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German Contributions

Christoph Irmscher

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In late August 1855 a gloomy James Russell Lowell arrived in Dresden. A little more than a year earlier his young wife, Maria, had died under traumatic circumstances, and Lowell had left his five-year-old daughter, Mabel, behind only reluctantly. But everyone back in Cambridge had agreed that a solid knowledge of German would be the best preparation for Lowell's new position, the Harvard Professorship of Modern Languages, previously held by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Living with the German botanist August Reichenbach and his wife, Lowell found it hard to concentrate on his studies. The intricacies of German grammar didn't help. "Why the empty distinctions of sex without its privileges or responsibilities?" he lamented in a letter to President Walker of Harvard, pointing out that in German the spoons were male and the forks female. At sea in the murky twilight of a language marked by confusing articles,

unpredictable pronouns, and sheer endless sentences, Lowell felt “like an admiral with sealed orders, not knowing where the devil he is going.”

Lowell's sarcastic quip provides a suitable introduction to this year's prodigious output on “gender studies” by German Americanists, from whose lips the names of Teresa de Lauretis and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick now seem to drop as effortlessly as once did references to Gadamer's homegrown hermeneutics or Iser's reader-response theory. Whether subconsciously predisposed by their native language's especially arbitrary gender assignments or not, German-speaking writers on American literature make a concerted effort this year to explore whether “true” gender identities are, as Judith Butler would have it, really fictions or not. Though James Russell Lowell, the smooth writer of popular essays, would have been bewildered by some of the diction to be found in these new books and articles, he perhaps would have approved some of the sentiments. Hadn't he himself heard the “faint tinkle of chains” when watching the wives of the Boston literati or their servants go about their household chores? At the same time, Lowell, who after the birth of his first child took an active role in daily childcare and proudly described himself as the “personification of the maternal principle,” also believed that all men should have in them at least a few “tender feminine virtues.”

Given the shift in the interests of German Americanists, it no longer seems sensible to adhere to the chronological sequence that has become customary for this section. What started as an imperceptible nudge in the direction of American literary theory has now become, for better or worse, vigorous prodding. Fewer are the ones now that dare go, in Alice James's beautiful phrase about her brother William's writing, “lightly amid the solemnities.” The flip side of this newfound earnestness is a comparative neglect of whole periods or genres of American literature—but then these terms have, apparently, outlived their usefulness anyway: “The idea of a stable system of literary genres,” exults Kornelia Freitag in a piece on the experimental L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poet Lyn Hejinian, “has dissolved in the light of contemporary literature and theory” (“A Pause, A Rose, Something on Paper”: Autobiography as Language Writing in Lyn Hejinian's *My Life*,” *Amst* 43: 313–27). The arrangement of the following notes reflects no particular inner logic but merely, on a descending scale, the quantity of the contributions to each critical category.

a. Gender Studies The playfully titled *Gender Matters*, a slim book published in 1997 as part of *Berliner Beiträge zur Amerikanistik* (John F.

Kennedy-Institut für Nordamerikastudien, Free University of Berlin), arrived too late to be reviewed here last year. In her introduction, the editor of the volume, Sabine Sielke, offers a concise overview of recent definitions of “gender” and expertly guides the reader through a maze of related problems and publications, dispelling, above all, the notion that the new emphasis on gender has sounded the death knell for women’s studies. However, if feminism was predicated on the assumption that the (female) human subject is—or should be—autonomous, the postmodern conception of “gender” redescribes both “her” and “him” as embedded in a web of cultural and political contexts and relations and as having an identity made up of the most heterogeneous discourses—an insight as chastening as it can be liberating.

