# AMERICAN STUDIES

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**AMERICAN** STUDIES
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# Content Index

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# Editor's Note

"The New World is upon us."

The words are uttered by an excited Irish-born immigrant in the company of Cornelius Timberlake (the fictional great-great grandfather of Justin) in the 2013 Saturday Night Live sketch "Immigrant Tale," though they might as well have been spoken by readers of *American Studies in Scandinavia*. In the sketch, the immigrants arrive in 1883 New York City sharing dreams of landownership, education, and economic mobility for their children, and their children's children. Rejecting fur trapping and coal mining, Cornelius Timberlake, however, dreams of a day when his great, great grandson will become a millionaire from popular song with a band of boys. "I actually dream of a day when my great, great grandson will bring sexy back," Cornelius proclaims. Perplexed, the other passengers ask what that actually means to which Timberlake maintains, "it will be gone, and he'll bring it back." To such a statement, Cornelius' companions can only nod and agree in imagining the New World as a both place of collaboration and opportunity.

While sexy is likely too strong a word to describe the new design of *American Studies in Scandinavia*, its current form *is* quite a bit sexier than previous iterations and the new digital world *is* now upon us.

Starting with this issue, *American Studies in Scandinavia* can be accessed freely by anyone with an internet connection and features custom-made covers, increased use of illustrations and an expanded editorial team. Dr. Henry King has, along with Dr. Anne Mørk, played indispensable roles in editing this issue with editorial assistant Jay Cannon, graphic designer William Lindhardt, and library editor Claus Hansen providing important contributions. In collaboration, this team has expertly guided the issue through the production process. As such, the journal's international reach, and opportunity to engage a vibrant scholarly community, is enhanced while its stated goal of publishing high-level interdisciplinary scholarship is maintained.
Thus, in this first open access issue, the reader will find several innovative pieces that speak to the transnational, racial, and creative challenges at the forefront of the field of American Studies.

In the opening article, Clara Juncker, using the concept of adoption, introduces an original transatlantic and postcolonial analysis of Hans Christian Andersen and Karen Blixen. In her piece, Juncker argues that Andersen and Blixen use adoption narratives to communicate the need for new ideological constellations of family, community, and nation.

In the issue's second article, Marianne Kongerslev explores the intersection between indigenous studies and queer studies through an analysis of Paula Gunn Allen's novel *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*.
By deploying Jack Halberstam's notion of queer failure, Kongerslev reveals the novel's subversive elements and in the process argues for the importance of feminist resistance.

Finally, Melih Levi offers a close, complex, and original reading of Frank O'Hara's poetry. In this piece, Levi details the changing role of metonymy, meaning the "association by proximity" in a narrative, in O'Hara's poetry and shows how it allowed for a break away from modernism and an embrace of poetry foregrounding bodily and gestural expression.

In sum, this New World, both the digital and the American, continues to offer much excitement and, on behalf of our excellent editorial team, I am excited to bring you this issue.

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Anders Bo Rasmussen

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# Adoptees and Americans:
## Exporting Hans Christian Andersen and Karen Blixen (Isak Dinesen)



**Key words:**
Adoption, Hans Christian Andersen, Karen Blixen, fairy tales, US reception

**Abstract:** Hans Christian Andersen and Karen Blixen (aka.) Isak Dinesen have been widely read in America, with Hollywood's *Out of Africa* adaptation adding to the attention. Both writers dramatized their alienation with adoption stories reaching across national and racial boundaries. They became iconic writers in the US for many reasons, but their preoccupation with adoption has been insufficiently explored. In fact, their transnational, transracial, transsexual, and cross-species adoption tales have entered US conversations about the Other, since the adoptee arrives in familial structures from "other" ideological, economic, or racial locations. Their adoption tales further fit American rights discourses, by insisting on the rights of belonging and conditions of freedom laid down by reason and law. They also subscribe to emotional discourses that evoke in the audience empathy and emotions related to dignity and humanity. Fairy tale adoptions fit the classic American quest narrative—Huck Finn-style—in which a heroic protagonist takes off into the unknown to find an identity, rooted in liberty, independence, and freedom. In a 21st-century world populated by migrants, refugees, orphans, adoptees, adoptive parents, and adopted or adoptive nations, Andersen and Blixen communicate with global adoption narratives the need for new ideological constellations of family, community, and nation.

In 1873, the 25-year-old Norwegian-American Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen met Hans Christian Andersen in his cluttered Copenhagen apartment. The young editor of *The Atlantic* and newly appointed Assistant Professor of North European Languages at Cornell University (Glasrud) visited the aging Andersen after a stint in his native Norway. Andersen greeted Boyesen with his wish to visit the United States, where he had friends and his translator Horace Scudder resided. If only Andersen could escape the sea voyage and be telegraphed over there, he would love to come. "It is strange," the famous traveler exclaimed, "that America has become so foreign to me. Up at the moon, I can easily imagine all sorts of fun going on, but in the big, cold and prosaic country to the West I would think that a poetic imagination would starve from lack of material." In response, Boyesen described the busy life of Manhattan and Broadway. Andersen finally stretched his long, spindly legs and laughed: "Indeed? I would certainly love to see that, though I would most likely be run over. There must be something colossal about life over there" (Andersen, *Andersen* 298).[1] In "Andersen's Tales and America" (1968), Erik Dal also quotes Andersen: "America! I shall never go thither, I have hydrophobia, but I was there with all my thoughts from the dunes at Tróia, the Portuguese Pompeii." Dal subsequently warns readers that Andersen in a few lines has exhausted his knowledge of the far-away continent (23).

Some sixty years after Boyesen's meeting with Andersen, another famous Danish writer, Karen Blixen, had just published *Seven Gothic Tales* (1935), the Book-of-the-Month-Club selection that established her literary reputation, despite initial rejections by Danish and British publishers. Her younger brother, Thomas Dinesen, had used his American acquaintance Dorothy Canfield to get the volume out in the US and propel his destitute older sister, in the English-speaking world better known as Isak Dinesen, to fame. Two years later, she would publish *Out of Africa* (1937, in Danish *Den afrikanske Farm,*) which in 1954 caused Ernest Hemingway to mention her, in a possibly performative gesture, as a competitor for the Nobel Prize he himself received that year. Unlike Andersen, who also loved attention, Blixen would go to the US to meet her readers and cement her iconic status in North America. On a February afternoon in 1959, she allowed herself to be photographed with Carson McCullers and Marilyn Monroe.

In "Teaching American Literature: The Centrality of Adoption" (2004), Carol J. Singley argues convincingly against the notion that adoption occurs in limited contexts in American literary canons and in American ideologies. She traces the imprints of orphans, homelessness, and adoption in a range of American texts, from the Puritans to William Faulkner. Yet she and other critics remain silent about the imported—adopted—canonical writers who have educated and entertained Americans about transracial and transnational adoption. Andersen and

[1] I have translated the quotations from Jens Andersen's biography of Hans Christian Andersen myself.

10.22439/asca.v54i1.6597

Blixen have been widely read in American nurseries and classrooms, with Hollywood's *Out of Africa* adaptation adding to the attention received. Both writers lost their fathers in childhood, and both suffered from a restlessness that sent them into the world, where they never escaped their original sense of being outsiders and misfits. They dramatized their alienation, and the remedies they found, with adoption stories reaching across national and racial boundaries. In "The Ugly Duckling" (1843, original title "Den grimme Ælling"), Andersen tells a story of the identity crisis following a transracial adoption from the point of view of the adoptee, the swan hatched among ducks. This adopted protagonist is ostracized by those accustomed to conventional family patterns, and his success and happiness ultimately reside outside his adoptive family. The duckling becomes a swan and locates other swans, and his own self-worth, away from those who could not take the place of his blood relatives. This tale parallels the American adoption story *par excellence*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Samuel L. Clemens (Mark Twain), published in the US in 1885.

Blixen also uses adoption to narrate herself and her destiny. Through adoption, she expresses her own dilemmas and ruptures, the biographical, psychological, social, and writerly schisms that accompany experimental motherhood and exile. Critics have debated the imperialist and class-based perspective with which Blixen met her African adoptees, since her autobiography seemingly echoes the racial ideologies of the American South, from the antebellum plantation owners to Blixen's own time. Like southern planters (Fox-Genovese), Blixen describes her household as a family in black and white, but scholarship on her work has not focused on adoption. As Beverly Lyon Clark writes on troping adoption, "the metaphor [of adoption] has become almost transparent, almost invisible" (98). Yet adoption complicates stories of belonging and exile, home and homelessness, and transnational and transracial encounters. In the words of Jill R. Deans, who writes on adoption policies and practices in novels by Louise Erdrich, "fractured families . . . are not just domestic issues but symptoms of a cultural state of emergency" (239).

Though she focuses on contemporary US adoption, Marianne Novy writes in her introduction to *Imagining Adoption* (2004) that adoption "exists at the intersection of many contested issues" (6). The social issues activated through adoption practices and narratives include the definition of family, the importance of heredity, and the dichotomies between insiders and outsiders. Adoption and stories about it constitute, in short, an experimental site, where what Claudia Castañeda calls "naturalized versions of national, racial, and cultural belonging" (284), and, we might add, sexuality, become destabilized or fluid. This site has utopian traits, in that adoption becomes a model for social alternatives, for "regrouping society" (O'Toole 18). Transnational or transracial adoption, and its literary representations, intensify these social potentialities by bringing together groups traditionally anchored separately by race and ethnicity, sexual preference, economics, and nation. John McLeod explains in *Life Lines: Writing Transcultural Adoption* (2015) that "transcultural adoption writing confronts the discursive legitimacy of ideas such as race, national identity and cultural authenticity or purity by exposing the porous boundaries and precarious design as the product of myth rather than truth" (231). In an American context, adoption stories accordingly carry the potential for change, and for debunking old belief systems.

The material of writers may not necessarily be directly autobiographical, but nonetheless linked to their own experiences (Gish 175). Andersen drew in "The Ugly Duckling" on his own life story so obviously that his contemporaries nick-named him "The Danish Swan." In his biography of Andersen, Jens Andersen states that the Danish writer of poetry, novels, travel accounts, dramas and fairy tales also had his life story to share, canonized in the fairy tale "The Ugly Duckling." This tale was immediately translated into German and English and was to secure Andersen's readership in aristocratic and academic circles, and, later, in America. But before and after this famous publication, Andersen's life was already touched by adoption. He left his biological family in Odense behind at the age of fourteen and did not look back at this group of relatives. They counted his illiterate and alcoholic mother, his prostitute aunt, a stepfather, his half-sister Karen, whose low-life existence and requests for money disgusted him, and his mentally disturbed grandfather, who, like Andersen's mother, died in a poorhouse in the Danish city later illuminated in honor of its famous native son. His dreamy shoemaker father died early, and Andersen would in childhood indulge in fantasies of royal birth and subsequent adoption into the destitute family raising him, a myth he did not altogether abandon in adulthood (Andersen II, Chapter 7).

Upon arrival in Copenhagen, Andersen became the adoptive son of the illustrious Collin family, headed by Jonas Collin, who also secured Andersen the financial support of King Frederik the VI (Andersen 67), a prominent addition to the group of adoptive fathers in Andersen's life. Other adoptive figures included the Danish scientist H. C. Ørsted, the Danish writer B. S. Ingemann, and the Moritz G. Melchior family, in whose summer residence Andersen expired in 1875, surrounded by those in whose midst he had become adopted as a brother and son (Andersen II, 385-95). Andersen himself adopted, so to speak, a long list of children in the families he himself inhabited, from little Ida Thiele, the daughter of the secretary of the Academy of Art for whom he wrote *Fairy Tales Told for Children* (1835, original title *Eventyr, fortalte for Børn*), to generations of Collin children, the daughters of Baron and Baroness Stampe of Nysø manor, and many godchildren. He also adopted a series of attractive young men, who doubled as brothers and paid-for travel companions throughout Andersen's life. Among them were Viggo, Einar and Harald Drewsen, Edgar and Jonas Collin, Robert Watt, and William Bloch. Like Huckleberry Finn, Andersen enjoyed a male

10.22439/asca.v54i1.6597

travel companion, at times as controversial as Jim, the run-away slave who accompanies Huck on the raft going down the Mississippi.

Contours of adoption also emerge from Karen Blixen's autobiographical *Out of Africa*, which narrates the crucial part in her life when she decided to leave Denmark, marry her cousin Baron Bror von Blixen-Finecke in 1914, and immerse herself in coffee production in Kenya. As she writes in the first line: "I had a farm in Africa, at the foot of the Ngong Hills" (13). Like Andersen, she had a half-sister who now complicates the Dinesen family structure. On March 21, 2015, Danish newspapers carried the just-discovered story behind her father's suicide: Wilhelm Dinesen had impregnated a young maid working for his mother-in-law. A fourth, dark and shadowy sister now troubles the iconic portrait of the three Dinesen daughters and the aristocratic Dinesen family legacy (Ritzau), just as in many a Civil War diary, mixed-raced children populate the slave quarters of respected white plantation owners (Juncker).

Blixen used adoption to find her destiny. Soon after her arrival in Kenya, Bror infected her with syphilis, and she returned to Denmark for treatments. She had become infertile and would never have children of her own. Instead, she adopted informally the native children and servants with whom she surrounded herself, both as Bror Blixen's wife and Denys Finch-Hatton's lover. After Denys had died in a plane crash in 1931 and Blixen returned to Denmark, she continued to adopt. Clara Svendsen became her secretary, mother, and child (Svendsen). More notoriously, Blixen adopted a series of young men, who would move in at Rungstedlund, her family residence, some more willingly than others. Especially the young Danish writer Thorkild Bjørnvig entered her life, house, and circle of influence, but he did not escape unscathed (Bjørnvig). Another of her young men, Aage Henriksen—later a respected literary critic, scholar, and professor—accused in a Danish national TV documentary Blixen of trying to break his neck on her deathbed, wicked stepmother-style (Mandal and von Lowzows). Adoption complicates Blixen's life as well as her story of home and exile, and transnational and transracial encounters, just as it had complicated the lives of southern women, uneasily writing themselves into racial scripts.

Andersen's autobiography was originally published in Danish as *Mit Livs Eventyr* (1955), which means The Fairy Tale of My Life, and Blixen's *Out of Africa* might also be read as a fairy tale. The genre itself functions as a "theater of dislocation" (Leonard 118), where biographical and literary themes may be relocated and reenacted in a magic realm. Though neither Andersen nor Blixen addressed themselves primarily to children, the childish connotations of the fairy tale genre link up with adoption. Clark notes, accordingly, that "figurations of adoption often appear in contexts where childishness is figured too, one figure coupled to the other in a linguistic train of associations" (99). The fairy tale allows for the emotional impact of adoption stories, and, like stories of adoptees and adoptive families, the genre highlights self-creation and absence, the expulsion of what M. Fish calls "the hereditary ghost" (qtd. VanStavern 153). Like adoption, fairy tales have heroes and villains, the repositories of the anger adoptees might unconsciously project onto fantasy figures and plots (Leonard 126). The fairy tale inhabits fantasyland, with soil ripe for adoption issues, since fantasy allows for comprehending the "unspeakable and incomprehensible situation" in which many adoptees find themselves (Backus 140). In fairy tales, we enter the "otherworld" (De Soto 193) of origin and alternative identities. The fairy tales of both Andersen and Blixen open a terrain in which to imagine the future, as hero-adoptees embark on journeys taking them to uncertain or scary destinations of belonging. As we learn early in *Imagining Adoption*, "the importation of the nonfamiliar" sets in motion plot and narratives (O'Toole 17). This plot would appeal to American readers familiar with colonial narratives of travels to the New World and classic American stories of adventurous heroes going West in search of fame and fortune.

"The Ugly Duckling" belongs among the three mythic stories Marianne Novy identifies as typical of European and American cultures: The disaster plot involving unhappy adoption and discovery, the happy detection and ending, and the happy adoption (1). As the ugly duckling leaves his informal adoptive family and gets immersed in hardships of all kinds, he nonetheless finds an identity and a happy home among his own, the white swans with which Andersen ends his famous fairy tale:

> He thought of how he had been despised and persecuted, and now he heard everybody saying that he was the loveliest of all lovely birds. And the lilacs bowed their branches to him right down to the water, and the sunshine felt so warm and kindly. Then he ruffled his feathers, raised his slender neck and rejoiced from his heart: "I never dreamed of so much happiness, when I was the ugly duckling" (114). In the course of his journey, Andersen's ugly protagonist ruffles major themes in adoption literature, though with characteristic Andersen twists that helped export his story to American audiences.

