hurting from the loss of loved ones, the characters will find solace in the knowledge that everything is *sila* – meaning that everything is connected with each other. The audience witnesses both despair, which elicits empathy, as well as the process of healing that the human and more-than-human characters have to go through.

Sila faces two problems as a climate change play set in the Arctic that heavily relies on featuring polar bears. First, the audience could be hindered in feeling empathy by the limited similarities between the Western world and that of those living in the Arctic, especially Inuit. Second, that limited similitude could also pertain to the different species that this play focuses on. In order to overcome this, Bilodeau foregrounds the interconnectedness between human and more-than-human characters in various ways. In this respect, it is important to mention that while the polar bears in the play are anthropomorphized to some extent, they are still represented as nonhuman through the eyes of the human characters. Scenes that only feature the polar bears show them talking to each other like a human mother-daughter pair would. After the cub has drowned because it was too weak to swim back to land from a drifting ice floe, Mama in act 2 scene 4 walks around disoriented and talking to herself (71-72). Scenes with both humans and the bears from the point of view of humans show them as animals only. In act 2 scene 5, Tulugaq and Jean, an Inuk Elder and a climate scientist respectively, spot her and describe her as an emaciated bear with no further emotions and no visible injuries (73-74).

The most obvious connection between humans and polar bears in this play is the relationship represented between mother and daughter in both instances. Both, the polar bears and the two human female main characters, Leanna and Veronica, are mother and daughter pairs. While both mother-daughter pairs care for each other, they each have vastly different interests and goals. As for the polar bears, Mama is trying to teach Daughter how to

hunt in order to take care of herself in the future. Daughter, on the other hand, is insistent that she will never leave Mama's side, and prefers to play and hear stories of their ancestors over learning how to hunt. Leanne is an activist advocating for the Arctic. While she feels deeply connected to the place, she often leaves in order to raise awareness for the plight of her home. Veronica wishes to leave, believing that moving further south would be the best option for her son. Leanne disagrees with this notion, claiming that "Samuel needs to be here. He needs to be with his people" (28). Both mother-daughter relationships struggle in their own way. While Mama wants to protect and educate her daughter for when she inevitably has to part with her in the future, Leanne cannot comprehend the idea of letting Veronica leave the place that they are supposed to call home.

Bilodeau first establishes a connection between the audience and the Arctic as a place that can be seen as homey and welcoming to humans and animals alike, but then turns it into a cold and harrowing place as tragedy strikes. Bilodeau states about her conception of the Arctic that "there are two distinct Arctics in this play: the Arctic of the Inuit and the Arctic of the Southerners. The Arctic of the Inuit is warm, raw, and fiercely alive. [...] The Arctic of the Southerners is cold, mystical in its foreignness, and rarefied" (5). After having the audience connect to the Arctic by experiencing it through the eyes of the Inuit and polar bears that call it their home, the devastating events of the play start to unfold: the death of the cub by drowning and the death of Veronica's son by suicide. Consequently, this shared space no longer feels familiar, but frightening and dangerous instead. The death of Veronica's son can be attributed to the many psychological problems Inuit experience, oftentimes brought on by the rules and regulations forced upon them by governments and politics, but also because the place they once called home has been changed beyond recognition. The death of the polar bear cub can be attributed to changing climate, unpredictable weathers and the force of an untamable nature, subsequently highlighting the unpredictability of the Arctic landscape as a consequence of climate change. It is important that the spectator has come to understand how Inuit and animals view the Arctic through the help of embodied simulation before these tragedies unfold, as they function as representations of how climate change and the transgression of Western societies on the Inuit way of living have left humans and more-than-humans alike vulnerable and suffering.