Some of the complexities of this theoretical approach are evidenced in Sielke’s own contribution to the volume, “Engendering the Body: Kostümierung, Camouflage und Cross-Dressing als feministische Praxis?” (pp. 73–95). Here the author describes a trajectory of transgressive female role-playing extending from the white nun of Amherst, Emily Dickinson, to Marianne Moore and, more surprisingly, to media star Madonna. In a brilliant essay from *The Necessary Angel* that he devoted to Moore’s ostrich poem, “He ‘Digesteth Harde Yron,’” fellow poet Wallace Stevens once claimed that Moore herself was like the “sparrow-camel” bird that natural history lore describes as eating iron so that it could “preserve its health.” Moore possesses, joked Stevens, “the faculty of digesting the ‘harde yron’ of appearance.” Her poetry not only digested iron, it was hard as metal itself, hiding under rigid and frigid surfaces “the Medusa-face of the world” (Randall Jarrell). Moore became something of a cult figure; armed with tricorne hat and purse, she attended prizefights and baseball games, and enjoyed dinner in the company of Cassius Clay. Sielke also finds evidence of such bold rejection of stereotypes in Madonna’s performances; here, however, the critique of female sexuality-as-commodity has itself become a commodity.

A more traditional view of “gender matters” is offered by Heinz Ickstadt, who in quick, bold strokes sketches a paradigm change in the concept of femininity in turn-of-the-century American writing and art. The cultural and sexual upheaval is captured memorably in the character of Lily Bart in Edith Wharton’s *House of Mirth*, who, late in the novel, realizes that “all the men and women she knew were like atoms whirling away from each other in some wild centrifugal dance” (“Portraits of Ladies: Von Henry James bis Edith Wharton,” pp. 17–31). Far less

accessible than this lively survey is Hannah Möckel-Rieke's attempt, in the same collection, to analyze the crisis experienced by male authors of the American Renaissance when they were confronted with primitive visions of physical inscription or "body-writing," especially in the form of tattoos ("Das schreckliche Ornament: Körperschrift, Geschlechterdifferenz und Autorschaft in *Typee* und *The Scarlet Letter*," pp. 33–72). Such "body-writing" negates, according to Möckel-Rieke, the separation of subject and object, mind and matter, on which the traditional conception of the author—as the originating principle behind a text, the point where all apparent contradictions can be resolved—so crucially depends. Möckel-Rieke illustrates—or, one is tempted to say, "fleshes out"—her theory with references to Melville's South Sea adventurer Tommo in *Typee* (for whom the prospect of being "written upon" by Karky the tattoo artist also means the prospect of imminent feminization) and, perhaps less convincingly, with regard to the "red stigma," the awful letter A, worn by Hawthorne's Hester Prynne.

Sabine Sielke is also the coeditor, with Ulf Reichardt, of an issue of *Amerikastudien* titled "Engendering Manhood" (*Amst* 43, iv). If Luce Irigaray declared women to belong to "the sex which is not one," Sielke and Reichardt now want to stress that the same insight can and should be applied to men: masculinity is not a stable, homogeneous entity that can simply be equated with power and patriarchal domination ("What Does Man Want? The Recent Debates on Manhood and Masculinities," *Amst* 43: 563–75). A radical questioning of the influences that make or unmake men can only be salutary for American Studies, a discipline studying a culture traditionally replete with icons of masculinity, from cowboys to terminators. Manhood, like womanhood, is multidimensional—a premise that informs all the essays Sielke and Reichardt have collected. In "Purgers and Montaged Men: Masculinity in Hawthorne's and Poe's Short Stories" (*Amst* 43: 577–92) Jochen Achilles examines some of Hawthorne's more unappealing male characters (Aylmer in "The Birthmark," Richard Digby in "The Man of Adamant," and John Endicott in "Endicott and the Red Cross"). These so-called "purgers," whose assertive masculinity is threatened by "deviant" female figures, are then contrasted with the protagonists in stories in which men are literally assembled and then disassembled, Poe's "The Man That Was Used Up" and Hawthorne's "Feathertop." In Achilles's reading, such constructions of manhood on the brink of disaster effectively anticipate later reorganizations of gender in our culture.