From the outset, Andersen stresses the connection between adoption and difference. As the ugly duckling finally tumbles out of his egg, the mother duck exclaims: "My! What a huge great duckling that is! None of the others look a bit like that" (108). He is met with cruelty and lack of understanding from those around him, and the mother duck "wished he were far away" (109-10). She shares the conflicted views of adopted children Beverly Crockett locates in 19th century adoption fiction and beyond (57). Mother duck tries to love her unusual duckling, but he is simultaneously discredited and despised, thus reflecting Andersen's ambivalence and distance from his own biological roots. Given his proletarian background, Andersen inscribes in this fairy tale the notion that orphans or adoptees come from the dangerous classes. The other ducks pull together and condemn the outsider in their midst: "'There! Now we've got to have that rabble as well—as if there weren't enough of us already! Ugh! What a

10.22439/asca.v54i1.6597

sight that duckling is! We can't possibly put up with him'—and one duck immediately flew at him and bit him in the neck" (109). Some fifty years later, Huck Finn embarks on his trip away from the respectable Widow Douglas wearing his tattered clothes, true to his proletarian roots. Both orphans encounter a hostile world threatening to destroy them, in the case of the duckling with guns going off, blood-hounds chasing him, water turning red, and frosty skies and whirling winds endangering his survival (110, 112). "Yes," Andersen writes, "the poor duckling was certainly having a bad time" (113).

As an orphan or an adoptee, the duckling inhabits a negative identity: "'It is no turkey, that's certain,' said the duck" (108). It is no cat or hen either, as an old woman, her cat and her hen make clear in the small farm cottage where the duckling seeks shelter: "'Can you arch your back or purr or give out sparks?' the cat asked. 'No,' responds the duckling. 'Can you lay eggs?' inquires the hen: 'No'" (112). As an adoptee, the duckling is open for inscription, a blank page upon which others may write their identities and stories. Andersen gives to the duck's relatives and acquaintances all discursive power to stress that to be adopted is to be excluded and silenced. As Crockett writes about children raised outside biological families, "notable is the reluctance—indeed the refusal—by some to talk about their histories at all" (63). Nonetheless, the ugly duckling's "no's" suggest a measure of resistance towards conventional scripts. In *Huckleberry Finn,* the child protagonist serves a similar function. Traditional ideologies and discourses flow towards and through him, but he eventually resists by choosing the turn in the river that will not bring Jim back to the auction block.

The "gawky, peculiar" (109) duckling resembles his author, who was harassed and ostracized in many contexts before he arrived at fame and fortune. Andersen's persona enacts the search for identity that much adoption—and American—literature revolves around (Novy 8). It is the hidden hero of Western culture, a type that counts among its numbers Superman and Cinderella

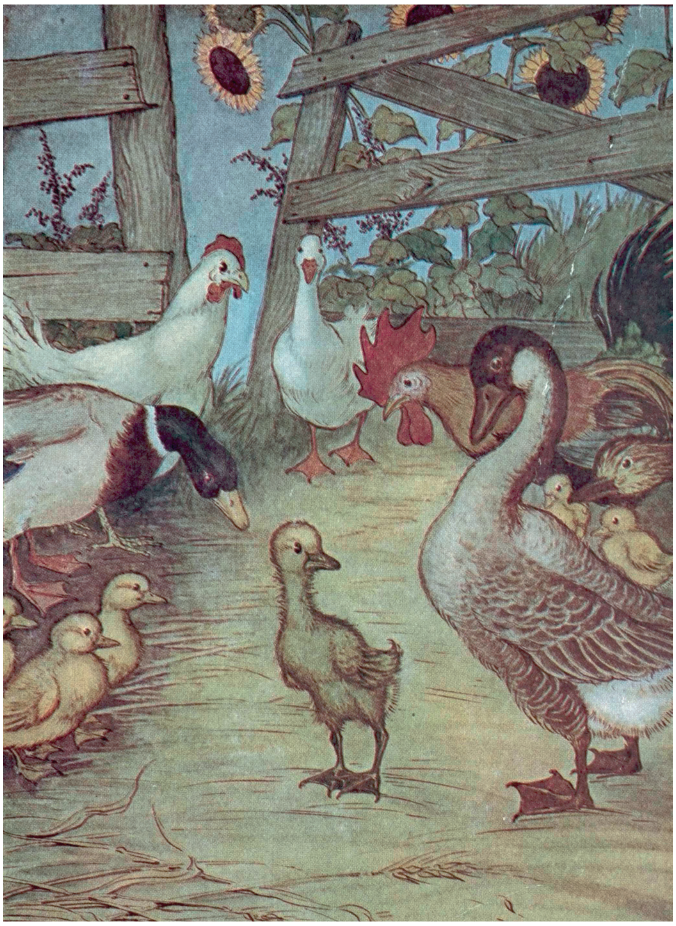

*Illustration of the "Ugly Duckling" by Milo Winter. 1916. Credit: Wikimedia Commons*

(Crockett 71), other famous adoptees. Adoption protagonists show us the bewildering arbitrariness of all genealogy, "the fact," as Paris de Soto writes with Foucault, "that our identity is a product not of genes or fate or careful construction but of the arbitrary and the accidental" (204). The duckling accordingly engages in a project of self-discovery and self-creation. Andersen sums up: "It doesn't matter about being born in a duckyard, as long as you are hatched from a swan's egg" (114).

The duckling represents its author, since its biological parents remain erased, like Andersen's own, though his discovery of beautiful swans suggests a reservation about the adoptive project that complicates its author's identity. "The Ugly Duckling" enacts the "ontological anxiety" de Soto finds relevant for all of us in general and adoptees in particular (196-97). The swan has left the duck yard, traditionally read as narrow-minded and provincial Denmark. But the future of the new swan must be imagined, as he raises his slender neck and rejoices from his heart at the end of Andersen's fairy tale. Also Huck Finn meets with complications. He follows his own moral compass in not going downriver towards Jim's re-enslavement, but the long ending still has Jim locked up in a cabin for quite some time. And Huck makes explicit his misgivings: "I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it" (229).

The complicated identity of the ugly duckling and the Danish swan also involves the alternative sexualities of adoption plots, since adoption removes biological procreation from family scripts. The duckling is feminized. He is consistently the "poor duckling" who trembles in the face of danger and adversity; he is given to emotions and dramas associated with mid-19th century women. He is fearful, passive, and domestic, given to hiding in secret places: "All he wanted was to be allowed to stay quietly among the rushes and drink a little marsh-water." He has a nervous temperament: "It was terrifying for the poor duckling, who was just turning his head round to bury it under his wing when suddenly he found behind him a fearsome great dog with lolling tongue and grim, glittering eyes" (110). Also, the new swan seems "strange," like the duckling (111), "graceful" and "the prettiest," with a "slender neck" and a vanity fed by the mirror in which his new identity resides. Emotions overflow from his heart (115). In this respect "The Ugly Duckling" draws on Andersen's own life story and his own complicated sexuality. Andersen's homosexual or homoerotic attraction to young men and his life-long love for the unattainable Edvard Collin constitutes a major theme in Jens Andersen's biography of the Danish writer. Here again is a parallel with the Huck-Jim relationship, which some critics have defined as homosocial or homosexual (Nissen 59).

Transracial adoption plays a muted, though interesting part in Andersen's fairy tale. The ugly duckling begins his existence as non-white. Not only his "peculiar" frame and his different personality contribute to his role as Other. His coloring plays an important role: he is an "ugly grey duckling" (108). The duckling's journey and his arrival at final happiness include his entry into the whiteness he initially admires from a distance: "The duckling had never seen such beautiful birds, all glittering white with long graceful necks. They were swans" (113). Before he inevitably turns into a white swan, he seeks out whiteness. He attempts to cover himself in white when he blunders into the peasant woman's domestic arrangements. First he flutters into a milk bowl, and then he flies into a butter-tub and eventually into the flour-bin. Chased outside, he lands in new-fallen snow. At this point, Andersen retreats from his story by writing that "it would be far too dismal to describe all the want and misery the duckling had to go through during that hard winter" (113-14). A thin layer of whiteness cannot cover the ostracized outsider, who associates whiteness with privilege and status: "And straight ahead, out of the thicket, came three beautiful white swans, ruffling their feathers and floating so lightly on the water . . . . I will fly across to them, those royal birds!" As the protagonist of Andersen's fairy tale discovers his reflection in the water, he sees that he is "no longer a clumsy greyish bird, ugly and unattractive—no, he was himself a swan!" (114). His whiteness results in community approval, as "everyone" says: "The new one is the prettiest—so young and handsome" (115). He hears "everybody saying that he was the loveliest of all lovely birds" (115). His new skin color has paid off and ensures the happy ending of "The Ugly Duckling," just as this muted racial script ensures the interest of American readers.

Karen Blixen's famous *Out of Africa* owes much to Andersen and appeals to Americans as well. *Out of Africa* may be read as a modern fairy tale, like some of Andersen's set in a foreign land but with clear Scandinavian connections and American implications. She becomes the hero of her autobiography, since, as in the American Success Myth, she must go through a series of qualifying tests to win her status, her land, and her life story. Like many of Andersen's characters, she is an outsider, often ignored by relatives and by the British colony in Nairobi, reminiscent of Andersen's conventional figures and villains. She too suffers in Africa the loneliness of Andersen's ugly duckling, but like him, she conquers the world in the end. Blixen presides royally over the numerous natives on her land and becomes their adoptive mother, her native children the Africans closest to her, reluctantly left behind upon her return to Denmark. But Blixen also employs someone like Farah, her Somali butler and confidant, as an Andersen shadow or a southern overseer. Like Andersen in "The Shadow," Blixen represents with Farah her own conflicting dilemmas and desires. This split allows her to remain silent about what might be the absent center of *Out of Africa*: disappointment, disease, and death.

In Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" (1837, original title "Den lille Havfrue"), the protagonist has the witch cut off her tongue for the potion that will help her win the young Prince. Blixen sacrifices her tongue and suffers in silence as she moves closer to her own prince, the irresistible and irresponsible

Denys Finch-Hatton, who, in a modern turn, dies so that the Baroness might thrive. Blixen followed Andersen in using the things and the figures of her own life to write her African fairy tale. It has a happy ending of sorts, because she begins to write. Astrid Rode, who reads *Out of Africa* as a tragedy in five acts, writes that Blixen transcends the genre because her experiences in Africa supply her with material for many stories that immortalize her life at the farm (n. p.) As a writer, she arrives in a new place of fame, though not of fortune. This story echoes many a Confederate woman diarist, who also holds her tongue but gets a measure of relief as she fills her pages, though leakage entries indicate frustration, sorrow, or rage (Juncker 62-64).

*Out of Africa* engages its readers in Blixen's transnational and transracial adoption project and activates numerous themes in adoption literature, such as the notion of identity. Blixen left Denmark to reinvent herself as an independent, global woman, because she, like Andersen, resented the Danish duck pond. She married the aristocratic lion hunter Baron Bror von Blixen-Finecke, the twin brother of Hans, whom she had loved and desired unsuccessfully. The emphasis on fantasy and imagination figures strongly in *Out of Africa,* as does the innovative notions of family and sexual difference associated with adoption. As Novy writes, literature becomes the site on which intricacies of adoption scenarios may be tested and investigated (12). Especially issues of race and gender participate in Blixen's self-transformation from bored Copenhagen debutante to coffee farmer and wild game hunter in Kenya.

Like Andersen, Blixen knew about gender trouble. American biographer Judith Thurman links hunting to sex in the passage on the safari with Bror, where the newly-wed European woman was "quite unprepared for her own blood lust." Thurman continues: "A week into the safari, drunk with it, she offered her apologies to all hunters for any prior scepticism toward their 'ecstasy'" (143). But in watching her first lion skinned, Blixen's position is bisexual. She identifies with the lion while simultaneously admiring its masculinity, its hardness, and its muscles. Thomas Dinesen reveals in his book about his sister, *Tanne* (1974), her gender confusion. On the one hand, his sister is the Lioness: she has fought nobly for her marriage to Bror, and for her African farm, with a lion's strength and determination. On the other, she is a phallic woman. In a letter to Thomas written January 8, 1919, she joyfully describes shooting a furious, grunting lion, charging at her "straight as a cannon ball" (63). In fact, Blixen becomes a soldier figure, fighting her war and winning her prize, like her father before her.

In the wilder parts of the Rungstedlund grounds, Wilhelm Dinesen had shared with his favorite daughter the secrets of hunting and nature. It had been the wilderness contrasting maternal complacency and conventionality inside, the freedom she later sought in Africa. A veteran of the Dano- and French-Prussian wars, Dinesen had in the early 1870s lived with Native American tribes and written up his experiences in *Letters from the Hunt* by Boganis, the name the Chippewa of Wisconsin gave him. He had called his dog

"Osceola" after the leader of the Semioles, which his daughter used as a pseudonym for her early stories. She identified with the "quality of boundlessness" her father had sought in America, and though she never went beyond the East Coast during her only visit to the United States, she wanted to travel to Wisconsin and locate Frydenlund, the two-room cabin her father had owned in Wolf River county. Here, as Richard B. Vowles writes in "Wilhelm Dinesen in America" (1976), he grew indiscriminatingly intimate, in terms of hunting and love-making, with both the Sioux and their enemies, the Pawnees (369-70). Frydenlund was the last stop in Dinesen's two-year stay in North America, which had also included a time in Chicago, in the Milwaukee Avenue neighborhood where Emil Dreier, the founder of a fraternal association called "Dania," had declared: "Denmark is a marvelous country, but you cannot get bear meat there" (Vowles 371). Blixen may have adopted this lack of bear meat as a metaphor for her own impatience with Denmark. Vowles concludes about Wilhelm Dinesen's legacy: "He implanted in his talented daughter a *wanderlust*, a resilience, a curiosity about all things, and a very special dignity, in the bare ten years they had together" (381). This curiosity, resilience, and love of travel would later appeal to Blixen's American readers.

Some silences in Blixen's works might originate in the syphilis her father brought back from his American sojourn, or his suicide (Dinesen 13; Wivel 29-30), which accounts for his daughter's melancholy and the gender fluidity now associated with the Baroness. Steen Eiler Rasmussen, Blixen's longtime friend and admirer, compares a photograph of Wilhelm Dinesen in his daughter's Rungstedlund study to one from the African farm, in which the daughter has turned into the father: Blixen in a riding suit stands with gun and dog at her side (Rasmussen 36-37). Many years later, Niels Carlsen, who grew up at Rungstedlund with his single mother, the cook, called Karen Blixen his father (Mandal and von Lowzows).

In an August 25, 1926, letter to her brother, Thomas, Blixen theorizes about modern love as "homosexuality" (101). This "homosexual" view of love owes much to Denys Finch-Hatton, who backed away from traditional relationships and may himself have been bi- or homosexual. Wivel links her view of marriage and destiny to Denys, who refused paternal responsibilities in the famous telegram from London that either recommended abortion or single motherhood to the woman who believed herself pregnant. He excuses Denys, who was "both impeded by a dubious sexual identity and the relationship-free attitude Karen Blixen made her own over the following years" (80). Susan Brantly notes in "Karen Blixen, Hybridity, and Some Challenges to Postcolonial Criticism" (2013) that "Blixen thematizes in her book the notion of the hybrid, of the unstable identity" (42). Much could and has been made of the Baroness's homoeroticism. In his analyses of sexuality, gender, and identity in her works, Dag Heede queers the whole Blixen canon and argues that her characters constitute textual nomads who travel among sexualities and genders in infinite constellations (33), much like Andersen and even Huck Finn before her.

In *The Creative Dialectic of Karen Blixen's Essays* (2014), American critic Marianne T. Stecher-Hansen disagrees with Heede's arguments for Blixen's performative sexualities. In her analysis of Blixen's "Oration at a Bonfire," delivered in 1953 and translated into English in 1978, Stecher-Hansen locates Blixen's "entreaty to modern women to repossess today's spheres of male dominance . . . with another mode of existence . . ." (71). To absorb and communicate the fullness of human existence, the artist needs, as Stecher-Hansen reads Blixen, to activate both masculine and feminine principles, since "both life forces are necessary for the fully integrated persona" (64). In her chapter "On Feminism and Womanliness," Stecher-Hansen links Blixen with New French Feminism as a precursor to Hélène Cixous, who asked women to write in white ink, with body fluids as modes of experience and communication (67). Other critics focus more literally on Blixen herself and speculate on anorexia, with its fear of femininity and female forms, and her identification with Diana, not Venus. Bror Blixen complained about his new bride's hunger diets and her (ab)use of laxatives to stay slim (Arnold 122-23). All critics agree, however, on immersing Blixen in gender trouble, whether constructed, performative, essentialist, psychological, or physical, and thus consolidate the adoption plot and its alternative sexual dramas.