Interconnectedness in *Sila* goes beyond the shared familial dynamic and shared space. It also extends to shared grief, as both Veronica and Mama struggle with the loss of their children. After Daughter drowns Mama is no longer depicted as rational. As already mentioned, she wanders the Arctic disoriented and talking to herself and her deceased cub. Similarly, Veronica

alienates herself from humanity: she stops talking, barely eats, and becomes a shell of her former self. Both mothers are lost and hurt. The connection between humans and animals is especially highlighted in act 2 scene 8. Leanna is still with Veronica and begs her to talk again. As they start to fight – although silently as Veronica still has not found her voice – Veronica turns away from her mother. Ultimately, Leanna says something that connects the four females and their lives in this shared space: she calls Veronica *paniapik*, the same expression that Mama used to address Daughter (88).

Interconnectedness in this play is also emphasized by the importance of *sila*, an omnipresent concept in Inuit culture: "*Sila* – now there's a word that packs a wealth of meaning. Ubiquitous in Inuit culture, it encompasses the weather, the outside, the environment, and – in a different sense – intelligence, knowledge, wisdom" (Harper 114). The word encompasses everything in existence. It entrenches and guides every being and thing. As Mama explains to Daughter in act 1 scene 10, "the only creatures who are lonely are the ones who forget about *sila*" (43). Despite hurting from the loss of loved ones, the characters eventually find solace in the knowledge that everything is *sila* – meaning that everything is connected. They are still connected to their deceased children, as humans, animals, and nature are all equally part of one another and cannot be separated. This stress on *sila* also highlights that everything that humans suffer from, other species will suffer from as well. This in turn leads back to the topic of climate change theater and the interconnectedness of humans and the more-than-human within it.

In *Sila*, there is a division between the issues that Inuit and the more-than-human face. Human characters struggle against political oppression, such as the building of a pipeline, or the fight to have the destruction of the environment recognized as a violation of human rights, or societal issues like alcoholism and the climbing suicide rate among the Inuit communities. They all directly impact the characters, their emotions, and their lives. While the human characters are preoccupied struggling with these issues, Bilodeau introduces the polar bears into the play as the characters directly affected by the dangers of climate change. The ice is melting and the landscape around them and its conditions are changing for worse, and much like the Inuit, the polar bears are victims of the changing climate without having actively contributed to it.

Climate change theater is grappling with the pressing question of how playwrights can portray the struggles of climate change and its consequences in faraway places impacting different cultures and species. The objective is to have an audience emphasize with these characters despite not being familiar with the circumstances. Bilodeau's choice to represent climate change equally through a focus on both polar bears and humans is daring. This stems from

the question whether using these animals to portray climate change trivializes the crisis. This in turn may undermine the suffering of Inuit communities and result in making the public regard climate change as a danger that does not affect humanity although it already negatively affects people around the world. Nevertheless, I argue that Bilodeau's choice does not trivialize the issues that Inuit cultures have already faced for years by applying them primarily to polar bears. Instead, it allows Bilodeau to address even more issues that humans exclusively face by focusing Leanne's efforts on the building of pipelines, and the lack of mental health support to name just two examples. Mirroring and juxtaposing humans and the more-than-human at once allows both sets of issues to develop without taking the importance away from one or the other, and thus attributes them equal amounts of significance.

The message of *Sila* is that climate change needs to be stopped. The polar bear cub's death could have been prevented if polar bears were still capable of trusting their instincts and the environment – i.e., the thickness of ice. Leanne mentions repeatedly that climate change has become a danger to the traditional ways of living in the Arctic, that it takes lives, and that everything in one's power needs to be done to contain it in order to not only save the Inuit but also the animals living in the Arctic. The play represents the plight of those already affected in a way that allows Western audiences to understand how severely the climate crisis already affects a part of the planet, humans and more-than-humans alike. Ultimately, it will only be a matter of time until every human and more-than-human on this planet is negatively affected by climate change. Drawing these connections between the human and the more-than-human can elicit a feeling of sympathy from the audience, which consequently can urge them to contemplate their own approach to caring for other species on the planet, and hopefully lead them to taking actions against climate change before it is too late. Bilodeau's message is loud and clear: humanity should care about the climate crisis, the environment (especially the Arctic), and for the humans and more-than-human already suffering from its repercussions.

Notes

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Biography

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