One such development is, in fact, the subject of the next essay in the collection, Heinz Ickstadt's brief and breezy "Liberated Women, Reconstructed Men and 'Wandering' Texts" (*Amst* 43: 593–98), which claims that the "transformation of gender roles" was one of the aesthetic dimensions of American modernism. In this light, Henry James's terminally hesitant Lambert Strether emerges as one of the harbingers of a new, softer, less masculine than feminine self. Christa Buschendorf's "Gods and Heroes Revised: Mythological Concepts of Masculinity in Contemporary Women's Poetry" (*Amst* 43: 599–617) discusses the ways in which the male "godhead" of classical myth has been transformed or questioned in long poems by 20th-century women writers: H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, (1961), Anne Waldman's *Iovis* (1993), and Diane Wakoski's *Medea the Sorceress* (1991) and *Jason the Sailor* (1993). Buschendorf impressively outlines the different forms this "work on myth," in Hans Blumenberg's phrase, has taken in these works, ranging as it does from H.D.'s "dialogic principle," where Achilles serves as Helen's male "soul mate," to Waldman's "androgynist poetics," which allows the poet to don different mythological masks, male and female, and thus to transcend the limitations of gender itself. Buschendorf is less sanguine about Wakoski's Jungian rewriting of the Medea-Jason myth, which, coming from a poet who saw nothing wrong in titling one of her poems "My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys," courts the danger of reasserting traditional notions of masculinity. Be that as it may, the works of these poets support Hans Blumenberg's contention that classical myth combines a high degree of constancy with an exhilarating capacity for variation.

Such flexibility is spectacularly unavailable to Mickey Spillane's gumshoe, Mike Hammer, the subject of Gabriele Dietze's amused scrutiny in "Gender Topography of the Fifties: Mickey Spillane and the Post-World-War-II Masculinity Crises" (*Amst* 43: 645–56). Dietze shows how the hard-boiled Hammer, in his tough, single-minded quest for justice, is constantly beleaguered by hordes of demanding women and their seductively bulging bodies. Behind such fantasies, as is the case with many others mentioned in "Engendering Manhood," lurks the old image of the sculptor Pygmalion—but stripped of the comfort that was available to him in Ovid's version of the tale, where the artist married his model and lived happily ever after. When modern men think they can create women to fit their dreams, their works will come alive only to haunt them.

My own contribution to "Engendering Manhood," "The Absolute

Power of a Man? Staging Masculinity in Giacomo Puccini and David Henry Hwang" (*Amst* 43: 619–28) presents yet another variation on this familiar theme, David Henry Hwang's successful Broadway play *M. Butterfly* (1988). Hwang builds on the intercultural conflicts already inherent in Puccini's opera (considered "revolutionary" by Puccini's audiences). As Hwang himself notes, Puccini, in Lieutenant Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton, portrays the West as "oafish and insensitive," while his Cio-Cio San demonstrates how the East also has "played into" the stereotype of its own passivity and fragile helplessness. When his Chinese lover, Song, reveals herself to be a man and exchanges her kimonos for an Armani suit, a desperate René Gallimard, struggling for authorial control over his favorite "Orientalist" fantasy, dons the costume of the "butterfly" and commits suicide. Gallimard's final femininity, like Song's masculinity, is an allusion, but, as Hwang's play demonstrates, even quotes can kill. In Hwang's play, masculinity emerges as a role within a preimagined cultural script that releases neither Gallimard nor Song.

"I study the forms of . . . men and their words," Anne Waldman's speaker announces in *Iovis*, her inversion of the Pygmalion tale. "The quest is in me to reach them through words, to make words dance out of a body without breasts and womb, or to take that body and establish the will of a man coming to life." The spectacle of "a man coming to life" really begins in adolescence. "We'll get the boys together and have the initiation tonight," said Twain's Tom Sawyer, summing up what critics have since celebrated as one of the most abiding themes of American literature. A pioneering book on the topic, Peter Freese's 1971 study, *Die Initiationsreise: Studien zum jugendlichen Helden im modernen amerikanischen Roman* (first reviewed in *AmLS* 1972, p. 283), has just been reissued by Stauffenburg, equipped with a sensible new preface by Klaus Lubbers. Surveying countless novels, from Charles Brockden Brown's *Arthur Mervyn* to Norman Mailer's *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, Freese paints a panorama of American literature as populated by hordes of pubescent and postpubescent boys frantically shedding their childhood skins so that they can enter the dim caverns of grown-up experience. Often these biographies unfold much less teleologically than promised by the familiar model of Corinthians 13.1, where the child at first sees darkly and then with clarity, "face to face." Sure enough, the male adolescents in the novels analyzed by Freese all learn to put away, as Saint Paul had recommended, all "childish things," but what they gain instead is a rapid darkening of their world—witness Faulkner's Ike McCaslin in

Go Down, Moses, who “ceased to be a child” so that he could become “a hunter and a man” and then must continue to live his life alone, his loss of family and property reflected in the inevitable destruction of the green wilderness around him.