Blixen's adoptions evoked the colonialism or racism familiar to American audiences. Though the Baroness knew the names of Kikuyus and Masais—Kamante, Saufe, Kitau—Africans became "her" natives. In what Marie Louise Pratt calls a "contact zone" (4), Blixen inhabits the space of the imperialist, whose gaze aims at control. As in early southern literature, such as John P. Kennedy's *Swallow Barn* (1832), natives turn up in anonymous plurals and often remain invisible, their work linguistically absent from Blixen's script, as when she describes the troubles of a coffee farmer: "I had six hundred acres of the land with coffee; my oxen dragged the cultivators up and down the fields, between the rows of trees, many thousand miles, patiently, awaiting coming bounties. (*Out of Africa* 16-17). The drivers of the oxen have disappeared, as Blixen focuses on her cattle, apparently struggling on their own. The natives on her land become anonymous field hands, either because she "watch[es] the plants set" or has them shaded by an invisible work force. Her panoramic gaze across the fields suggests the position Pratt associates with colonial and cultural dominance. Blixen withholds from the natives a linguistic presence also by having them merge with the landscape: "The Natives were Africa in flesh and blood. The tall extinct volcano of Longonot that rises above the Rift Valley, the broad mimosa trees along the rivers, the elephant and the giraffe, were not more truly Africa than the natives were—small figures in an immense scenery" (28).

For Blixen, the Africans populated a pre-historic landscape, where European and

10.22439/asca.v54i1.6597

American sins had yet to arrive. Blixen's sojourn among the Masai provoked the British colony in Nairobi, usually not given to moral outrage. The Baroness did not care. She saw the Africans as representatives of wisdom, sincerity, and community, but first and foremost as messengers from a pre-cultural original state of life and mind: "They came into my life," she writes in *Essays*, "as some sort of response to a call in my own nature . . . or to feelings and instincts deep down in my mind" (12; Wivel 50). The Baroness never gave up calling the Africans "her" natives, though this habit made people uncomfortable as the decades passed. In introducing two paintings of Africans, she elaborates on their pre-historic quality: "They express in color, lines and movement a perfect unity and harmony. The inner nature and soul of Africa had here, through thousands of years, created for itself a human form, as clear and truthful in style as that of the lion or the leopard" (Lasson, [Drawings] 32).

In his analysis of Blixen's "dangerous book," Lasse Horne Kjældsgaard complicates Blixen's colonial perspective by noting that in her writings, comparisons to animals suggest primitivism or animalism, not racism (113). He concludes that in *Out of Africa*, Blixen joins the colonial project as a witness, a participant, and an accuser, and that she cannot be reduced to any one of these roles (135). Karen Thisted finds, moreover, that Blixen's text transcends the colonizer's ambivalence with her intelligent awareness of mimicry as a resistance strategy employed by the colonized, narrated through her personal experiences with the native Africans (106ff). Both Kjældsgaard ("Death from Torture") and Thisted zoom in on the Kitosch episode in *Out of Africa* and argue for Blixen's condemnation of white settler justice, as does Brantly, who adds that "she was generally regarded as 'pro-native' by the British establishment" (32). Brantly acknowledges, however, that "Blixen's own powerlessness as a woman might help her sympathize with the Africans, but the central paradox remains that she is still the oppressor as well as the oppressed" (40). Thurman sums up the complicated relationship between the Baroness and the Africans: "There was something of a lonely child playing with her doll in all her relations with the Africans: the extreme tenderness, the maternal solicitude, the sense of power and responsibility that distracted her from her own feelings of helplessness and despair" (269). To this list, Thurman might have added Blixen's flight from history, and from Denmark, an escape that allows her to ignore certain benefits the colonizers had gained from the asymmetrical division of power in Kenya.

Thurman approaches the adoption theme in *Out of Africa*, but instead of a child playing with dolls, Blixen becomes an adoptive mother with transracial children. This relationship fits into discourses of racism and colonialism, but it might be taken further. Blixen enters a maternal discourse and comes together with her adoptive children through the land. She explains in a book of her drawings: "Only the African highlands have spoken to me immediately, without an interpreter, in a language that went straight to my heart. There must have been an original, mythic understanding between them and myself, for at our first meeting I took possession of the land, or the land took possession of me, and we became one" (Lasson, [Drawings] 28). Through the land, and through an emotional, almost physical relationship with the landscape around her, the strong colonial "I" of her first sentence—"I had a farm in Africa"—dissolves. After the trip to Kijabe and three months on the Masai Reserve, famously included in *Out of Africa* on film, she says: "The grass was me, and the air, the distant visible mountains were me, the tired oxen were me. I breathed with the slight night-wind in the thorn trees" (233). As Thurman points out, this passage is poetically condensed from real events and suggests the artist at work on herself through the land (146).

Danish literary critic Sten Pultz Moslund finds in this passage "an Othering that de-subjectifies, even de-anthropomorphizes the self, turning it into vegetation and animal or a mode-of-being that is fundamentally produced by Otherness: a being-created rather than a being that creates" (148). Moslund includes Blixen in discussions of "sensuous geograhies," but the passage also fits an adoption plot, where Blixen takes on the role of adoptive mother, a maternal role "being-created rather than a being that creates." As Moslund notes, "when Blixen reflects on her encounter with Africans (in her novel or in her non-fiction), she frequently stresses the encounter as a powerful disintegration of her individual identity or socioculturally induced senses of self" (148). This "powerful disintegration" occurs when mother and child or children merge, when Blixen takes on the maternity without giving birth, when she through "smell, color, shapes, movements, and the skin's tactile sensations" becomes part of what Moslund calls "the place's own totality" (147). In this sensuous reading of *Out of Africa*, Blixen engages with adoption by including nature and body, her own and those of the adoptees she meets on their own terms, as Africans, as innocents, as people absorbing nature and other bodies through physicality, movement, and sensuousness. Through a transnational and transracial adoption plot, Blixen communicates with herself, her country of origin, her adopted country and the children and adults living in it. In this intersection of identities, and of alternative structures of being and living, Blixen writes herself into modernity and out of established socio-cultural arrangements. She also writes herself into American dilemmas and debates about race.

Blixen investigates though an adoption plot "the mutual workings of influence without privileging any of the differentiated terms" (Clark 98), such as self and other, European and African, parent and child. The interracial family in *Out of Africa* functions, then, as "vanguard of interracial relations" (Satz 273), though Castañeda problematizes this vision of racial harmony (284) by pointing to its "evacuation of histories of domination and resistance" (286). Like Andersen, Blixen works with cross-species adoption ("the tired oxen were me"), what Clark identifies as "a powerful figure for all adoption, the biological difference of adoption figured as difference in species." Adoption, she argues, allows for independence and hybridization, for "connections among races, species, kingdoms (animal, vegetable, mineral)" (100). The tensions in both Andersen's and Blixen's adoption identities and plots appear as "a metaphorics of distancing, or more precisely, of distancing and connecting" (Clark 105). Readers of adoption narratives such as Andersen's and Blixen's identify with an adoptee or adoptive parent and grasp alternative human relationships across a distance that enables them to connect from afar, not least across the Atlantic Ocean.

Andersen and Blixen have become iconic writers in the US for many reasons, their preoccupation with adoption among those insufficiently explored. Their transnational, transracial, transsexual, and cross-species adoption tales have entered US conversations about the Other, since the adoptee enters familial structures from "other" ideological, economic, or racial locations, and since adoptive motherhood remains "other" to those who arrive at motherhood through biological birth (Berebitsky 87). These conversations connect with the institution of slavery, which, like adoption, is based upon a contract not signed by the enslaved—or adopted—person at its center (Modell 218-19). With family narratives involving involuntary intimacy, Andersen and Blixen have developed modes of verbalizing links between dominance and dependency, between center and margin, between black and white in American history. The two Danish writers allow from afar—from fairy tale land, from Denmark—Americans to approach their own interpersonal and interracial relations and, in the process, point to the silences and gaps in American discussions of family, race, and gender.

The famous Danish writers appeal to both American minds and hearts. Andersen and Blixen's adoption tales fit into American rights discourses, by insisting on rights of belonging and conditions designed by reason and law. The Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Rights Movement, LGBT* activism, or the Black Lives Matter community all target legal documents, rulings, institutions, and decision-makers. Rights activists in all camps seek as well to problematize what they consider unfortunate cognitive patterns or modes and the literary and linguistic choices they influence. As McLeod asks in *Life Lines*, "What new modes of being—singular and interdependent—might be figured for all through the recounting of transcultural adoption? Which new narrative forms does transcultural adoption require and create?" (5). Both Andersen and Blixen subscribe to the "tactical uses of passion" that evoke in the audience empathy and emotions: "human rights, dignity, autonomy, and freedom" (Modell 224). With their insistent stories of outsiders making their way in, they help cement the rights of all, regardless of gender, class, race, sexual preference, or other divisive categories in US history and society.

Fairytale adoptions fit the classic American quest narrative—*Huck Finn*-style—in which a heroic protagonist takes off into the unknown to find an identity, a life away from home, liberty, independence and freedom. Samuel L. Clemens wrote the orphaned Huckleberry Finn into being, and his raft and eventful trip on the Mississippi set the mode for innumerable American heroes to come. In a sense, the United States is itself an orphan, as Kristina Fagan suggests, "a young society cut off from its European parents and searching for an identity" (252). The first pilgrims arriving at American shores fled from religious persecutions in the Old World, and as an orphaned community, they had to find their own destinies in the wilderness William Bradford and others encountered. Ultimately, as Bradford complains in *Of Pilgrim Plantation* (1630-47), later generations in the New World preferred, like the fairy tale heroes, to go it alone and break religious and communal ties in favor of individual decisions and solutions. Americans will recognize themselves in the duckling's becoming a swan and in Blixen's flight from Rungstedlund to her coffee farm, since they are accustomed to individualistic modes of solving personal and national issues. Both Andersen's and Blixen's tales might also read as rags-to-riches stories, their protagonists starting with nothing and winning if not everything, then more than most.

Both writers have empowered those struggling with gender conventions and restraints. Through an ugly duckling trembling in front of dogs, hunters, old women in comfortable cottages, and traditional conceptions of beauty, Andersen has imagined a gender continuum where everyone might find a position. In his life and his writings, he has constructed a new masculinity that in the 21st century appears enabling, or inevitable. The 1985 adaptation of *Out of Africa* and the Meryl Streep character fueled female empowerment scripts in the US. Blixen's special blend of daring adventures, romantic difficulties, search for independence, and possibly also her aristocratic air appealed to a generation of American women struggling to envision themselves inside or outside patriarchal systems of power (Banner, Chapter 6; Friedman *et al.*, Chapter 24). Blixen's "The Blank Page" remains constant in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, as editors, professors and generations of students decipher female communities and silences. Blixen

*H. C. Andersen with Charlotte Melchior. 1875.*
*Credit: National Image Database, Danish Royal Library*

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herself is adopted as an American writer into this popular anthology, a status *Out of Africa* had already granted her.

Adoption articulates the moral conflicts at the heart of American law, life, and literature, the conflicts "irresolvable without remainder" that Martha Satz discusses in the context of adoption and race (271). In adoption scenarios, problematic issues remain, be it the situation of the birth mother, the contractual transfer of human beings unable to speak or decide for themselves, or the inequality involved in transnational or transracial adoptions. But Americans have also taken to Andersen and Blixen and their adoption tales because both writers, and especially Blixen, have dared dream about racial and cultural harmony. Andersen's swan becomes himself and thinks fondly back at the mother duck raising him, while Blixen suggests that white settlers may co-exist, or even adopt, the Kikujus and Sudanese they live among. Both Andersen and Blixen promise oblivion. Instead of historical sins—war, slavery, genocide—they suggest with their fairy tale adoptions that the past may be created and reinvented, as it is in adoptive families, where origins, certificates, ethnicities, and genetic and reproductive failures are absorbed into more manageable narratives.

The hope that Andersen's and Blixen's fairy tales hold out to readers resides, however, in the writing itself. Their search for identity—among swans, among lions and Africans—becomes a search for narrative, a disturbing story of adoption, and of deviance. De Soto links in "Genealogy Revised" efforts to conceal the illegitimacy of the child in adoption practices with the illegitimacy of the adoption narrative (195). In structuring and writing their autobiographical texts as adoption plots, Andersen and Blixen argue for change, for otherness, and not least for art. Both writers ultimately locate their identities in literature and thus give themselves and their readers access to other selves, the multiple identities located within and around us. Especially Andersen refuses in "The Ugly Duckling," as Margot G. Backus puts it, to observe the "discursive interdiction—the 'burden not to tell'" (139) that may create or deepen psychic wounds. In the process, he gives birth not only to his birth mother—the uneducated and poverty-stricken Anne Marie Andersdatter from Odense, transformed into the kind-hearted but limited mother duck—but to himself as a writer. He does not finish his new creation, whose journey into adulthood is only just beginning as the story ends, but Andersen gives his swan a voice. Instead of the adoptee's blank page, Andersen's gives his protagonist the last word. In the final paragraph of "The Ugly Duckling," the new swan feels, thinks, hears, and feels again, but finally speaks to the world: "I never dreamed of so much happiness, when I was the ugly duckling" (115). His voice is new, in that speaking adoption, as Gish writes, is "experimental by virtue of foregrounding suppressed identities" (184). "The Ugly Duckling" might be read as a traditional rescue narrative in which a lucky adoptee finds a home and material and emotional privilege, but Andersen makes sure, nonetheless, that a swan and a writer have been born. He helps articulate what McLeod terms “alternative ontologies of the self” and struggles towards “paradoxical and approximate identities,” what the author of *Life Lines* calls “adoptive being” rather than “being adopted” (23).

Hans Christian Andersen and Karen Blixen share not only their fame as the best-known Danish writers in American contexts. They also broke traditional Danish molds in suffering, or benefitting, from the restlessness that sent them both abroad. From this marginal perspective, they took on traditional customs and Danish provincialism. Both writers sought to perform and communicate to audiences at home and elsewhere their own bravery and resistance, the narrow-mindedness of conformity, and, above all else, the importance of literature, with the Arts and the artist as a bulwark against melancholy, alienation, and despair in the modern world. Their adoption stories served this purpose. By speaking adoption, they broke the discursive and social silences of gender, class, and race, though future writers and (adoption) activists would push this agenda further, not least in the US. Still, in a 21st century world populated by migrants, refugees, orphans, adoptees, adoptive parents, and adopted or adoptive countries, Hans Christian Andersen and Karen Blixen communicate with archetypal or global adoption narratives the need for new ideological constellations of family, community, and nation.

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# She Bloomed in the Dark:
## Shadow Feminism and Queer Failure in Paula Gunn Allen's *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*



**Abstract:** This article analyzes Paula Gunn Allen's 1983 novel *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* deploying Jack Halberstam's notion of queer failure, a subversive phenomenon that involves embracing negative affects, refusing success narratives, and negating selfhood. Refusing stereotypical feminine positionality in a masculinist universe in favor of a shadowy, female-centered spirit community, the main character, Ephanie, rejects disciplinary gender norms and fails to perform a cis-hetero feminine identity. Recasting Allen's conception of the medicine-dyke as a Halberstamian shadow feminist, the article analyzes how the novel employs queer failure as a critique of settler colonial oppression and violence, from the main character as failed ciswoman to the novel's narrative as a failure of form and convention. Through a fragmented narrative style that never truly resolves, the novel lacks stability and familiar structure, challenging the telos of stabile identity formation and the logic of success. Like its main character, the novel is subversive, a queer unstory that fails to adhere to literary conventions, emphasizing unbeing, undoing, and murky kinds of feminist resistance.

**Key words:**
Queer failure;
Shadow Feminism;
Paula Gunn Allen;
Trauma; Two-Spirit.

Laguna Pueblo[1] scholar and poet Paula Gunn Allen's only novel, *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* (1983), is a celebration of feminist refusal and an invitation to consider the power of shadows and darkness as creative forces. Set in an unspecified time in the latter part of the twentieth century, *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* is a poetic-experimental work that does not lend itself easily to a concise summary. Vignettes, letters, psychologist's notes, poetry, and other snippets of text weave together Laguna Pueblo myths and legends with the story of Ephanie Atencio, a "crossblood" woman, to borrow Gerald Vizenor's term (*Crossbloods*). In the opening scenes of the novel, Ephanie seems to be emerging from a mental break, unable to speak or escape from the suffocating paternalistic behavior of her "Indian cousin" (8), Stephen. Aided by memories of her first love, Elena, and the legends of the creatrix Thought Woman (sometimes referred to as Spider Woman), Ephanie seeks a way out of abusive and toxic relationships that hold her captive in feminine and powerless gender roles. This pursuit takes her from her ancestral homelands in New Mexico to San Francisco, where she establishes a new life for herself and her children, and becomes involved in the city's Indian Center in an attempt to find friends and connections. She briefly marries a Japanese American man, Thomas, but this marriage fails after the couple loses one of their twin sons to sudden infant death syndrome, after which Ephanie returns to Albuquerque, where she attempts to hang herself. Realizing she does not want to die "in such a stupidstupid [sic] way" (163), she frees herself at the last moment. In the aftermath of this final violent and traumatic experience, she becomes obsessed with reading and knowledge (168), and with "re membering [sic]" herself as a medicine-dyke through stories of the mythical Thought Woman (212).

