

noted, it fails to take into account the reasons for Tantalus's punishment, which causes tantalization to be presented as arbitrary and without cause. *American Tantalus* does nonetheless provide convincing evidence for the idea that meaning is immanent in the surface of a literary work; digging below the surface is not necessary. While not all readers would agree with this standpoint, *American Tantalus* does provide fruitful grounds for debate and re-consideration of a number of America's seminal works. This is indeed Warnes's most important achievement in *American Tantalus* and one likely to be appreciated by a wide range of scholars of American literature.

Jane Mattisson Ekstam
Kristianstad University, Sweden

Winfried Fluck, Erik Redling, Sabine Sielke, and Hubert Zapf, eds., *American Studies Today: New Research Agendas*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2014. 475 pages. ISBN 987-3-8253-6094-8.

American Studies Today: New Research Agendas is an ambitious title. Not only does it suggest an overview of American Studies as it is practiced today, but it also proposes to contribute new agendas to a field known to continuously problematize its identity, methodologies, and intellectual agendas. Given the volume's title, I would imagine its most likely target group to comprise graduate students and scholars in the field. Although my own graduate student days are long gone (I completed my Ph.D. at the University of Texas at Austin in 2004), I still remember vividly all the seminar discussions, oral exam preparations, and job market rehearsals, where we were instructed to give definitions of both what American Studies is and how we position ourselves within the field. All of us had to do this; you could not enter doctoral candidacy without a firm grasp of your own conceptualization of the field. The rationale for this was that few people outside of American Studies had much understanding of what it is that we actually "do," while few of those well-versed within the field's various paradigms seemed to agree about them. Once I left the United States to work in Europe, I was introduced to an entirely different can of worms in trying to decipher the ways in which the field was conceptualized and practiced in the various European nations.

Given my own scholarly background, I will, somewhat unconventionally, begin this review with a word of criticism that overshadows my reading of the articles published in this anthology. The book does not have an "Introduction," where the editors would lay out their delineation of American Studies within either the history of the field or its recent debates. Yet the book's subtitle, "New Research Agendas," in particular, calls for explicating the broader context within which the book situates itself. At the turn of the century, we had already seen the "New American Studies" movement establish itself, so one cannot but wonder what might be the "new" that this book refers to? A disclaimer in a two-page "Preface" states that the editors' "aim is neither an assessment of the state of American Studies at German universities, nor the field of German American Studies. Although the volume features contributions by leading American Studies scholars from the German-speaking world, its purpose is dialogue about contemporary American Studies within a transatlantic framework of scholarly exchange" (ix). While I would certainly not deem it necessary to offer an assessment of the state of the field in Germany in a book like this, I do think it would serve the readers well to offer some contextualization of the editors' understanding of the field globally. After all, there is no singular way to conduct American Studies anywhere in the world; as we know, it is understood and practiced in multiple ways in different continents, nations, and institutions.

The anthology consists of thirteen articles, each of which is followed by a peer-commentary. This approach is an excellent one, as it allows for dialogue between the authors in a fruitful, but concise manner. The book is divided into the following thematic sections: "Transatlantic Histories"; "Poverty and Class"; "Relational Sociology"; "Postcolonialism/Transculturalism"; "The Conception of Recognition in Literary Studies"; "Ecology, Culture, and Literature"; "Race"; "Ethics and Aesthetics"; "Media"; "Visual Cultures"; and "Globalization". Individual authors' approaches to the field vary a lot, depending on their scholarly backgrounds, often in a monodiscipline. In addition to "American Studies," the field is defined as "American Literary and Cultural Studies," "American Cultural Studies," "American Literary and Visual Studies," "North American Studies," and "U.S. American Studies." Some of the writers, alas, refer to American Studies as a "discipline," which it, as an interdisciplinary field of study, is most definitely not. With over a dozen authors in the book, the quality between them is bound to be uneven. I found the most compelling ones to be those that took the book's claim towards "new research agendas" seriously by,

indeed, offering something novel to the field in a global context, either thematically, methodologically or theoretically.

The best such contribution is William Uricchio's article, "Things to Come in the American Studies-Media Studies Relationship," which is an outstanding discussion contextualized within contemporary debates about disciplinary divides, global academic trends, and technological developments. I particularly welcome Uricchio's problematization of the field's de facto classifications in a transatlantic setting and wholeheartedly concur with his statement that "Definitions matter" (p. 366). Reflecting on his experiences as a member of the Dutch Fulbright Commission's board, Uricchio describes his sense of frustration with preconceived notions of the field: "I was...arguing that American Studies and Media Studies could both benefit from the likes of Robert Sklar or Andrew Ross [both prominent figures within American Studies in the United States]. But no—the chairs reflected the core disciplines on which the field was built: Literature, History, and Political Science" (p.369).