The life histories of girls usually offer less latitude, claims Freese, entering slippery territory, since they are, he believes, bereft of the experiences that traditionally make men into men, such as the hunt, seafaring, and wars. But, as Lubbers points out in his introduction, there are indeed many accounts of the initiation of girls authored by women, such as Sarah Orne Jewett’s “A White Heron,” Katherine Anne Porter’s Miranda stories, and Kate Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour.” (He could also have mentioned such earlier bestselling novels of female growth and development as Susan Warner’s *The Wide Wide World* or Maria Cummins’s *The Lamplighter*.) Some of Freese’s analytic categories do seem dated today, and the extensive analysis of *Catcher in the Rye* that makes up the book’s entire second part will no longer rivet the reader as it must have in the early ’70s. One wishes also that the author had corrected some mistakes for the reissue, such as the classification of Faulkner’s Boon Hogganbeck as a “Negro slave” (the main part of Faulkner’s *The Reivers* is set in 1905, and Boon is neither a slave nor black). Nevertheless, Freese’s book is useful as it stands, a reminder of just how early indeed some of those “melodramas of beset manhood” (Nina Baym) kick in, at least in the confused minds of average American male literary characters.

A central part of Ike McCaslin’s initiation experience is Old Ben, the unhuntable bear, “shaggy, tremendous, red-eyed,” the epitome of wilderness itself. When Old Ben dies, the one “native” member of the hunting party, old Sam Fathers, the last of the Chickasaw, collapses as well; fittingly, his last reported words in the novella are breathed “in the old tongue.” As Matthias G. Kausch demonstrates in *Der Bär: Seine Bedeutung in der zeitgenössischen indianischen Literatur Nordamerikas* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann), a 1997 dissertation now published as a book, native initiation experiences involving bears need not be traumatic or tragic. Reading novels by N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) and Gerald Vizenor (Anishinabeg) as well as short stories by Judith Minty (Mohawk), Ralph Salisbury and E. K. Caldwell (both Cherokee), and Joseph Bruchac (Abenaki), Kausch shows that, for native writers, the bear, far from being merely a trope for the vanishing wilderness, has remained a vibrant source of inspiration and an all-encompassing identification figure. As Bruchac explains, “A bear is a lot

like a person. Or maybe it's the other way round, seeing as how the stories tell us that some of us are descended from bears." Bear power transcends gender limitations: in its many guises, it stands for male fortitude (Proude Cedarfair in Vizenor's *Darkness in St. Louis Bearheart*) as well as for the mythic connection with nature experienced and embodied in the female shaman Bagese in Vizenor's *Dead Voices*.

The last contribution of relevance to the inexorably expanding field of gender studies as surveyed and cultivated by German Americanists is Stephanie Grimm's *Die Repräsentation von Männlichkeit im Punk und Rap* (Stauffenburg), a brief examination of the strategies of performative self-invention in punk and rap. Unsurprisingly, Grimm concludes that the ironical subversion of stereotypical gender attitudes that is characteristic of punk culture cannot be found among self-respecting male rappers. But Grimm also argues that the aggressively masculinist swagger of rap, the all too obvious delight performers take in their dehumanizing references to women, also has an unintended effect: it makes masculinity recognizable as the cultural construction that it is.