The first novel written by a native woman to feature a (queer) woman as main character in roughly half a century (Tatonetti), this novel provides a seminal point of entry into Native women's fiction and an opportunity to explore the intersection between indigenous studies and queer studies. The novel contains several autobiographical traits and aligns well thematically with Allen's scholarly, poetic, and political projects, which she in large part outlines and explains in her 1986 book, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions.* As Lisa Tatonetti states in *The Queerness of Native American Literature* (2014), *The Sacred Hoop* started a conversation about the relationship between Native American studies and queer studies. The book is in many ways foundational for scholarship on queer native literatures, cultures, and traditions, despite its myriad generalizations about ancestral "gynocracies" and "matrifocality" in Indigenous cultures (3), as well as essentialist ideas of "American Indians" (2), and gender constructs. However, Allen's mission with the book—a recovery of traditions and a feminist call to arms—spurred on further research, especially as scholars engaged critically with her writing.

[1] Although Paula Gunn Allen (1939-2008) referred to herself as a "multicultural event" (Van Dyke 70), as a mixed Lebanese-Pueblo-Scottish-Sioux woman, she often aligned herself with her maternal Laguna Pueblo heritage (see e.g., *The Sacred Hoop*).

Ancestral Indigenous sexualities and genders have been studied extensively, since Europeans invaded the continents, especially from historical or anthropological perspectives (see for instance Williams; Lang; and Roscoe). In the last quarter of the twentieth century, new scholarship and activist movements intersected in increasingly complex ways. Running parallel to, but never quite intersecting with, the post-Stonewall gay and lesbian movement of the 1970s, the Native Two-Spirit, LGBT+, and queer movement in many ways originated in the San Francisco Bay Area with the organization Gay American Indians (GAI), with whom Allen was associated. This group's collaborative *Living the Spirit: A Gay American Indian Anthology* (1988) was the first collection of stories, poems, and historical and anthropological writings thematizing the gayness of Native America.

Moreover, within the last three decades, scholars have increasingly focused on the ways in which settler colonialism continues to influence Native societies, especially in terms of gender discourses and constructs (See for instance Rifkin; Morgensen; Arvin, Tuck and Morrill), although studies in queer indigenous issues received relatively scant mainstream attention, until the resurgence of scholarly work in the early twenty-first century. The debate about the split between queer studies and Indigenous studies continues today and it raises questions of how to square the two, evidenced by Choctaw scholar Jodi A. Byrd's 2020 article, "What's Normative Go to Do with it? Toward Indigenous Queer Relationality," in which she details the "strange and disjointed intimacy" between indigenous studies and queer studies (105). Describing an impasse, Byrd succinctly claims that "Indigenous studies has a queer problem" (109). As the two fields have not yet found common ground, she suggests shifting the focus from identarian constructs and othering processes to a grounded relationality, centering "the materiality of Indigenous bodies [as] relationally collective" (111).

In this context of ongoing conversations on the state of the field and its theoretical innovations, it is important to revisit both canonical and noncanonical texts to bring their themes and messages into new conversations. Thus, my errand in the present article is to explore how *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* expresses 'queer failure' in Ephanie's repudiation of normative gender and her alignment with Jack Halberstam's concept "shadow feminism," as well as in the narrative's refusal to comply with conventions. In *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), Halberstam defines queer failure as "a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and [...] a form of critique. As a practice, failure recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent" (88). Furthermore, he explores shadow feminism as "an antisocial, anti-Oedipal, antihumanist, and counterintuitive feminism that arises out of queer, postcolonial, and black feminisms and that thinks in terms of the negation of the subject rather than her formation, the disruption of lineage rather than its continuation, the undoing of self rather than its activation" (125-26). These concepts resonate with Byrd's discussion of the antinormativity of "entities that defy and refuse expectations" (Byrd 119), and with *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, as Ephanie as a failed cis-woman, is a disruption of settler discourses and narratives. At the end of the novel, Ephanie unravels and refuses to cohere, not to refuse futurity, but to highlight queer relationality, collectivity, and a different kind of kinship beyond the human. Although it is unclear whether the novel embraces magic realism and Ephanie transforms into a spirit, or if she simply loses her mind, she is portrayed as transcending human form by joining spiders and dancing women emerging out of the shadows in her room, singing herself into corporeal unbeing, as one among a collective of Spider Women.

Structured as a nonlinear series of falls and failures, the novel refuses easy categorization and analysis by eschewing linear narrative and traditional novelistic conventions. Through this disintegrated narrative style that never truly resolves, the narrative challenges the notion of stable identity formation and the logic of success. Like its main character, the novel is a subversive, queer failure to adhere to literary conventions, emphasizing Allen's mobilization of Yellow Woman-turned-medicine-dyke, a shadowy figure of feminist refusal, negation, and dissent.

## Queering Yellow Woman

In *The Sacred Hoop*, Allen argues that Pueblo cultures center lives around a feminine principle that guides and determines peoples' social and familial roles. As she recounts:

> *In the beginning was thought, and her name was Woman. The Mother, the Grandmother, recognized from earliest times into the present among those peoples of the Americas who kept to the eldest traditions, is celebrated in social structures, architecture, law, custom, and the oral tradition. To her we owe our lives, and from her comes our ability to endure, regardless of the concerted assaults on our, on Her, being, for the past five hundred years of colonization. She is the Old Spider Woman who weaves us together in a fabric of interconnection.* (Sacred Hoop 11)

Allen furthermore calls Native culture(s) "gynocratic" and matrifocal (2-3). In many tribes, including Allen's own Keres/Laguna Pueblo culture, women maintained an essential role in tribal government and families, as well as ceremonially and mythologically. Tribal gender roles fell into somewhat narrow categories, but Allen comments that the Pueblos and other tribes "encouraged variety of personal expression" and that many women-centered social systems valued "free and easy sexuality" (2), allowing for a measure of personal freedom despite valuing "conformity and propriety above almost anything" (227). Similarly, illustrating this female-centered and egalitarian life, in the essay "Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit" (1991), Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), discusses the relevance and centrality of the Kochininako (Yellow Woman) stories to Pueblo life, society, and ceremonies. She recounts:

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> *In one story, the people are suffering during a great drought and accompanying famine. Each day, Kochininako has to walk farther and farther from the village to find fresh water for her husband and children. One day she travels far, far to the east, to the plains, and she finally locates a freshwater spring. But when she reaches the pool, the water is churning violently as if something large had just gotten out of the pool. Kochininako does not want to see what huge creature had been at the pool, but just as she fills her water jar and turns to hurry away, a strong, sexy man in buffalo skin leggings appears by the pool. Little drops of water glisten on his chest. She cannot help but look at him because he is so strong and so good to look at. Able to transform himself from human to buffalo in the wink of an eye, Buffalo Man gallops away with her on his back. Kochininako falls in love with Buffalo Man, and because of this liaison, the Buffalo People agree to give their bodies to the hunters to feed the starving Pueblo. Thus Kochininako's fearless sensuality results in the salvation of the people of her village, who are saved by the meat the Buffalo people "give" to them.* (Silko 70-71)

Other stories tell of similar feats by Yellow Woman, who acts as the culture hero, uniting, aiding, saving the people. At the same time, her role in the stories is paradoxical, like the trickster in many other tribal legends and tales (Hynes). Yellow Woman does not always obey tribal laws or social rules, and sometimes she dies tragically. However, as Allen states, "the stories do not necessarily imply that difference is punishable; on the contrary, it is often her very difference that makes her special adventures possible" (*Sacred Hoop* 227). Yellow Woman takes on an oppositional social role, often described as precarious or positioned marginally in respect to the tribe. In many stories she lives on the outskirts of the village, by a river, or in other liminal spaces (*Sacred Hoop* 227; Cox 19-20), and she often shows the community how to live by way of example and as warning.

Coupling the notion of the feminine deity, Thought Woman, and the legendary Yellow Woman, Allen invents a queer indigenous concept to avoid anachronistically using 'lesbian.' Suggesting lesbian separatist or political lesbianist ideas, this "medicine-dyke" (*Sacred Hoop* 259) is a sexual and gender categorization for women who bond "with women to further some Spirit and supernatural directive" (257), rather than what she posits as a loosely defined Western concept of 'lesbian' as simply "a woman who is emotionally and physically intimate with other women" (257). The spiritual features of this identity ordain it as closely connected with the female deity. For this reason, Allen claims, heteropatriarchal settler colonial discourses and strategies, internalized by "a number of Indian men" (259), construct the figure as dangerous, which has led to it being met with dismissal, fear, and suppression in contemporary tribal societies. As a counter to historical and ideological erasure, Allen seeks to recover the centrality of women generally, and medicine-dykes in particular. In "Hwame, Koshkalaka, and the Rest: Lesbians in American Indian Cultures," a chapter outlining historical and ancestral stories and legends about homosexual people, Allen lambasts the historical and anthropological erasure of Native lesbian existence. Foreshadowing Byrd's critique above, she introduces the chapter by stating that, "The lesbian is to the American Indian what the Indian is to the American—invisible" (245). Therefore, Allen's feminist project becomes focused on ancestral gender forms and recovering the gynocentric and matriarchal power of women: "Under the reign of patriarchy, the medicine-dyke has become anathema; her presence has been hidden under the power-destroying blanket of complete silence. We must not allow this silence to prevent us from discovering and reclaiming who we have been and who we are" (259). Critiquing native men as complicit in this heteropatriarchal settler colonial erasure, she asks her native lesbian sisters to "reject all beliefs that work against ourselves [sic]," to unapologetically embrace "womanculture" (259), and the "singular power" inherent in the medicine-dyke to "override" the patriarchy (260). The medicine-dyke is transformative, queer, and shadowy; but she is also de(con)structive. Borrowing Keres ancestral stories, Allen frames her novel using Thought Woman, creator of the world: "In the beginning was the spider. She divided the world. She made it. Thinking thus she made the world. She drew lines that crossed each other. Thus were the directions. Thus the powers [...] In the center of the universe she sang" (1). Privileging this feminine creatrix, Allen shapes the story circularly, ending it where she began, with the heroine entering the song of Spider Woman:

> *And in the silence and the quieting shadows of her room, in her bed surrounded by books and notebooks and silence and dust, she thought. And the spiders in the walls, on the ceiling, in the corners, beneath the bed and under the chair began to gather. Their humming, quiet at first, grew louder, filling all of the spaces of the room. Their presence grew around her. She did not move. And around her the room filled with shadow. And the shadows became shapes. And the shapes became women singing. Singing and dancing in the ancient steps of the women.* (the Spider. 212-13)

This narrative circularity has led many scholars to conclude that Ephanie reaches a state of female empowerment and healing—by joining her ancestors in a dance, Ephanie builds "womanculture" (see for instance Holford; Bredin; Shi; Prince-Hughes). Some of the earliest critical explorations of the novel, such as A. LaVonne Brown-Ruoff (1983) and Elizabeth I. Hanson (1989), focus on the narrative as a quintessential identity quest. Whereas Brown-Ruoff reviews the novel's autobiographical aspects, the usage of Keres/Laguna mythology, and the mixed-blood theme, Hanson, touching upon these topics as well, adds a critique of the novel's shortcomings and failures, especially its formal failures and what she describes as its tendency to slip "into a personal narrative of melodramatic victimization" (Hanson 69).

Later scholars, such as Renae Bredin (1994) and Barbara Cook (1998), continue to focus on identity, but read the novel through various feminist lenses, including "U.S. Third World Feminism" (Bredin 36), Allen's Native American essentialist ideas about identity in relation to more constructivist paradigms (Bredin), and "Indian feminism" (Cook 21). Echoing key points in the development of the field of native feminist studies, these texts explicitly couple feminism and lesbianism thematically and theoretically, and although they largely support Allen's own scholarly and feminist writings, such as *The Sacred Hoop*, they fail to take into account "the prevalence of two-spirit[2] people among Pueblo peoples, including Laguna" (Prince-Hughes 11).

Jian Shi (1995) and Tara Prince-Hughes (1998), among others, include theoretical innovations by feminist and queer indigenous thinkers, recentering the identity-quest as a specifically queer, or two-spirit, tale. For instance, In "Contemporary Two-Spirit Identity in the Fiction of Paula Gunn Allen and Beth Brant" (1998), Tara Prince-Hughes argues that, "Native American writers seek to recover an underlying sense of stability based on spiritual and cultural continuity and interconnection with the wider natural world" (9). Through the trope of the two-spirit figure, she analyses the novel as a *Bildungsroman* (i.e. novel of development), where the protagonist ultimately ends up recovering a stable Self and position in the world, central to the community. Unlike previous scholars who focused on the Western idea of lesbianism in the novel, Prince-Hughes analyzes the cultural specificity of Ephanie's two-spiritedness, arguing that especially the Pueblos accorded their alternative gender people high social positions as, for instance, medicine people. Ephanie's identity as both mixed-blood and two-spirit, according to Prince-Hughes, is fundamentally that of a healer and mediator, someone whose role in the community is to bring people together (11). However, Allen's novel as well as much of her poetry and scholarly works were written before the term 'two-spirit' became commonly used both academically and popularly, and before queer indigenous studies coalesced as a field. Furthermore, although Ephanie attempts to act as a mediator, healer, and mixed-blood go-between, the text does not seem to support this reading. Other than two references to her friend, Teresa, visiting her (169; 179), in the final section, Part IV, of the novel, Ephanie has sequestered herself and only interacts with other characters in flashbacks or in retellings of myths. Ephanie never returns to her community, nor does she offer healing *per se*. Like her grandmother, Nightshade, who "bloomed in the dark" (148), and Yellow Woman, Ephanie ends up living alone outside of the village of her family,

[2] Cherokee scholar and poet Qwo-Li Driskill calls the term *two-spirit* "a sovereign term in the invaders' language" (Stolen 62). The term originated in the late 1980s Native lesbian and gay movements—and was adopted at the annual International Two-Spirit Gathering—when Indigenous LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and others) scholars came up with the term as an umbrella term to replace the more problematic term berdache (Tatonetti 8-9), which carries with it a history of genocide and colonization. Although not an uncontested term, *two-spirit* more closely mirrors the social, economic, and spiritual roles third and fourth gender persons played in ancestral tribal communities (see also GAI; Roscoe).

mostly withdrawing from her friendships and relationships, and ultimately, opting for the community of spirit women. She embraces negation and refuses bodily reality as a literal shadow feminist.

**Failing and Falling**

Through Ephanie, Allen constructs a critique of settler colonial gender constructions, gendered violence, and compulsory positivity. Initially, Ephanie is a stranger to herself. She is distracted and disarranged and has "disorderly black hair" (3). Furthermore, time collapses in on her, as "Clocks evaded her" (3), and initially she is desperately "trying to find a point that would give her the time" (3). Her memories likewise interrupt time, moving her back and forth between the present and the past, intruding constantly on her ruminations. The result is a scattered, disjointed, and distressed impression of her state of mind, reflected in her thoughts about her own name: "too strange a name, deranging her from the time she first understood its strangeness" (3). Both Ephanie's body and name, mirroring each other, are split: "Her body, choppy and short, sturdy, was at odds with her name. Ephanie was for someone tall and serene. Someone filled with grace. But like her it was a spilt name, a name half of this and half of that: epiphany. Effie. An almost name. An almost event. Proper at that for her, a halfblood. A halfbreed" (3). The adult Ephanie is her own shadow, her own racialized double embodied and rejected.

The motif of doubles runs parallel to the shadow motif throughout the narrative, and Ephanie aligns herself with shadows and constantly seeks out new doubles. She remembers her childhood friend, Elena, describing as her a twin: "There were photographs of them from that time. Because Elena's gold-tinged hair looked dark in the photograph's light, no one could say which was Elena, which Ephanie. With each other they were each doubled. They were thus complete" (22). Both of them, moreover, "loved the shadows" (22), and after Elena's mother forbids their friendship, suspecting they are becoming lovers, Ephanie wonders: "Perhaps it had been the shadows that betrayed her" (23). Throughout the rest of the novel, she struggles to make sense of her relationship with the shadows, sometimes seeking out darkness for comfort and strength, sometimes fleeing it. Ephanie aches "for the cave, for the Grandmother hand, voice, to guide her. For the low sweet singing that would call her into deep, into darkness, home" (175). Ultimately, she assumes the identity of Yellow Woman (173), linking her to her grandmother, Shimanna (Nightshade), to "beloved darkness" (209), and to Thought Woman.