In the article, Uricchio offers a new site, a new paradigm, and a new method for 21st-century American Studies research all in one: digitalization. As the article points out, the sheer amount of data that the past two decades' digitalization efforts produced have nothing short of revolutionized the study of U.S. history, culture, and society. In particular, the availability of data for American Studies practitioners anywhere in the world has transformed the field. Even so, there are also various intricacies embedded in the distribution rights of media content within a transatlantic setting which have important ethical ramifications for our research. Another important "new" resource that Uricchio discusses is social media, a forum which offers original data about community building, cultural expression, civic engagement, and a site for ethnographic research. In particular, Uricchio argues, these new forms of communication bear relevance for "the project of American Studies," because they are much more accessible than earlier media practices. Moreover, they leave "traces" that themselves turn into data, while establishing a bridge to the outside world (p. 381). Above all, Uricchio's discussion brings an important intersection between American Studies and Media Studies, two fields that are still today often regarded as strange bedfellows.

Erik Redling and Sabine Sielke's article, "Science|Culture|Aesthetics: New Crossroads for North American Studies," is another important discussion about the meeting of the humanities and sciences. Although the

authors point out that, when considered historically, such a paring is by no means a recent trend, within the field of American Studies, intersections between the humanities and sciences are still conspicuously rare. In 2000, John Carlos Rowe took American Studies to task by calling attention to its methodological insularity: “So where are the theories and methods from some of the disciplines continually neglected in American studies, such as political science, economics, psychology, rhetoric, and even the cognitive sciences? Our range of interdisciplinary inquiry turns out to be embarrassingly narrow.”² Redling and Sielke’s contribution, then, is a welcome grappling of the issue.

Drawing examples from visual arts, film, and fiction the authors explicate the ways in which various “technologies of representations” have relevance for both the arts and sciences. As a specific example, they use a case study of cognitive poetics, with tools from cognitive linguistics and literary studies, to demonstrate the broader usefulness of the culture-science intersection in making sense of texts and images. That is not to say, the authors suggest, that such a pairing should be without challenges. On the contrary, disciplinary differences and frequent miscommunications characterize such an endeavor. Despite the obvious differences between the arts and sciences, the authors make the case that “Engaging in a radical interdisciplinarity that critically reflects the methods of all fields involved can possibly amount to a boost rather than a loss of prestige for literary and cultural studies (p. 348). As far as de facto interdisciplinary American Studies is concerned, one cannot but salute such an endeavor!

Other compelling articles that contributed to innovative new approaches in American Studies include Mita Banerjee’s “Frontiers of Justice’: Visions of Planetarity and the ‘Case Study’ of India in a Globalized World” and Winfried Fluck’s “The Concept of Recognition in American Cultural Studies.” Both of the authors engage in broader theoretical discussions taking place within the humanities today, but use them to reconceptualize American Studies from the perspective of literary studies. The best part about Banerjee and Fluck’s articles is that they remind us, on the one hand, that there is no one way to conduct American Studies and, on the other hand, that the disciplinary and geographic borders of the field are not fixed. On the contrary, each generation of scholars has a chance to redefine and reinvent the field in exciting new ways. But we need to explain to one another

2 John Carlos Rowe, *Post-Nationalist American Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 14.

what our particular “way” is. Notwithstanding my reservations about the lack of an “Introduction” in this volume, graduate students and scholars working within the field will find in several of the articles discussions that point to new research agendas.

Benita Heiskanen
University of Turku, Finland

Maria Holmgren Troy, Elizabeth Kella, and Helena Wahlström, *Making Home: Orphanhood, Kinship, and Cultural Memory in Contemporary American Novels*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2014. 254 pages. ISBN: 978-0-7190-8959-6.

A list of famous orphans (Oedipus, Moses, Aristotle, Beowulf, Muhammad, etc.) testifies to the deep significance of the orphan figure in history, myth and legend. In more recent Western literature the heyday of the orphan would appear to be the nineteenth century, with Dickens the central figure and his host of orphan heroes centre stage. Troy, Kella and Wahlström take a specifically American focus on orphanhood, analysing an admirably wide range of works by contemporary authors (Barbara Kingsolver, Linda Hogan, Leslie Marmon Silko, Marilyn Robinson, Michael Cunningham, Jonathan Safran Foer, John Irving, Kaye Gibbons, Octavia Butler, Jewelle Gomez and Toni Morrison) and hence covering recent Euro-American, African American and Native American writing. The orphan is viewed through the notion of ‘home’ and the multiple implications of this notion in terms of family, nation and national (American) literature.

Making Home argues that the orphan has been a central figure in the formation of a national literary history in the USA. This is true for the obvious examples of Twain’s Huck or Melville’s Ishmael, but orphanhood and family (or absence of family) are also central to such specifically American genres as captivity and slave narratives. Through the figure of the orphan contemporary US authors have inserted themselves into American canonical traditions often to revise or even reject them, and thus “the literary orphan functions both to reflect upon and shape aspects of collective memory in the USA” (4).

Canons and genre go hand in hand, and *Making Home* is particularly good at showing how contemporary American orphan fiction re-visits genre