b. Literature and Philosophy Napoleon believed that it was only a short step from the sublime to the ridiculous, but he had of course no idea of the proportions that the debate over Edmund Burke's concept would have assumed by the end of the next century. On the other hand, as Jean Baudrillard could have argued, maybe he *was* already thinking of the United States of America as we know it today, where space seems to dignify even the tackiest suburb with its K- and Wal-Marts and its brightly lit Krispy Kreme and Dunkin' Donuts franchises. If we want to find real sublimity in modern America, says Rob Wilson, author of the seminal 1991 book *The American Sublime*, we need look no further than the media images of natural and nuclear disasters, "technoeuphoric spectacles" transmitted right into our living rooms. Wilson's essay on "The Postmodern Sublime: Local Definitions, Global Deformations of the U.S. National Imaginary" (*Amst* 43: 517–27) concludes an issue of *Amerikastudien* on *The American Sublime*, guest-edited by Hans-Ulrich Mohr and Maria Moss, dedicated in part to *refuting* Wilson's claim that there is a separate, "positive" (i.e., celebratory and affirmative) American tradition of sublimity.

For Edmund Burke, terror and a sense of privation were part and parcel of the experience of the unrepresentable sublime, and Ulla Haselstein devotes an entire essay to proving that, *pace* Wilson, comparable

“moments of negativity” do also exist in American intellectual history, notably in Bryant’s “The Prairies” and Emerson’s *Nature*. Haselstein professes a special interest in those passages of Emerson’s work in which Emerson critically reflects on his tendency to appropriate nature and deprive it of its otherness (“Seen from a Distance: Moments of Negativity in the American Sublime [Tocqueville, Bryant, Emerson],” *Amst* 43: 405–21). Hans-Ulrich Mohr, in “Sublimity, History, and Revolution: Barlow, Dwight, and Irving” (*Amst* 43: 391–404), argues that early American writers recognized that an appropriate sense of national history had to be set against the aesthetic experience of a largely inscrutable nature—consider the lesson taught by Irving’s Rip van Winkle, a kind of 18th-century Forrest Gump. Setting her face against Gary Lee Stonum’s theory of a “Dickinson sublime” [*sic*], Jutta Fraunholz reads selected poems by Emily Dickinson less as a celebration of the “romantic sublime” than as an anticipation of a “modernist tendency” to discover art in such natural events as a sunset (“‘Bring Me the Sunset in a Cup’: The Experience of the Sublime as a Source of Poetic Inspiration in Dickinson’s Poetry,” *Amst* 43: 463–82). In this light, Dickinson’s “sunset in a cup” is not far from Prufrock’s “patient etherised upon a table.” Closer to our time, Maria Moss finds a similar conjunction of terrified awe and artistic control in Don DeLillo’s 1982 novel, *The Names* (“‘Das Schaudern ist der Menschheit bestes Teil’: The Sublime as Part of the Mythic Strategy in Don DeLillo’s *The Names*,” *Amst* 43: 483–96).

Herman Melville’s Ishmael knew that there were many “sweet, and honorable, and sublime” associations with whiteness, but he also believed, in profoundly Burkean fashion, that whiteness, as embodied in the whale, was “the intensifying agent in things the most appalling to mankind.” In her dissertation-turned-book, *Der Grundgedanke Schopenhauers bei Melville: Entwicklung und Dynamik der ontologisch-metaphysischen und epistemologischen Thematik* (Winter), Karin Spranzel does not think that Burke’s philosophy provides the right key to understanding such and similar thoughts. Nor, she insists, do the pronouncements of all those misguided critics who have characterized Melville as a postmodernist *avant la lettre* and have described his texts as self-referential fictions that question not only themselves but also the notion of an external, knowable reality. Equipped with an astounding knowledge of Schopenhauer’s philosophy (summarized in a lengthy first chapter), Spranzel boldly calls the bluff of most previous readers of the philosophical substance of Melville’s work. Defiantly she focuses on content, not on

the dazzling forms of narrative mediation in the novels (and, in the process, ignores Melville's poetry completely). This decision lends consistency and rigor to her interpretations, but it also makes them more predictable and ultimately less interesting. Spranzel's conclusion is complex: while the philosopher Schopenhauer believed that in moments of rapture afforded by the experience of works of art some intuitive access might be gained to the elusive essence underlying the deceptive world of phenomena, Melville the artist was more skeptical of what art could in fact achieve. His works draw attention to their own insufficiency as gateways to absolute truth, whose existence, however, Melville never seriously doubts. Spranzel, who professes indifference as to when and how much of Schopenhauer Melville actually read, pursues her "meta-physical" reading of Melville with great energy and zest. But exactly what kind of reader would Melville have had in mind for such step-by-step, point-by-point analyses of the workings of the Schopenhauerian "Will"? Someone with a dog-eared, heavily annotated copy of *The World as Will and Idea* constantly by his or her side? For all its devotion to the rigor of philosophical thinking, *Der Grundgedanke Schopenhauers* remains silent about its own theoretical premises.

