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Horizons of Enchantment

Lene M. Johannessen

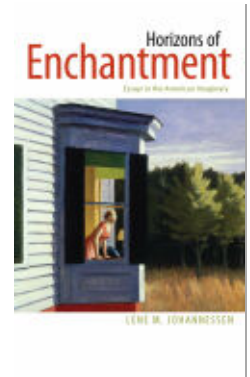
Published by Dartmouth College Press

Johannessen, M..

Horizons of Enchantment: Essays in the American Imaginary.

Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2011.

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THE CHAPTERS IN THIS BOOK may be considered field trips in the varied and conglomerated area that is American literature, or, if you like, excursions in literary and cultural archaeology. Each one has something to say about its particular subject as it is constituted by and constitutive of its own moment of origination as well as the moments it dialogues with, be it a Norwegian-American novel, its relation to the *Bildung* genre, and its ties to culturological formation; the multiple routes that constitute Rodolfo Gonzales's "I am Joaquín" into being and its relation to Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself"; Richard Ford's narrative figuration of dejected apathy against the suburban fruition of the American imaginary's ideals; or the "conversation" between the nonliterary, ideological works of Samuel Huntington and Richard Rodriguez.

Given the generic and aesthetic variation among these works, the chapters necessarily retain a certain independence from each other in terms of the approaches and theories they draw on. On the one hand, they offer new readings of both well-known and lesser-known works, sometimes in unlikely company. On the other hand, these readings do not veer from the objective hinted at in the book's title, of reading the works as refractions of and responses to the enchantment of the American imaginary. They explore, gauge, and bring out the works' varied articulations of their places in the imaginary, as well as their relations to its magic. They all engage with the American imaginary in its flexibility and continued capacity to speak to and of our fundamental human desire to give aspiration free reign, to pursue this desire within an instituted imaginary that

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not only encourages what Rodriguez calls the quest for “I” but also celebrates it as a socially beneficial endeavor. The conglomerated social fabric that constitutes American culture contains many reactions and reflections of the encounter with the imaginary, and consequently each chapter yields different enactments of these negotiations. This is how it must be; the accommodation extended by the imaginary as an enabling filter is filtered back into it in a dynamic and multifarious reciprocity. There is nothing earth-shattering in this, but I hope that reading according to Charles Taylor and Cornelius Castoriadis’s concept of the imaginary offers a way to make sense of the glue that, to many an observer, miraculously holds America together, and provides a tool for probing the country’s challenges and direction.

For our own work, we invariably rely on the support and work of friends and colleagues, near and far. The list here is far from complete, but I am grateful to the department of Foreign Languages at the University of Bergen, Norway, and to its Faculty of Humanities, for allowing me the time away from teaching and administrative chores to complete this book, and for providing me the necessary financial support to spend a semester engaged in research in the United States. I am equally indebted to the Literature Department and to Karen Bassi, department chair, at the University of California, Santa Cruz, for hosting me as a visiting researcher and for generously facilitating my stay. I am particularly grateful to Norma Klahn at UCSC for her kind support and helpful advice during our conversations; I have gained a lot of inspiration from her knowledgeable insights into the workings of cultural imaginaries. I would also like to thank Donald Pease, whose engagement with American Studies outside the United States is a source of continuing encouragement and support to many of us. My students have in various contexts brought their curiosity and unexpected perspectives to bear on some of the themes of this book, and I greatly appreciate that. Grateful acknowledgment is also made to David Chu for brilliant editorial suggestions. As always, my most heartfelt gratitude goes to all my children, who in their various ways have kindly and

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bravely made it possible for me to finish this book, and to Kevin, for loving support and willingness to listen.

Midway through the work on this book I received the news of Emory Elliott's sudden passing. Scholars and students across the world lost a dear friend and a highly esteemed colleague; few individuals are able to make such a difference in and touch so many lives as Professor Elliott did, and he is greatly missed. I am forever thankful for the intellectual and friendly generosity he showed me during the years I had the fortune of knowing him.

This book is dedicated to Emory.

A shorter version of the first part of chapter 5 appeared in Lene Johannessen, "The Lonely Figure: Memory of Exile in Ana Menéndez' 'In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd.'" *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 41, no. 1 (2005): 54–68. Available from: <http://www.informaworld.com>. Grateful acknowledgment is made for permission to reprint this material.

A portion of chapter 6 appeared in Lene Johannessen, "Remembering America," in *Postcolonial Dislocations: Travel, History, and the Ironies of Narrative*, ed. Charles I. Armstrong and Øyunn Hestetun (Oslo: Novus Press, 2006), 123–34.

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