In addition to the shadow motif, Allen uses the symbolism of falling to describe Ephanie's awakening as shadow feminist and gradual transformation into a medicine-dyke. That is, her failure as a woman lies in her attempts at conforming to society's standards, to perform "emphasized femininity" in Raewyn W. Connell's words (*Gender and Power* 183), a failure resulting from a series of traumatic events in her early adolescence. The most significant of these events is a violent fall from an apple tree, revealed in bits at a time through flashbacks. This fall has both Christian and indigenous connotations, possibly evoking the biblical fall from the Garden of Eden, or emphasizing Ephanie as the otherworldly, unnamed heroine of the Iroquois creation story "The Woman Who Fell from the Sky," which Allen also recounts in several forms throughout the novel. Ephanie wakes up symbolically reborn after the fall which both injures her physically and, most importantly, breaks her confidence with her own body. Trying to get up, but unable, she recalls later: "she'd broken two ribs and punctured a lung and it had collapsed. They drained the fluid that had collected there with a longlong [sic] needle and a terrifyinghuge [sic] syringe. They said soothing things to her. They said she was lucky she didn't break her neck" (202). The experience functions as a disciplinary event for her, and she heeds its warning. "She didn't say much except that she was sorry. That she shouldn't have done that. That Elena had said for her not to. That she should have listened to her, to all of them, to their warnings, to their fear, to their complaints" (202).

In the aftermath of the fall, Ephanie starts internalizing her surroundings' perceptions and fears. "'I guess I am not so tough after all,' she had said. Or thought. 'I guess I shouldn't do things like that again'" (202). And so she does not. "After she fell everything changed. How she dressed. How she walked. What she thought. Where she went. How she spoke. The old ease with her body was gone. The careless spinning of cowboy dreams" (202). The fall teaches her how to regulate and tame her body, and teaches her to perform femininity properly:

> *Instead highheels and lipstick. That she suddenly craved, intently. Instead full skirted dresses that she'd scorned only weeks before. Instead sitting demure on a chair, voice quiet, head down. Instead gazing in the mirror, mooning over lacey slips and petticoats. Curling endlessly her stubborn hair. To train it. To tame it. Her. Voice, hands, hair, trained and tamed and safe.* (203)

Thus, internalizing hegemonic, Anglo/Western attitudes towards femininity, Ephanie attempts to rebuild her mangled body, thereby alienating her from what the novel portrays as more holistic—or even queer-inclusive[3]—Guadalupe traditions. Metaphorically, Ephanie shapeshifts by playing the role of the proper girl who does not cause trouble, and she adapts stricter Catholic beliefs:

> *After she fell she had begun rising early to attend morning Mass. Had given up grandiose daydreams for Lent. Had forgotten how to spin dreams, imaginings about her life, her future self, her present delights. Had cut herself off from the sweet spring of her own being. Bless me father for I have sinned. But I won't sin anymore, she vowed.* (203)

[3] I use the phrase "queer-inclusive" despite its anachronistic implications, and the term queer here both connotes sexuality and gender. The novel constructs the Guadalupe as matriarchal, matricentric, and as gender non-binary as well as relatively open to multiple forms of sexual identities.

Importantly, Ephanie stops allowing herself to dream and imagine, like she did with Elena, that she could be anything, perceiving her childish manners as sinful. By denying herself imaginings, she denies herself survivance and engages in a form of erasure, a lack of futurity that plays into the settler colonial conception of heteropatriarchal compulsory heterosexuality (Rifkin) as well as expendable "Indians" (Wolfe). Because the settler colonial logic rests on the presumption of eventual elimination (Wolfe; Morgensen), by ignoring what Allen would call her "spirit-directed" identity as medicine-dyke, Ephanie temporarily becomes complicit in her own symbolic elimination.

Like her submission to patriarchal discourses and attempts at performing cis-hetero femininity, Ephanie's dysfunctional and abusive relationships with men function as a metaphor for colonial violence. Like Yellow Woman's seduction by the beautiful spirit, Ephanie is ensnared by the (false) promises and possibilities in relationships with men, believing that she will find a sense of belonging and worth. However, these relationships only lead to trauma and erasure of her desires and agency. Thus, throughout the novel, Ephanie vacillates between constant movement and stunned inaction, precariously at the mercy of her surroundings, especially the men in her life.

This is apparent from the beginning of the novel, when her husband has recently left her to take care of their two children alone. Her childhood friend Stephen takes it upon himself to take care of her and the two enter into a form of relationship that at first is not clearly defined as either platonic or romantic. Ephanie experiences the world in a haze as if drugged. After "the cruel marriage" (8) ends, Stephen attempts to fill a space in her life, but Ephanie does not want him. At first, before she can put her feelings into words, she experiences him as "Starlight. Candlelight. Flame. Against her shadows, sharp. Pointed he was. Keen. Slicing through the fogs that shuddered her. Through her. Through her. A flicker of light. Of fire" (8). Trying to describe him, Ephanie's words circle around images of light, contrasted with her own shadows. The language Allen uses to describe Ephanie's perception of Stephen is coded as destructive. He is "sharp" and slices through her like a knife. The section is teeming with violent imagery, and eventually Ephanie's recognition of Stephen's manipulation ends up nudging her out of her doped stupor.

Ephanie slowly becomes aware of her oppression, "Why did she incessantly long for him, his presence when he was not there? Wish with all her shadowed heavy burdened being that he be gone when he was there? And why did she not get stronger?" (9-10). Slowly realizing that she yearns for something else than Stephen's company, Ephanie attempts express her concerns. But she has become voiceless and smothered by Stephen's dominating behavior. "And low, so low, she had finally managed to say. 'Stephen. I want.' Pausing then. For a beat. One beat the length of one single word. Then finishing. 'To go away.' She did not say that one, that crucial word. 'You. I want you to go away.' Nor did he hear. What the tiny pause, that silence was intended, inarticulate, to say" (11). Stephen has taken away her will and agency, slowly, by taking advantage of her traumatized state after her marriage ended. "'You be still now, Ephanie" he tells her, "Now you rest. Now you let me take care of you. I'll take care of you.' Saying, 'You know you need me to. You are so weak, now. I'll take care of you, little one, sister. I will take care of you" (9). Stephen's treatment of her is a form of erasure that renders her infantilized and confused. She "did not realize it was he who told her often, every day, more, that she would surely die without him to secure her, to make her safe. She was helpless, he said" (10). Ephanie internalizes his oppressive treatment to the extent that he almost convinces her she is unreal. "That orange doesn't see you. Do you exist?" he asks (47).

When Ephanie moves to San Francisco, she meets another man, who, like Stephen, crushes her. Thomas is Nisei, or a second generation Japanese American, whose experiences with racism and disenfranchisement in American society has rendered him impotent and vengeful, and he takes this rage and impotence out on Ephanie, whose own impotent struggling against him proves futile. Although in certain ways, he is also a member of an oppressed community in the US, Thomas is a second-generation immigrant, a symbol of the permanence of settler colonialism. His various violences towards Ephanie, as well as his refusal to acknowledge himself as the oppressor, echo the process of settler eradication through real and symbolic violence (Wolfe; Veracini). "Like Stephen he refuse[s] to make her real" (82), his desire for her is superficial and formulaic, and he leaves her feeling empty, even though "his lovemaking was good," and she ponders, "when she was near him, why did she cry" (81).

Like her inability to speak her will with Stephen, Ephanie has no language or power to act against Thomas. When he invades her apartment late one night before they are married, he rapes her and thus further robs her of agency and voice. "She protested [...] She couldn't say she was having her period. Shyness, inarticulate fear rose in her at the thought" (88), but he begs her, "and with his hand he pushed his half flaccid penis into her, almost sobbing, 'Damn thing,' he cursed, moaning, 'Damn thing.'" When her new friend, Teresa, tries to convince Ephanie not to marry Thomas, Ephanie thinks, "she wondered herself why she would think of marrying him, knowing that it was because she was too tired to fight. That resisting was not her way, antagonism was not possible" (91). Through his constant "denying [of] all she knew and based her life upon" (98), Thomas wears Ephanie down and "sucked her courage and denied her its sustenance" (97). Thinking she can heal him, she is seduced into another brutal marriage to a man.

Ephanie's lack of agency is further symbolized by the death of one of the couple's twin boys, and later a near-drowning experience. Ephanie fails to fully control her life like she fails to control her body. She cannot protect her children and she cannot save herself. However, after nearly drowning, only to be saved by her potential lover, Teresa, Ephanie seems to make the conscious effort to embrace her failure to conform to cis-hetero womanhood. Thus, to undo her violent erasure, Ephanie moves towards deliberately unbecoming hegemonically gendered. She slowly discovers that there is freedom to explore other avenues of being, which in Halberstam's terms entails how, "failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world" (2). Thus, a purposeful undoing of identity becomes a performance of a failure that reclaims meaning and agency. Ephanie's undoing of her femininely gendered self leads her to a sense of being that predates her fall from the apple tree.

Furthermore, at the end of the novel, her union with the Spider and Spirit Women, whose community she has longed for, functions as a failure to remain in the realm of the living. Thus, like Yellow Woman, she chooses to live separately, in a liminal space, among the spirits, partaking in a spiritual "womanculture," rather than committing to any social or cultural community in the real world. Embracing this other position constitutes a form of protest against limiting binary gender systems, while simultaneously resisting oppression. Resistance and modes of undoing are key shadow feminist strategies, relying on anti-establishment and separatist ideals and in their extreme forms become violent counterattacks on heteropatriarchy. As Halberstam states, these "Shadow feminisms take the form not of becoming, being, and doing but of shady, murky modes of undoing, unbecoming, and violating" (4).

Similarly, Ephanie engages in a process of unbecoming and violation, degenerating into shadow(s) formed by "the spiders in the walls, on the ceiling, in the corners, beneath the bed and under the chair..." (212). Ephanie embraces the shadows that undo: "They stepped and they sang. And she began to sing with them. With her shawl wrapped around her in the way of the women since time immemorial, she wrapped her shawl and she joined the dance. She heard the singing. She entered the song" (213). Entering the song becomes a way to remove herself from a world dominated by demands she cannot and will not meet. This mirrors the beginning of the novel, the prologue in which Spider creates the world: "In the beginning was the Spider. She divided the world. She made it. Thinking thus she made the world [...] There were no others then but the Spider who sang" (1). Coming full circle, the narrative emphasizes Ephanie's surrender to "a form of unbeing for which beginnings and ends have no meaning" (Halberstam 131). Although describing another novel, Halberstam's comments aptly describe Ephanie: "her refusal to be is also a refusal to perform the role of other within a system that demands her subjugation" (132). Instead of learning to tell time, Ephanie transcends it, and instead of performing a role as ciswoman, she refuses to be a woman at all.

**Trauma and Narrative Failure**

Trauma and narrative failures produce the novel as "the unstory of a woman who cannot be anything but the antithesis of the self that is demanded by colonialism" (Halberstam 131). As well as thematically disunited, the narrative consists of fragmented sentences and a myriad of gaps, ellipses, and silences, "moving back and forth between present, past, and mythical time" (Cook 21). In her stunned and depressed state, Ephanie suffers from aphasia, a severe inability to understand or express language, reflected stylistically as near-gibberish:

> *She walked through the tiny quiet house. Turning on lights, turning out lights, picking things up, carrying them awhile, putting them down. Among the litter of my own things, she kept thinking. Grew angry at herself for thinking it over and over. As though it was a prayer, a ritual, a rite. Among. Pick up the robe. The litter. Walk with it. Of My. Put it down. Own things. Turn out the bedroom light. (Among.) Turn on the hall light. (The litter.) Go downstairs. (Of my.) And begin again. (Own things.). (6)*

Gradually and unevenly, Ephanie's aphasia abates, mirroring her chaotic and somewhat unsuccessful healing process, in which she attempts—and often fails—to make sense of and to herself. Thus, through this narration of her past, attempting to reorder it as if it were a corporeal entity, or "re-membering" it, Ephanie undoes her own false origin story. In "Of Time and Trauma: The Possibilities for Narrative in Paula Gunn Allen's *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*" (2007), Deborah Madsen elegantly links notions of trauma, gender, and healing with storytelling and argues that trauma as portrayed in the novel is un-expressible. She argues, "trauma is unrepresentable in narrative terms because the destruction of the traumatized 'I' renders the linear history of trauma unrecuperable" (112). In this way, Madsen states,

> *Allen approaches the issue of Native experience from the perspective of woman-centered Keres-Pueblo cultural tradition, however, she offers a revisionary perspective on the whole contemporary discourse on trauma. [...] a sensitive, tribally informed approach, such as Allen's novel represents, can uncover for us a larger truth about identity de/formation under conditions of trauma. (112)*

Instead of viewing trauma as an experience with a belated reaction, which also seems traumatic, Madsen sees trauma as lying "in the impossibility of experiencing, and so remembering, an event that resists all discursive formulation" (116). As an example of narrative failure, trauma is traumatic exactly because it is unspeakable and unrepresentable in language. As Ephanie herself thinks early in the novel, "I wonder if I can speak at all. To anyone." (5). Thus, for Madsen, "the absence of a coherent and self-consistent subject of/in the narrative accounts for the radical fragmentation that characterizes the language of the text" (Madsen 117). The narrative itself fails to express trauma, but stylistically, Allen conveys this unspeakability through fractured, incoherent, disjointed language.

Although Madsen argues that there is no single originary traumatic event for Ephanie in the novel, an argument that seems to fit well with the analysis of trauma as inexpressible, there are multiple originary traumatic events in Ephanie's life. Madsen links trauma and sensation narratively and argues that instead of expression in words, Ephanie's trauma manifests as wordless felt sensations and internal images. In this way, the single event becomes doubly repeated, first as memories or sensations, representing an event and later re-lived as new events that re-traumatize her. Thus, her first "cruel marriage" (8) leads to two other abusive relationships, and the almost-but-not-quite remembered sexual abuse she suffers at the hands of her doctor as a child, transcends generations and re-traumatizes her, as she realizes the doctor may also be abusing her children (12-13). Similarly, the rape-scene featuring Thomas has an antecedent with Stephen cast as the perpetrator:

> *She remembered something. That had no words. That had no picture. About Stephen, the light. The heat of that July day. The sun blazing, hurting her head, stupefying her brain. The numbing sun. The fire. A shadow coming down over her. A hand. A mouth. A feeling of suffocation. On her chest heavy. Knowing she would surely die. Wanted to. But that she could not remember. Could only in her body know, its humming, its buzzing, the sound of static like on their radio, that sound within her now, that sound she could not abide, would on hearing it become senseless, enraged, a buzzing angry like bees, like wasps, like hornets, in her brain just behind her eyes, near the top of her head, in her skull, in her eyes, in her throat shutting off words, in her chest, tight in her chest, a buzzing like static so that she could not breathe. (14)*

Ephanie's body remembers something she cannot, a violent, possibly sexual, assault, although the scene might also refer to the fall from the apple tree that punctured her lung. Because it is fragmented and full of gaps and silences, Madsen argues that, "Allen's narrative style presses language to convey trauma in its full unspeakable horror by resisting any normalizing literary style that would reduce the alien and terrifying nature of trauma" (119). Trauma is not an experience *per se*, and as such it cannot be expressed in language, a point which the novel exemplifies in eschewing these stylistic and novelistic conventions.

Throughout the novel, the narrator remains unreliable, and the narrative has no consistent focalization or perspective. The representation of speech, thoughts, and impressions remains ambiguous. Mostly, the narrative is heterodiegetic with focalization through Ephanie. However, the narrative slips from third person narration to first person narration in ways that do not fit with neither standard free indirect discourse nor direct discourse, which makes it seem like the narrator is Ephanie herself, at times talking about herself in the third person. "She looked around her and saw dust lying. Thick on everything. Nobody was ever here. I didn't have that conversation with Stephen" (5). Slipping from the narrator describing the surroundings to focalizing through Ephanie is a common linguistic cue leading the reader to see through Ephanie's eyes, but the slippage from "Nobody was ever here"—an example of free indirect discourse—to "I didn't have that conversation…" offers no cues or punctuation to denote that this is direct speech, although stylistically it seems to be just that. This type of confused narrator voice occurs mostly in the beginning of the novel, when Ephanie is alone, as in this example, where the narration abruptly switches from “her” to “I”:

> *She knew one thing. She was alone. There was no one in the house with her, to see the last sun go, to see the darkness crawl into the room, the see the fire brighten in front of her eyes. There is something else I know. It is dark. But is it night? Dark comes early now. I wonder if it is really night. I wonder how long I have to wait until I can expect someone to come (6).*

Crucially, except for these slippages, the novel consistently uses quotation marks to denote direct speech, which indicates that this is different. Even when she speaks to herself, the text notes this: “And he left her there to ponder the pain of him, of her. ‘I don’t want to live,’ she whispered” (88). This narrative failure not only adds to the sense that Ephanie is a woman on the verge of a breakdown, a woman whose self is so fractured she needs to represent herself from two perspectives, but also adds a sense of refusal of identity as singular and fixed. Madsen also comments on this narrative inconsistency, remarking that “For Ephanie, her suffering is focused upon the impossibility and continual frustration of failing to make herself understood to others and, often, even to herself. [...] The absence of a coherent and self-consistent subject of/in the narrative accounts for the radical fragmentation that characterizes the language of the text” (117). This fragmentation, Madsen further notes, alienates Ephanie from herself and the “narrator reports Ephanie’s own first-person voice, but this occurs only in moments of intense introspection, when meaning dissolves back into raw uninterpretable sensation” (119).