From Switzerland comes a sober attempt to line up all the lunatics, complete with corresponding "philosophical aberrations," that crowd the pages of Saul Bellow's novels: Walter Bigler's *Figures of Madness in Saul Bellow's Longer Fiction* (Lang). Bigler's study bears all the signs of a doctoral dissertation, down to the minutely executed typology that leads the author to contrast the characters of Henderson, Herzog, and Humboldt, whose madness has "inspirational elements," with Artur Sammler, Kenneth Trachtenberg, and Albert Corde, i.e., those characters in Bellow whose craziness lacks "liberating and purifying dimensions." I wonder what stern Mr. Sammler, the fastidious "registrar of madness" in *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, would have had to say about the reasons for meticulous Mr. Bigler's own rage for order. "Think on universal lines," perhaps?

Herbert Klein, in his new, wide-ranging study of "cybernetic models of consciousness" in 20th-century English and American novels, *Konstruierte Wirklichkeiten: Kybernetische Bewusstseinsformen im anglo-amerikanischen Roman des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Winter), is less interested in thematic content than in epistemological frameworks, more specifically, the ways in which fictional, "artificial" worlds are constructed in the age of the computer. In the cybernetic paradigm, as invented and defined by MIT's own Norbert Wiener, the systems of communication and control

among living organisms such as human beings and those in machines are considered analogous; purposive behavior in humans or in machines requires control mechanisms that maintain order by counteracting the natural tendency toward chaos. Klein is interested in the extent to which such an apparent assault on the uniqueness of human thought processes has affected the construction of fictional worlds and characters, and while he rounds up some of the usual suspects (Pynchon among them), his chapter on works by Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, Christine Brooke-Rose, and William Gibson is fascinating; in these “cybernetic science fictions,” he claims, machines are represented as being imbued with a consciousness and even “a soul” surpassing that of humans. If science fiction is concerned with the quasi-human coming-to-awareness of machines, the “metafiction” of John Barth, Robert A. Wilson, and Thomas Pynchon confronts the progressive mechanization of human consciousness. In some cases, the dividing line between science fiction and metafiction becomes invisible, which is why Klein suggests a new term for such texts, “trans-cybernetic fiction.” Soon, “hyperfictions” that can only be read by the computer and demand the reader’s cooperation via mouse-click will permanently change the way we look at the world, since here we must continually re-create ourselves in front of the flickering screen. I found it a bit hard to share Klein’s unbridled enthusiasm over such dismal prospects, and I am not convinced that the burgeoning popularity of “hyperfiction” will set to rest C. P. Snow’s famous complaint about the “two cultures.”

c. Literature and History If “metafictional” writers like Donald Barthelme desire nothing more than “to escape from the confinement of facts,” as Paul Goetsch puts it, they will find natural allies in the “metahistorians,” theorists in the wake of Hayden White who believe that history is, primarily, what we make of it. Ostensibly re-creating in his short story on “Cortés and Montezuma” the circumstances of the Spanish conquest of Mexico City, Barthelme in fact *creates* them, playing as he does with the events as they have come to us from the sources, suppressing some of them and adding other, imagined ones. He cannot make the 29 fragments of his narrative cohere, but this does not much bother him: “I’d rather have a wreck than a ship that sails.” In fact, Barthelme “anticipates,” as Goetsch has it, the findings of Stephen Greenblatt, for whom the history of the *conquista* is, to some extent, a problem of conflicting interpretations.

Goetsch's essay, "Virtual History in Donald Barthelme's 'Cortés and Montezuma'" (pp. 297–312), is part of a new collection of essays, ed. Bernd Engler and Oliver Scheiding, *Re-Visioning the Past: Historical Self-Reflexivity in American Short Stories* (Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier). Most of the authors of the 24 essays in the book, which deal with shorter narrative texts by authors ranging from Charles Brockden Brown to Steve Erickson, pay their respects to Hayden White. The latter's principal insight—namely, that historical thinking is inevitably shaped by the traditional tropes of poetic theory—gets much airtime in the volume, because it implies that overtly literary texts dealing with historical events play out only more forcefully the penchant for storytelling that is already present in the historical "sources" themselves. There are many fine readings in this collection, Helmrecht Breinig's "Hybrid Retrospections: Myth, Fiction, History, and the Native American Historiographic Short Story" (pp. 313–41) among them. Breinig emphasizes how native writers like Leslie Marmon Silko, Anna Lee Walters, Luci Tapahonso, Jack D. Forbes, Carter Revard, and Gerald Vizenor have all to some extent used "performative rather than analytical ways" of dealing with their own complicated tribal as well as individual histories: "reality is a product of memory and imagination and can therefore only be changed by the imagination." Read in conjunction, however, the contributions to *Re-Visioning the Past* also point to a danger inherent in an approach which assumes that, because the world of historical facts can be shown to be governed by the laws of fiction, most fictions can also be read as an attack on the world of facts. Whether it's Irving, Melville, Bierce, or Faulkner, in this volume they are all busily blurring boundaries, merrily mixing genres, and redescribing Truth (with a capital T) as a clever invention. Thus, the unsuspecting Ambrose Bierce, in Ansgar Nünning's reading, becomes a kind of proto-Hayden White, a "metahistorian" *avant la lettre* who wrote his stories, it seems, so that he could mount a good and solid "sustained critique of positivistic notions of history and historiography" ("'The Realm of the Unknown': Epistemological Skepticism, Historical Revisionism, and Transgressions of Boundaries in Ambrose Bierce's Short Stories," pp. 183–210). Often such interpretations (and Nünning's is a particularly brilliant example, which is why, perhaps unfairly, I have singled it out here) introduce a strange teleology into the business of literary history; the past, once it has been appropriately "revisioned" and repositioned, becomes little else than preparation and prologue to our postmodernist present, where the bright light of theory illuminates what

so far has been practiced darkly and dully. Not coincidentally, “anticipate” is one of the most frequently used verbs in the collection. (When I was about halfway through *Re-Visioning the Past*, the book came unglued in my hands, with about half of its pages gliding, like so many paper planes, softly into my lap, a reminder that even books that celebrate fragmentariness over completion are better served with sewn bindings.)

d. Cultural Studies The major entry in this category, *(Trans)Formations of Cultural Identity in the English-Speaking World* (Winter), ed. Jochen Achilles and Carmen Birkle, boasts essays bounding from the Puritans to Spike Lee. The organizing principle behind the volume, as the editors intimate, is “the conflict between unitary essentialism and multicultural hybridity” as reflected in “linguistic and textual structures” that help resolve “these dialectics.” Such dark pronouncements (and the awful title) aside, the book has much to offer. It begins, appropriately, with Wilfried Herget’s elegantly phrased reminder that if the Puritans indeed helped shape American identity as we know it today, they did so through their obsessive interest in texts, legal and otherwise, and in the interpretive processes through which words acquire meaning (“A Culture of the Word: Puritanism and the Construction of Identity in Colonial New England,” pp. 15–25). In “Giving Her Self: Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and the Problem of Authenticity” (pp. 125–39) Ulla Haselstein takes her cue from a subtle analysis of the act through which Jacobs “gives her self” to Mr. Sands and thus refuses to “give herself” to Mr. Flint, her owner. The “scenes of feigning and forging” that thus characterize and constitute Jacobs’s plot might well be applied to the multilayered text of her autobiography itself, which gestures toward the African American audience that does not yet exist: “In telling the story of her giving her self . . . she succeeded in both having and becoming a self—for herself.”