However, towards the end of the novel when Ephanie starts to realize “the lie she had learned, had lived” and to remember how she “forgot who she had meant to be, what she had meant to do” (204), this slippage recurs as she comes to understand how she had misunderstood earlier events in her life. In this fashion, the novel stylistically underscores Ephanie’s Halberstamian unravelling:

> *But I had already left myself before Elena abandoned me, she thought now. Because I thought I should have been smarter than to listen to Stephen’s dare. Because I was hurt. Because I was in the hospital for a few days, alone and scared and feeling so guilty. So guilty I never trusted my own judgment, my own vision again. ‘Yes, my dear,’ she said out loud to herself, ‘you took quite a fall.’ (205).*

Thus, at the end of the novel, the return to muddled narrative voices signals Ephanie’s decision to opt out of a system “built around a dialectic between colonizer and colonized” (Halberstam 131), instead refusing individuality and embracing plurality and a form of kinship that transcends human relationality.

In response to some critics’ claim that the novel is “seemingly unedited” (Hanson 68) and fragmented unintentionally, Vanessa Holford points out, employing Helene Cixious’ concept of *ecriture feminine*, that these narrative slippages and unconventional narrative features are purposefully constructed (100). The effect is a fragmentary and unusual text, a feature that might be construed as failure-as-resistance. Utilized as a critique of phallogocentrism, this textual unevenness is an example of what theorist James C. Scott has labeled "weapons of the weak" (qtd in Halberstam 88). These are oppositional strategies that may appear to be failures—for instance, Halberstam discusses the notions of inaction, passivity, and non-reproduction—that offer a form of emancipation. Moreover, resistance can take "the form of investing in counterintuitive modes of knowing such as failure and stupidity; we might read *failure*, for example, as a refusal of mastery, a critique of the intuitive connections within capitalism between success and profit, and as a counterhegemonic discourse of losing" (11-12, *italics in original*). Therefore, to "*Resist mastery,*" embracing the failure or inability to accomplish something, is to defy the rules entirely (11, *italics in original*). Narratively speaking, Allen's novel, in eschewing order and recognizable structure and progression, challenges fixed logics of identity construction and the capitalist logics of success and mastery. Allen flouts the rules of narrative progression, especially in connection with healing, which in western psychological terms is presented as requiring a linear progression through stages of grief and self-discovery (Madsen).

Furthermore, in addressing the ways in which failure in colonial situations can be mobilized as strategy of resistance, Halberstam argues that,

> *There are several responses possible to colonial knowledge formations: a violent response, on the order of Frantz Fanon's claim that violent impositions of colonial rule must be met with violent resistance; a homeopathic response, within which the knower learns the dominant system better than its advocates and undermines it from within; or a negative response, in which the subject refuses the knowledge offered and refuses to be a knowing subject in the form mandated by Enlightenment philosophies of self and other.* (Halberstam 14)

Thus, the negative response corresponds to a wholesale refusal to acquiesce to Western modes of identity construction and narrative progression, and this is what *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* does. By rejecting, firstly, the dominant society's ideals of true cis-hetero-womanhood, and, secondly, normative existence in the dominant society at all, both Ephanie and the novel embrace queer failure.

## Conclusion

There is always a risk in reading past literatures from a different historical perspective, however, Allen's complicated and open-ended narrative lends itself to, or rather invites, renewed interest and potentially pleasurable misreadings. Reading *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* with Allen's own ideas about gender and patriarchy—but also alongside those who have sought to highlight a two-spirit aesthetic—does not preclude reading with

Halberstam as well. Allen's own conceptions of gender and feminism were sometimes adversarial, often combative and provocative—and importantly, not wholly utopian or even happy. Folding in Halberstamian negativity and shadow feminism expands on and enriches previous readings, rather than disproves them in a kind of positivistic fashion. One may read Ephanie as two-spirit or a medicine-dyke, or both, but neither of these readings necessitate happy endings or neatly resolved happy endpoints of empowerment. Ephanie can be simultaneously a medicine-dyke, two-spirit, and a shadow feminist who embraces separatism, negativity, and antinormativity; these are not mutually exclusive.

Most scholars analyzing Ephanie's queerness conclude that she ultimately finds a place central to community, in accordance with the social role traditionally attributed to two-spirit people in many indigenous communities. However, the ending of the novel never truly fulfills this promise of centrality and inclusion; instead, its ambiguity points toward Ephanie embracing the position of the medicine-dyke as failure, as marginal and subversive. In this way, the novel suggests that women, especially queer and lesbian ones, must deconstruct notions of belonging, centrality, femininity, and motherhood. Unlike the figuration and social position of two-spirits, the novel situates the medicine-dyke as permanently peripheral to mainstream society, and although Allen herself argued for the centrality of Native lesbians and queer people *to native societies*, her own novel deconstructs this female centrality—at least within a settler social context. The medicine-dyke's indigenous centrality does not translate to centrality in settler society, and only through subversion and separatism can she achieve survivance.

Through a series of (attempts at) acts of self-love, bodily sovereignty, and self-harm, Ephanie struggles to gain agency and empowerment, ultimately finding power and freedom in embracing herself as a failed *cis-woman*, and in the process, she redefines the role and significance of Yellow Woman. Failing to acquiesce to settler colonial norms of proper feminine behavior therefore becomes a way for Allen to "explicitly challenge colonialism and heteropatriarchy as intertwined *and* interdependent systems of oppression" (Burford 176).

*The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* is a novel about trauma and learning to bloom in darkness. Ephanie Atencio, the main character, whose mixed-blood status alienates her from mainstream society, struggles to overcome silencing, violence, and the oppressive pressure of the discourse of success. And in a Halberstamian way she does. Ephanie fails spectacularly at being a ciswoman, a mother, and a productive member of society. However, as Halberstam would argue, there is resistance in queer failure. Refusing her role as mother and wife in a masculinist universe in favor of a (possibly imagined) female-centered spirit community, embodying the mythical Yellow Woman-turned-medicine-dyke, Ephanie rejects the disciplinary gender norms and abandons cis-hetero femininity by immersing herself in shadowy fashion in the spiritual culture of the women who sing the world into being.

Finally, the novel's episodic and chaotic narrative style can be seen as a deliberate rejection of mastery. Through a fragmented narrative that never truly resolves, the novel breaks with conventions of novelistic writing, structure, and thematic resolution. Lacking stability and familiar structure, the narrative challenges stabile identity formation and the logic of success. In short, it is a subversive, queer failure to adhere to literary conventions, narratively emphasizing Ephanie's emergence as a shadow-feminist medicine-dyke.

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# Gesturing Beyond Modernism:
## Frank O'Hara, Metonymy, and the Performing Self



**Abstract:** This article studies the changing role of metonymy in Frank O'Hara's poetry. In his early work, O'Hara often uses metonymy for the referential assortment of various modernist fields of influence. The origins of O'Hara's signature 'I do this, I do that' style can be traced back to the problems of self-consciousness which emerge in these early homages to modernism. Though he is often celebrated for the swift responsiveness and spontaneity of his urban poetry, these metonymic homages reveal a poet with deeper and longer attachments in the object-world. Such attachments alert O'Hara to the risk of turning the self into one of the concrete or objectual signifiers of his metonymic assemblages. O'Hara's early negotiation with the descriptive legacies of modernism and the resulting anxiety about self-consciousness will be demonstrated through an analysis of his sestina, "Green Words." O'Hara's solution will entail changing the logic of metonymy from contextual assemblage, where the body often finds representation as a conceptual object, to a foregrounding of the inherently metonymic character of bodily and gestural expression, where the body emerges as a dynamic and responsive presence. Thus, this article investigates how O'Hara's ekphrastic accounts of contemporary art allowed him to break away from modernism to embrace a poetics of embodied responsiveness.

**Key words:**
Frank O'Hara, poetry, modernism, avant-garde, gesture, metaphor, metonymy

> *"While I was writing it I was realizing that if I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing the poem, and so Personism was born."*
> Frank O'Hara, "Personism"

I like to reflect on those famous photographs which show O'Hara talking on the phone, while typing on a typewriter or casually leaning against the wall with a cigarette between his fingers. His telephone posture seems to convey something about lyric voice and performance, about the role that the body plays even when voice is disembodied and carried through a technological device, about how we might pose and use our bodies while talking on the phone, or while lifting a poem off the page and enhancing that performance with our bodies. Theories of the lyric tend to emphasize mechanisms of voice and sound. John Stuart Mill's famous characterization of poetry as an 'overheard' phenomenon, Robert Frost's idea of the 'oversound' in poetry. And this is for good reason. After all, sound is one of the primary resources of poetry. But I suggest talking on the phone as a model for lyric performance because there, though voice is still central, gestures and bodily language enhance the quality of what ends up being a disembodied voice. While reading O'Hara's poems, we often overhear not only an abstract or unconscious aspect of a speaker, but also the ways in which a speaker incorporates the gesturing body into poetic expression.

In this article, I will demonstrate how O'Hara learns to use the body to supplement the descriptive and rhetorical strategies that he learned from various modernist movements.[1] Rather than working with singular notions of a 'modernist style' or 'modernist imagery,' however, I wish to employ a more dialectical semiotic framework and focus instead on the changing tension between the metaphorical and the metonymic modes while distinguishing between modernist poetry and various departures from it in the middle of the twentieth century. Although Roman Jakobson's distinctions between metaphor and metonymy have gathered much dust over the years, metonymy has remained a ubiquitous concept in studies of O'Hara's poetry.[2] That is not only due to O'Hara's referential style and use of montage, both of which can be abundantly found in modernist poetry. What really distinguishes O'Hara's urban poems is his use of gestures to supplement poetic

[1] Parts of this article are based on my PhD dissertation *The Plain Sense of Things: An Analysis of Mid-Twentieth-Century Departures from Modernism* (Stanford University, 2020).

[2] In "Marginal Notes on the Prose of the Poet Pasternak" (*Pasternak: Modern Judgements*, ed. Donald Davie and Angela Livingstone, London: Macmillan Education, 1969), Jakobson associates metaphor with poetic language and depth because it entails meaning being "imported into objects" (146). Metaphorical language, in other words, makes investments in the things it names and ascribes significance to them by associating the internal workings of the psyche with the external elements that are brought into the space of poetry. Jakobson associates metonymy with the language of prose, whose organizing impulse is contiguity, or "association by proximity… the narrative moves from one object to an adjacent one on paths of space and time or of causality; to move from the whole to the part and vice versa is only a particular instance of this process" (141).

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reference. As I will demonstrate shortly, gestures are inherently metonymic because while ‘drawing’ certain signals with our hands or bodies, we inevitably rely on part-whole or contiguity relations. Hence, gestural communication provides a metonymic logic that is quite different from modernist metonymy’s emphasis on contextual assemblage.

After explaining the changing role and importance of metonymy throughout O’Hara’s career, I will divide the article between two sections. In the first, I turn to one of his early surrealistic poems, “Green Words,” to demonstrate the kinds of descriptive freedom that surrealist assemblage introduce to O’Hara’s technique. While thinking about O’Hara’s bewildering arrangements of objects and locations, I like to have in mind Yves Tanguy’s surrealist assemblages where various captivating objects are held together by very thin and barely visible threads that resemble spiderwebs. These paintings capture for me the restless traffic between metaphor and metonymy that is characteristic of modernist rhetoric. While the individual entities strive for autonomy and metaphorical depth, the subtle threads keep disturbing their claims to significance by asserting the primacy of their metonymic arrangement. In a similar vein, O’Hara turns to the sestina which ensures that there is a formal ‘thread’ connecting the various claims made by the repeating end-words. Despite the freedoms it offers to O’Hara’s descriptive style, however, the surrealist mode also conveys a certain anxiety about what happens to the self (“me” is one of the end-words in O’Hara’s sestina) and whether the self can stay afloat without being absorbed into the objectual landscape. In the second section, I show how O’Hara’s encounters with contemporaneous artists enabled him to move beyond this self-consciousness by emphasizing the body, which had received ample sensuous representation and description in modernist poetry while remaining largely absent from it as a gestural and dynamic presence. This final section will offer analyses of O’Hara ekphrastic responses (the literary description of visual artworks) to paintings by his Jane Freilicher and Jackson Pollock. Gestures prove especially resourceful for O’Hara’s ekphrastic attempts because his ekphrastic procedure often combines painterly description with a kinesthetic responsiveness to visual art (e.g., an embodied response to an artwork in a museum).

## What We Talk About When We Talk About Modernism

It is hard to return to modernism without feeling self-conscious about the necessary shortcomings of our descriptions. The term refers to such a rich variety of decadent, post-Symbolist, avant-garde, aestheticist, or experimental late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century styles that formulating a coherent description of their mutual ambitions proves nearly impossible. But artists and writers share in this challenge. The legacies of modernism are so diverse that any artistic negotiation with the earlier phases of twentieth-century aesthetics requires fashioning compelling authorial tactics or strategies. While describing O’Hara’s various engagements with the modernist backdrop and his reworking of the modernist collage, Rona Cran argues that “we see him exorcising his poetic predecessors and artistic contemporaries through his employment of collage, before using it to mediate between the disjointed, referential fragments that make up his body of work.”[3] Cran’s language recognizes both the unconscious endurance of modernism in O’Hara’s imagery – thus his need to “exorcise” them – and his self-conscious strategies to “mediate” between the various aesthetic sensibilities purposefully montaged together in his poems.

Though it may be somewhat misleading to generalize the image as the central concern of all modernist movements, given O’Hara’s painterly poetic style, the image inevitably becomes the primary site of his negotiations with the modernist heritage. The impulse to define O’Hara’s poetic style against a generalized modernist backdrop is likewise motivated by the poet’s style itself. Especially in his earliest negotiations with modernist influences, O’Hara cultivates the notion of a modern poet who actively fashions himself in relation to this generalizable “crew of creators.”[4] Though he does not always erase distinctions between their styles, the moment he gestures out of their force field to distinguish his own style, he folds them into a category, just as any critic would while tracing the historical evolution of certain aesthetic sensibilities. Therefore, the critical anxiety that one might just miss the nuances of O’Hara’s individual references, or the deeper significance they cultivate through the social and contextual reorganization of the cultural field, is reflective of O’Hara’s own creative anxiety.

In what ways was imagery central to modernist aesthetics? While characterizing modernist imagery, critics tend to call attention to the growing demands for concrete presentation starting with the Symbolist movement toward the end of the nineteenth century and the wide-ranging afterlives of the short-lived Imagist movement. Privileging a short episode like Imagism for explaining the tendency toward concrete imagery as a widespread modernist phenomenon may be unconvincing. But Imagism’s insistence on concrete description is very much a part of the genealogy of descriptive rhetoric in the modern era. As Peter Nicholls observes in *Modernisms,*

> *Imagism thus begins to suggest a way of moving beyond a Paterian ‘moment’ freed from the continuum of normal experience, a moment which at the turn of the century had become the ‘impression’ of Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford… Much of the subsequent history of modernism is foreshadowed in this at first sight rather trivial distinction between “image” and “impression.*[5]

[3] Rona Cran, *Collage in Twentieth-Century Art, Literature, and Culture: Joseph Cornell, William Burroughs, Frank O’Hara, and Bob Dylan* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 10.

[4] Frank O’Hara, *The Collected Poems of Frank O’Hara*, ed. Donald Allen (Berkeley: University of California, 1995), 17

[5] Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 167.

10.22439/asca.v54i1.6599

Nevertheless, it would still be misleading to take the concrete image as constituting the core of modernist description because apart from the few poems written dutifully in the Imagist mode, the work of a single concrete image never becomes standard practice in modernist poetry. An exclusive emphasis on the work of concrete imagery obscures the dramatic threads which hold these images together in such works as Ezra Pound's *Cantos,* Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," and Mina Loy's "Songs to Joannes." In *Modernism,* Peter Childs argues that "in general the more the literary styles, such as those of the Modernists, tend towards dense, poetical imagery, the more they are likely to gravitate towards metaphor. Part of the emphasis on metaphor in Modernism can be demonstrated from its use of symbols for allegorical or representational effect."[6] The metaphorical depth activated by the sensuously intricate images of modernism is undeniable. However, in most cases, these images also appear as part of dramatic structures. Insofar as they provide metaphorical insights into the relations and tensions between subjectivity and episodes of perceptual intensity, they also necessarily highlight threads between these intensities. Thus, the metonymic mode, which emphasizes contiguity and context, proves equally significant to most traditions of modernist poetry.

Though it would be impossible to provide a comprehensive account of modernism by making distinctions between the metaphorical and metonymic modes, the uneasy traffic between the two modes is perhaps one of the most pervasive signs of modernist aesthetics, especially in those traditions where montage and pastiche play key roles in gathering various sensuous and perceptual intensities. Think about the self-conscious images in T.S. Eliot which strive for metaphorical intensity but cannot help pointing back to the dramatic voice and the central subjectivity which hold them in a restless balance. Ironically, then, the modernist desire to find "a way of moving beyond a Paterian 'moment' freed from the continuum of normal experience" ends up foregrounding the perceptual efforts of a central subjectivity even more strongly. The fact of there being a *stream* behind the stream-of-consciousness method and its implications for subjectivity become more interesting than the individual entities gathered by that consciousness. A more thematic investigation of modernism might relate these formal and semiotic features to questions like alienation and fragmentation.

For example, while describing T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," Michael North talks about how "in certain lines, metaphor dissolves into metonymy before the reader's eyes."[7] Even though "poetic structures themselves reinforce [a] metaphoric bias" by making concrete and sensuous images appear as metaphorical extensions of a restless subjectivity, Eliot calls attention to

[6] Peter Childs, *Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 190.

[7] Michael North, *The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 76.

[8] Ibid., 79.

the crisis of metaphor or the self-consciousness of metaphor by constantly introducing metonymic relations to the poem.[8] Similarly, Charles Altieri considers the centrality of the metonymic mode to Eliot's "Prufrock":

> *Metonymy in fact is rhetorically the perfect figure for Prufrock's problems of sustaining interpersonal relationships. For the problem of intersubjectivity is essentially a problem of overcoming metonymy, of feeling and of making felt that one is not 'formulated in a phrase' but that a full being is expressed through its partial manifestations.*[9]

Therefore, even in the more dramatically organized works of modernism, the sensuous intensity and self-consciousness end up foregrounding the perceptual efforts of an organizing subjectivity. In other words, as Altieri suggests, together "they point beyond themselves only to signify an absent whole which neither he nor others can grasp." [10]

In poetry after modernism which prioritizes montage the traffic between metaphor and metonymy is not ensnared anymore in self-consciousness or constant claims of significance. For example, O'Hara's lists of places, objects, artists, and artworks immediately activate context. The search for metaphorical opportunities comes after, once a sense of context is established for the poetic voice to search for sites of significance and affective commitment. This is not to suggest that O'Hara's various references lack metaphorical depth. However, they are not usually framed with 'grammars' of significance, as scholars of modernism like to say. The word 'grammar' is often used while characterizing the various descriptive strategies of modernism because modernist reference comes laden with grammatical and syntactical claims of significance. In O'Hara, however, reference is more typically used to create social context than to disclose sensuous grammars of perception. While comparing O'Hara and T.S. Eliot, James Breslin distinguishes between the role of self-consciousness in their poems: "Self-consciousness is not the kind of trap for O'Hara that it is for a character like Prufrock; self-consciousness, instead, generates the fluid energy that gives life to O'Hara's multiple guises."[11]

The most important reason behind this difference - Eliot's self-conscious and O'Hara's more fluid style - has to do with the body. The interest in sensuous and concrete imagery in modernist montage privileges the body as a sensory and perceptual apparatus. As Michael H. Whitworth explains, "they include the body as the residence of the five senses."[12] However, Whitworth continues,

[9] Charles Altieri, "Steps of the Mind in T.S. Eliot's Poetry," *Twentieth-century Poetry, Fiction, Theory,* ed. Harry R. Garvin (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1977), 187.

[10] Ibid.

[11] James E.B. Breslin, *From Modern to Contemporary: American Poetry, 1945-1965* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 241.

[12] Michael H. Whitworth, *Reading Modernist Poetry* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 55.

10.22439/asca.v54i1.6599

"very few modernist poets consider the body as something creating its own sensations through sexual desire, the consumption of food and drink, and through the process of aging."[13] In addition, while emphasizing the body as the site of sensory intake and synthesis, modernist poetry often leaves out the gestural aspects of bodily expression. Thus, as we slide from metaphor to metonymy in Eliot's "Prufrock," we are aware of the body's involvement in cataloguing the variety of psychologized imagery around it. However, the body never attains kinesthetic and gestural dynamism because it does not orient us through the poem with expressions that can supplement that grammatical or the rhetorical. Metonymy proves to be the central literary device for foregrounding the gesturing body. As the applied linguist Jeannette Littlemore shows, gestural communication is inherently rich in referential metonymy:

> *For example, in order to gesture a 'house', one might make a triangle with one's hands to refer to one of the most salient parts of a house: the roof. This would involve a part for whole metonymy whereby the shape of the roof represents the whole house. We can see the same phenomenon if we think of the gestures one might use to indicate other concrete items, such as a tree (where we might gesture the branches, or the trunk), a table (where we might gesture the flat top), a bed (where we might gesture the act of sleeping), or someone absent-mindedly gesturing the opening and closing of a pair of scissors, while looking for scissors.*[14]

Given that our bodily representations of concepts routinely practice the two dominant logics of metonymy (part-whole and contiguity), when poetic language makes us aware of embodied expression trying to supplement the descriptive, it immediately suggests a metonymic core to the poetic operation. Note that this is different from a metonymic *representation* of the body, as in Eliot's "Prufrock," where the body is represented through references to its parts or adjacent relations. In contrast, gestural expression makes us aware of a body that can exceed the representational impulses of language.

When James Breslin explains O'Hara's use of a "theatricalized self that is never completely disclosed in any of its 'scenes'," or when Rona Cran demonstrates the way O'Hara designs his poetry to be "experienced, rather than interpreted, by his readers" through "continually redeploying himself," they are ultimately calling attention to the expressive and embodied core of his poetry, as well as to how the embodied element tempers the relentless claims of significance and metaphorical depth that even the most casual linguistic reference may perpetuate.[15] Lytle Shaw was the first critic to observe the centrality of gestural expression to O'Hara's

[13] Ibid.

[14] Jeannette Littlemore, *Metonymy: Hidden Shortcuts in Language, Thought and Communication* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 69.

[15] Cran 2014, 39 and 147. Breslin 1984, 231.

poetry. Like Breslin and Cran, Shaw argues that "working in relation to gesture has for O'Hara is to liberate him from 'the poem' as a unit of composition."[16]

Nevertheless, it took some time for O'Hara to get there. In the earlier stages of his poetry, when the influence of modernism weighed heavily on his artistic process, he often experimented within the various grammars of modernism. O'Hara's busy homages to and metonymic assortments of modernist legacies, especially in his early poems, pose significant challenges to his attempts to launch the kind of dynamic first-person voice which will become characteristic of his 'I do this, I do that' style. While trying to launch the active and dynamic "I" into the object-oriented or impersonal landscapes metonymically organized in his poems, O'Hara comes to realize that his speakers run the risk of becoming parts of these chains.

His solution to this problem will involve fashioning a more embodied and gestural poetic expression. This way, rather than contextualizing the self in a metonymic chain as a signifier or rendering the self interpretable through its projection onto the various entities in a context, the poem can foreground the embodied act of its positioning in relation to a context. In other words, rather than using metonymy to shore up contexts which situate the self in a web or network of relations, O'Hara will master the art of using metonymy to maintain a sense of *towardness*. As he says in "Poem," "everything / seems slow suddenly and boring except / for my insatiable thinking towards you."[17]

**O'Hara and Metonymy**

Why characterize O'Hara literary arrangements of these various fields of influence as metonymic at its core? On a simpler level, I associate the metonymic impulse with O'Hara's playful, paratactic assortment of multiple aesthetic movements. These early poems typically develop chains of association with particular artists and artistic movements. This is not to say that O'Hara, as part of his imitations of or playful homages to modernist movements, creates images without metaphorical depth. Certainly, O'Hara's individual images are not mere placeholders for the concerns or sensibility of larger aesthetic movements. However, when presented in a sequence with playful theatrical and apostrophic gestures, they inevitably turn into substitutes for the aesthetic movements whose stylistic and descriptive conventions they embody.

"Memorial Day 1950," offers an amusing survey of modernist art movements, a survey which also announces O'Hara's stylistic repertoire.[18] This kind of metonymic arrangement of the various modernist fields of influence is typical of O'Hara's early poetry. He begins with a declaration: "Picasso made

[16] Lytle Shaw, "Gesture in 1960: Toward Literature Situations," *Frank O'Hara Now,* ed. Robert Hampson and Will Montgomery (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 40.

[17] O'Hara 1995, 354.

[18] Ibid., 17.

10.22439/asca.v54i1.6599

me though and quick, and the world; / just as in a minute plane trees are knocked down / outside my window by a crew of creators." The syntax is occasionally disjointed, calling attention to the mechanical operations of language. The voice, however, is always playful and amusing, such that it quickly enlists syntax for improvisation. Micah Mattix reads the statement "Picasso made me" as both "refer[ring] to O'Hara's debt to Picasso's style…" and how "the poet, in exploring himself in his work, becomes a work of art."[19] In these early metonymic arrangements, O'Hara is clearly aware of both creating and being created. While positioning these fields of influence, O'Hara grows conscious of the risk of being defined by them with a kind of Oedipal anxiety. Cubism, for example, is not a mere technique. It is a historically-charged strategy for variously disguising and performing the self. When O'Hara engages with the presentational ambitions of cubism, he realizes that he is also inevitably representing and constructing himself.

Successful interpretations of these poems require a discursive understanding of the active, performative interventions of self (the "I" statements) as well as what Sydney Shoemaker calls the process of "being presented to oneself as an object."[20] O'Hara continues to catalogue his various influences in "Memorial Day 1950." He names Gertrude Stein, Paul Klee, Dada, Rimbaud, Pasternak and Apollinaire, as well as paying homages to the machine-obsession of Russian futurism: "Poetry is as useful as a machine! / Look at my room. / Guitar strings hold up pictures. I don't need / a piano to sing, and naming things is only the intention / to make things." As opposed to adopting their techniques, O'Hara prefers to name them and make them a part of his descriptive technique. Whereas modernist movements used the surface of language to establish concrete grounds for the realizations of imagery, O'Hara's metonymic surfaces collapse all distinctions between depth and surface. He intends to show how the machinery of linguistic signifiers situates the speaking-subject amidst many representational regimes. It is through the eruptions, interruptions and various obstinacies of language that we gather information about the subject who at once mediates and is mediated by language. Even these litany-like playful negotiations with modernism anticipate O'Hara's later management of the poetic voice through spontaneous declaration and embodied expression. In some sense, then, the modernist legacy serves both as a playful target for O'Hara to articulate his own poetic sensibility and an overwhelming field of influence that he needs to move beyond.

Unsurprisingly, metonymy appears frequently in many studies of O'Hara's poetry. James Breslin, for instance, situates O'Hara amongst mid-century poets whose

[19] Micah Mattix, *Frank O'Hara and the Poetics of Saying 'I'* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011), 31.

[20] Sydney S. Shoemaker, "Self-reference and self-awareness," *Self-reference and Self-awareness*, ed. Andrew Brook and Richard C. DeVidi (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001), 90.

departures from modernist and decadent writing "pushed toward the metonymic pole of writing."[21] Lytle Shaw recognizes the limitations of the Jakobsonian categories while still emphasizing O'Hara's metonymic arrangements and the enduring power of the metaphor-metonymy distinction "both as methods of specification and as the groundwork for tracking a significant shift away from metaphor in poetry since the 1950s."[22] Similarly, Hazel Smith describes the "dynamic interplay" between "metaphor and metonymy" in O'Hara's works as trapping the reader in a continuous process of "deconstruction and reconstruction: they are continually propelled by the disintegration of meaning towards another possibility of meaning, and, as such, they actively participate in the construction of the poem."[23] Most recently, in a comparative study of O'Hara and Thomas Wyatt, Jeff Dolven offers a Bourdieuan conception of metonymy as "the figure of side-by-sideness, how things come to mean one another because they share space in the world." [24]

What explains the endurance of this critical concept – metonymy - in studies of O'Hara's work? Part of the reason is stylistic: Many O'Hara poems make tireless references to places, artworks, personalities, and objects, thereby seemingly avoiding metaphorical depth and placing more emphasis on the contextual assortment of their parts. The other reason is that many early studies of O'Hara's poetry tended to emphasize his commitment to creating and maintaining *surfaces* without substantial depth. Marjorie Perloff, the pioneering critic on O'Hara's poetry, advanced this distinction in her earlier assessments of O'Hara's aesthetic style. For example, in "Frank O'Hara and the Aesthetics of Attention," she characterizes the dynamism of O'Hara's urban poetry by showing how the multiplicity of references in his poetry work "metonymically to create a microcosm of the poet's New York world."[25] Over time, however, as critics began to offer more thorough investigations of the social, gendered, and cultural depths of O'Hara's references, the critical privileging of O'Hara's surfaces started to seem insufficient. Nevertheless, the metaphor-metonymy distinction has continued to inform studies of O'Hara's poetry because they are incredibly useful for characterizing O'Hara's rhetorical maneuvers.

In a 2004 interview, Perloff addresses the shortcomings of her earlier characterization of an anti-symbolist impulse in mid-century poets: "But in hindsight, O'Hara's proper

[21] Breslin 1984, 59.

[22] Lytle Shaw, Frank O'Hara: *The Poetics of Coterie* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), 279.

[23] Hazel Smith, *Hyperspaces in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara: Difference / Homosexuality / Topography* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 99.

[24] Jeff Dolven, *Senses of Style: Poetry Before Interpretation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 109.

[25] Marjorie Perloff, "Frank O'Hara and the Aesthetics of Attention," *boundary 2,* 4(3), 1976: 796.

[26] Marjorie Perloff, "On & Off the Page of Poetry," P*oetics in a New Key: Interviews and Essays,* ed. David Jonathan Y. Bayot (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 56.

names, which I took to be "just" names, do signify."[26] Similarly, in a conversation with Charles Bernstein, Perloff revisits her earlier assessments of O'Hara's referential apparatus: "[I]n the case of Frank O'Hara, where I used to think most of the person and place names were intentionally fortuitous, now scholars are writing solemn treatises about the significance of lunching at Larré's on 56th St. or on the meaning of Gauloises."[27] Rather than advancing a more valid interpretation of O'Hara's style, changes in Perloff's assessments capture the very structure of O'Hara's anxiety which is rooted in his chiefly metonymic mode of description: Is the poem held together by an "I" whose subjective valuation and metonymic assortment provides significance to its contexts? Or is the poem held together by a "context" which enables the "I" certain performative opportunities and significance? While metonymy can make it seem like "the parts of reality are mutually indifferent" (Jakobson), it can also call attention to the radically subjective configurations of that reality.[28] As Lytle Shaw explains, O'Hara's poetry often problematizes "how and in which contexts names take on meaning and who has the power to enforce this meaning."[29]

In *Power in Verse,* Jane Hedley shows how metonymies preserve imagined contexts (or, at least, the manner of their extraction from an imagined context), while metaphors tend to obscure or remove context: "whereas the orientation of metonymy is worldward, metaphor tends to pull the external world into the mind. Metonymy presupposes a contiguous, extrinsic field of reference that is in some sense already given. Metaphor pulls its terms out of context." This "already given" aspect of metonymy grants it a greater degree of realism than metaphor. It also allows metonymy to produce an illusory sense of presence. Think about the prominence of metonymy in historiography (e.g., "England declared war"). We rarely dwell on the term "England" because these historical metonymies are so prevalent. They immediately convey an (illusory) reality and presence, as if such entities really and undoubtedly exist. Likewise, when O'Hara casually refers to artists or artistic movements, he simultaneously makes them present to the aesthetic imagination, while also underlining the illusory of their metonymic presence. This awareness inevitably translates to his own artistic identity: He, too, can be swallowed by this metonymic context into representing a broader style or sensibility.

Like in historiography, metonymy features prominently in the narration of personal history and autobiography. In O'Hara's case, for example, his constant allusions to modernist legacies acquire metonymic function. They engender an illusory sense of presence. For example, in a declaration like "Picasso made

[27] Marjorie Perloff, "The Alter(ed) Ground of Poetry and Pedagogy," *Poetics in a New Key: Interviews and Essays,* ed. David Jonathan Y. Bayot (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 88.

[28] Jakobson 1969, 146.

[29] Shaw 2006, 37.