In “Paradise Lost in the Caribbean” (pp. 161–73) Alfred Hornung argues that the “long shadow” cast by Milton’s epic of the fall from grace reaches as far as the Caribbean, where the protagonists of Jamaica Kincaid’s novels *Annie John* and *Lucy* harbor, in Auden’s phrase, different “dreams of Eden.” Identifying with a proud, prelapsarian Lucifer, Kincaid, now an American citizen, carries the torch of the once-colonized and brings fictional light into the darkness of a ravaged, fallen, postcolonial world. To which I would add that Kincaid’s gender-bending of the devil, as a result of which Lucifer becomes the author’s alter ego Lucy and

vice versa, probably harks back to the devil-as-drag-queen in Canadian writer Timothy Findley's brilliant 1985 novel *Not Wanted on the Voyage*. However, if Kincaid rewrites Milton's poem in the hope that paradise, "beyond all limitations of political and national frames," could be regained, Findley's protagonists, crammed into a helplessly drifting ark on which, for once, no one seems to be firmly in power, are less optimistic about the future. Having survived the flood, Noah's wife, a bedraggled Lucy(fer) by her side, prays not for a rainbow but for more rain. Such tentative conclusions seem suitable for a world in which it has become difficult, as filmmaker Spike Lee would put it, to "do the right thing." This is the tenor also of Lothar Bredella's final article in the collection, which applies Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor's "politics of recognition" to two of Lee's best-known films and succeeds in highlighting the curious interplay of different perspectives in Lee's scripts. Hovering between a desire for dignity and authenticity and the ambivalence of irony, they expose how relative all racial and ethnic stereotypes are, including African American ones ("The Politics of Recognition: Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* and *Jungle Fever*," pp. 295–317).

An issue of *Amerikastudien* edited by Hannah Möckel-Rieke and Randi Gunzenhäuser sets out to define the relations between "cultural memory" and other cultural practices in the United States. In "Engendering Cultural Memory: 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow' as Text and Intertext" (*Amst* 43: 19–32) Klaus Poenicke reads Irving's story as yet another evocation, a remembering, of a place where men forget themselves and what it is they wanted—the intoxicating Circe's lair where masculine cultural will battles the chthonic pull of feminine nature. In expelling the invading, greedy, and lecherous Yankee schoolmaster Ichabod from his enchanted valley, Irving indirectly endorses a "local and oral culture of memory." In a chatty article, which joins the chorus of approval for Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Sabine Bröck claims that in reinventing the suppressed history of African American suffering, the author has also deliberately refused to represent such memory as unproblematically "immediate" ("Postmodern Mediations and *Beloved*'s Testimony: Memory Is Not Innocent," *Amst* 43: 33–49). Somewhat less effusively, Randi Gunzenhäuser surveys recent attempts to remember the assassination of John F. Kennedy and argues that this obsessive "search for pattern and links" (a phrase borrowed from Don DeLillo's novel *Libra*) has less to do with the past than with "white, male ways of remembering in the 1990s" ("All Plots Lead Toward Death': Memory, History, and the Assassina-

tion of John F. Kennedy," *Amst* 43: 75–91). In her fascinating "Haunted Real Estate: The Occlusion of Colonial Dispossession and Signatures of Cultural Survival in U.S. Horror Fiction" (*Amst* 43: 93–108) Gesa Mackenthun treads on less familiar ground. Using the first two *Poltergeist* movies and Stephen King's novel *Pet Sematary* as examples, her essay claims that in American fictions of horror, "forgotten" imperial and colonial conflicts reappear in uncanny form as deadly conflicts within the average nuclear American family or in primeval battles between some such family and the forces of evil itself. Predictably, in horror novels written by native writers, like the Pueblo writer Martin Cruz Smith's *Nightwing* (1977), such "signs of the uncanny" become "signatures of cultural survival." History, writes historian Pierre Nora, as quoted by the editor of this *Amst* issue, is the enemy of memory, whose traces, while marching inexorably forward, it seeks to destroy and suppress. What better place, then, to remember, to find "the key to all the picture-writing of the Past," than the United States, where, as James Russell Lowell noted in 1864, different epochs of history seem to occur literally "within five minutes of each other"? For what seems so strangely convenient about America, Lowell went on, is that here, as in a theater, all "the great problems of anthropology" can be "compressed . . . into the entertainment of a few hours." Or, looking back on this year's harvest of German American Studies, a few hundred pages.

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