*This article studies Frank O'Hara's fashioning of an embodied poetic voice.*
*Credit: Pixabay.com*

me though and quick," O'Hara is pulling both Picasso and the poetic self into a metonymic chain, whereby both are presented as stand-ins or extensions of an aesthetic sensibility. In *Moved by the Past,* Eelco Runia associates metonymy with the idea of "presence in absence… not just in the sense that it presents something that isn't there, but also in the sense that in the absence (or at least the radical inconspicuousness) that *is* there, the thing that isn't there is still present." In Runia's account, then, metonymy is also caught in a conflicted relationship with the present: It can neither be fully present nor fully absent. Rather, it becomes emblematic of "discontinuity" and "the need for presence."

The dialectic of presence and absence activated by metonymy is fundamentally related to poetic voice, which characteristically runs the risk of being decontextualized, being removed from a physical context and turning into a "presence in absence." This duality always accompanies the act of reading poetry. Voice as a physical phenomenon is always necessarily removed from its origin (to become audible). But just as metonymy maintains a "worldward" orientation and retains contextual memory, voice can also launch into the word through a more embodied trajectory. The challenge for O'Hara is to find a poetic syntax and language that is capable of presenting that trajectory. As O'Hara will discover, there are compelling strategies to convey the gestural projections of a voice, as well as to preserve the traces of its stemming from particular contexts.

**Frank O'Hara's Modernist Returns**

The modernist movement that most energized O'Hara's early artistic development was Surrealism which was appropriated by American poets towards the middle of the century. Surrealism was an organized movement with manifestos and rigorous attention to the teachings of psychoanalysis. But once the movement reached the American context, it ceased to be an intellectual "revolution," offering instead more general tools and recipes for description. In addition, it took many different forms, even leading to a number of different 'schools' of poetry. In a 1973 article, Paul Zweig observes how "by the time the 'left wing' modernism of the surrealists reached the United States, it had become a scattering of detached ideas and techniques, moving in separate directions, appealing to extremely different writers for different reasons."[30] Whereas in its original iterations, surrealist automatism sought to eradicate rational distinctions between subject and object, in mid-century American poetry, Surrealism was absorbed into the self-aware and dramatic voices of poets like Ginsberg and O'Hara. There is here a clear inconsistency between a technique first conceived for the systematic dissolution of consciousness and later appropriated for bolstering the self-conscious performance and autonomy of voice.

O'Hara locates his interest in surrealism in its ability to unite "the duty, along with the liberation, of saying what you mean and meaning what you say beyond any fondness for saying or meaning."[31] The dialectical tension between saying and meaning can be projected onto the semiotic tension between metaphor and metonymy.

For O'Hara, Surrealism is distinct from many avant-garde movements due to its insistence on dwelling in this liminal space of signification.[32] Surrealism, accordingly, holds a special place because it relies on a strategic metonymic displacement of everyday objects from their contexts. This metonymic gesture simultaneously prepares the grounds for subjectification, for the metaphorical project of self-fashioning. In other words, metonymy intensifies contextual awareness but when the decontextualized arrangement of various entities attains sufficient coherence to consolidate an extratextual (or imaginary)

[30] Paul Zweig, "The New Surrealism," *Salmagundi* 22, 23 (1973): 274.

[31] Frank O'Hara, *Art Chronicles* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1975), 17-18.

[32] In *Art Chronicles,* O'Hara juxtaposes Cubism and Surrealism by describing the former as "an innovation" dealing with "technique" and the latter as "an evolution," dealing with "content" (17-18).

unity, the self can start to speak with a sense of "liberation."

Theodor Adorno conceptualizes surrealism around a similar tension between necessity and freedom, or to use O'Hara's language, tension between "duty" and "liberation." Adorno's perspective is crucial because like O'Hara, he was interested in looking *back* to the movement with renewed urgency awarded to it from a historical distance. Both were writing about Surrealism in the 1950s. In "Surrealism Reconsidered" (1956), Adorno asserts that "if surrealism itself now seems obsolete, it is because people already deny themselves the consciousness of denial that is preserved in Surrealism's photographic negative."[33] Adorno identifies the same artistic tension as O'Hara. Only, instead of using the words for "duty" and "liberation," to describe the "the dialectical images of Surrealism," he refers to a "dialectic of subjective freedom in the state of objective unfreedom."[34] The "photographic negative" represents both the assertive ego of the surrealist artist and how it demands a kind of "self-annihilation, for which in dreams no energy is required."[35] The artistic self seeks liberation from a context that he himself has metonymically demarcated from the objective world. Surrealism, as a result, creates a feedback mechanism that "discharges itself in the shock [which] is the tension between schizophrenia and reification."[36] The self remains excessively situated, while asserting its own psychologized logics of contiguity.

Most postmodern returns to surrealism start with this "shock." Rather than waiting for metonymic patterns to acquire a metaphorical significance, early O'Hara begins by awarding the world inflated significance and metaphorical potential. Hence, O'Hara's early poems turn to ecstatic apostrophes which register the shocking inevitability of self-consciousness: "Oh! Kangaroos, sequins, chocolate sodas!", "Look! The table, like an arrière- / pensée, trembles on its legs and / totters forwards."[37] In these poems, clearly influenced by Surrealism, metonymic tendencies are obvious but rather than creating enduring contexts from which the self can struggle for liberation, they feature the inflated and hyperbolic mannerisms of a self that has made too many investments and now feels anxious to maintain the metonymic surface. Endless temptations, tangents, distractions, and apostrophic interjections help the speaker to continually renew the sense of a surface. This spontaneity allows O'Hara to perform sincerity, or what Altieri calls "an all-encompassing honesty… where there can be 'no secrets.'"[38] However, what remains missing from O'Hara's earlier experiments with surrealist description is a

[33] Theodor W. Adorno, "Surrealism Reconsidered," *The Challenge of Surrealism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 35.

[34] Ibid., 33.

[35] Ibid., 34.

[36] Ibid., 33.

[37] O'Hara 1995, 15 and 26.

dynamic bodily presence that can maintain this performance of sincerity.

Let us now turn to one of O'Hara overtly surrealistic experiments to see this more clearly. In "Green Words," a sestina written in 1953, the poet rotates the following end-words: "grapes," "sun," "sky," "cat," "strokes," and "me."[39] Given that this is an O'Hara poem, it is no surprise that "me" – of all the end-words - heats up the most. O'Hara continuously reconfigures a setting in which the objects – cat, grapes, sky – acquire a sense of presence. The formal structure of the sestina serves to renew the sense of a shared context and surface. The poem's various objects are presumably a part of the same context, and, when placed side by side, demand new forms of imaginative combination. In addition to their contiguity, there is a permutational process of surreal presenc*ing* which results from their newly formed interactions: "I sat down on the sun," "and I sit on the grapes accidentally. It does feel like the sun," "I am pushed into the sun by a cat," and the last tercet:

> *The grapes are dying in the sun.*
> *And the sky is its own black cat*
> *which it strokes, as it does me.*

While the sestina requires the poet to privilege three end words in the final tercet, it still has to include the remaining three. This underlying formal structure reveals the extent to which the specific coexistence of these particular objects has become indispensable to the sense of the poem's overall atmosphere. Nonetheless, as the end-words grow increasingly abstract and register their influence over the poetic consciousness, the referential function of language relaxes and the metaphorical impulse begins to overshadow the metonymic assemblage of the objects. Thus, the restless traffic between metaphor and metonymy which characterizes many modernist practices of montage comes to undergird O'Hara's poem as well. The formal structure of the sestina repeatedly fortifies the contextual ground, while each object charges up with their own claims for significance, even competing with "me," the poetic self which also grows increasingly more concrete.

The title, "Green Words" announces the process of abstraction at the heart of the poem's linguistic strategies by associating words with colors. Accordingly, we can read each word like a brush "stroke." In fact, O'Hara chooses "stroke" as one of the end-words because he wants to activate it as both a noun and a verb. In addition to its obvious contextual meaning - moving the hands gently across a surface (i.e., stroking the cat) - stroke throughout the poem also refers to marks made on a surface (as in

[38] Charles Altieri, "Surrealism as a Living Modernism," The *Cambridge Companion to American Poetry since 1945,* ed. Jennifer Ashton (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), 56.

[39] Frank O'Hara, "Green Words, A Sestina," *Poems Retrieved,* ed. Donald Allen (San Francisco, City Lights, 2013), 122.

brushstrokes). The poem embodies a painterly logic that likens words to brushstrokes, which create the surface of the painting *and* reveal its fragmentary, compositional structure. The equivocation of abstract language and abstract painting is both generative and threatening. Though abstraction enables more plasticity for unexpected semantic associations, conflating syntactic units with painterly gestures also reveals traces of discontinuity. Since a brushstroke can never be repeated identically, each application of the same color becomes a marker of difference, and each word – though they are all "green" – refers to an individual's unique history of perception rather than a perceptual stability secured by shared context. Throughout the poem, as objects rotate, they gain in private association. "Me" - the self in the accusative - is a part of this rotation and it gains objectual presence as well.

The endlessly permutating non-logical relations in "Green Words" manage to produce delightful painterly effects and startling arrangements in every stanza, however, the poetic voice remains rather too formulaic. In addition, this mode risks detaining the poetic self within accusative and objectual states. W.H. Auden warns O'Hara of this danger in 1956. Auden had been serving as judge for the Yale Younger Poets Series, and in 1956, unsatisfied with almost every submission, invited John Ashbery and O'Hara to submit manuscripts. Though Auden ended up choosing Ashbery's manuscript, he wrote a letter to O'Hara, praising his work and warning him about the surrealist excess in his poetry: "I think you (and John too, for that matter) must watch what is always the great danger with any 'surrealistic' style, namely of confusing authentic non-logical relations which arouse wonder with accidental ones which arouse mere surprise and in the end fatigue."[40] O'Hara's initial reaction in his correspondence with friends would be dismissive of Auden's criticism, but he would indeed grow out of this surrealist mode in search of a more declarative and dynamic poetic style.

**Ekphrasis and the Gesturing Body**

As we have seen so far, in O'Hara's various negotiations with modernist legacies, the body, a crucial component of self-performance, receives little attention. This is not entirely surprising because *the body* is also conspicuously absent from modernist poetry in its gestural capacity, as well as from many philosophical accounts on self-consciousness. While foregrounding the kinesthetic and agentic mechanism which participates in the generation of the subject, Carrie Noland argues that "subjects also make *motor* decisions that challenge cultural meanings in profound ways.... If moving bodies perform in innovative ways, it is not because they manage to move without acquired gestural routines but because they gain knowledge *as a result of performing them*."[41] This kind of attention to how the body might become a site of agency and afford new possibilities for

[40] Quoted in Marjorie Perloff, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 249-250.

10.22439/asca.v54i1.6599

reinvention is a trademark of affect studies today. For O'Hara, the body offers a crucial opportunity to break free from the descriptive strategies of modernism or from the uncomfortable traffic between metaphor and metonymy which entraps the corporeal body within a representational space. A more kinesthetic presentation of the body allows O'Hara to generate a lyric voice which can convey the dynamism of embodied responsiveness.

O'Hara grows more aware of the need for an embodied presentation of the self as he continues his negotiations with modernism and through his encounters with his painter friends in the New York School. Experiments in ekphrasis, in particular, allow O'Hara to record his encounters with artists and artworks, not only on an intellectual level but as a wholly embodied experience. I will analyze two particular poems here to demonstrate the way O'Hara uses such ekphrastic experiments to advance a more embodied poetic voice and to cultivate a wider range of affective states. The first poem is O'Hara's homage to Jane Freilicher and the second is his response to encountering a Jackson Pollock painting in the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

In the early poem, "Interior (with Jane)," O'Hara strikes a balance between description and performative utterance.[42] He is interested especially in how Freilicher depicts the permeability of surfaces, and how, in so many of her paintings, one cannot tell where the interior ends and the exterior begins.

*The eagerness of objects to*
*be what we are afraid to do*

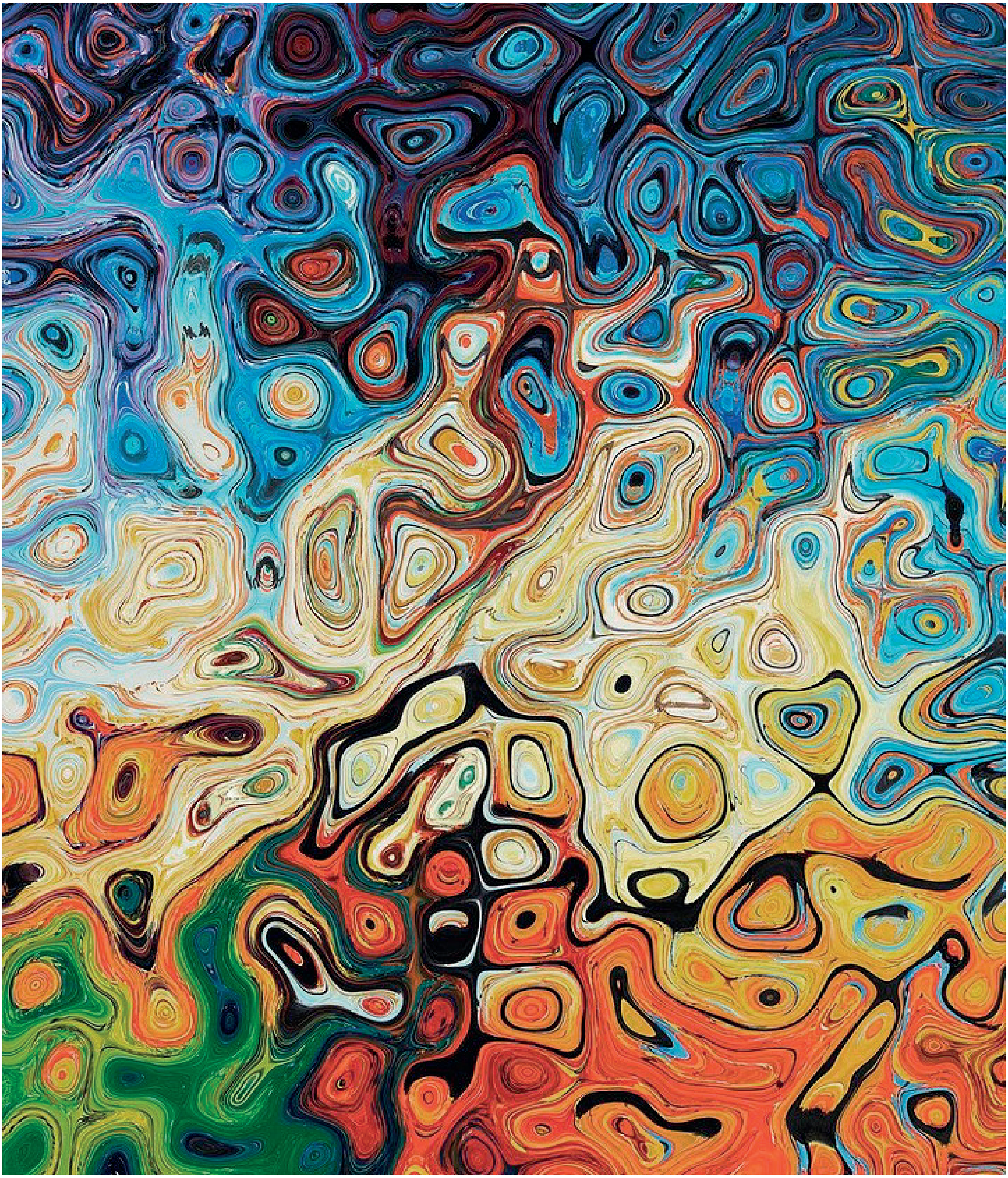
*cannot help but move us     Is*
*this willingness to be a motive*

*in us what we reject?*

The first two lines are connected with a peculiar rhyme, "to/do," which speaks to the ultimate inseparability of our actions from the potentials our imagination locates in the object world. The characteristics associated with object and human are ironically inverted in the third line. Objects, which "are eager to be" now *do*; they move us. And we, typically afraid to do, are now be-ings moved by objects. By forcing the dependencies between subject and object into a syntactical bind, the speaker's formulation collapses on itself. The speaker realizes that though he is "moved" by objects, the poem literally cannot move without them, so he turns in the second part to the object world in all its material glory: "a can of coffee, a 35¢ ear / ring, a handful of hair, what / do these things do to us?" He starts creating metonymic arrangements of the "stupid things" which mysteriously trigger some emotive attachment.

[41] Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 3 and 8.

[42] O'Hara 1995, 55.



Credit: Pixabay.com

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After the metonymic arrangement of these objects, like his painter-friend Jane Freilicher whose paintings evoke continuities between interior and exterior spaces, O'Hara guides our eyes toward the exterior, from the objects in the room toward the wintery landscape outside the window: "We come into the room, the windows // are empty, the sun is weak / and slippery on the ice." The window, like the body, is the threshold which mediates between the interior and the exterior without imposing any hard distinctions. O'Hara's treatment of the body is similar to how Sigmund Freud describes the body as a surface: "A person's own body, and above all, its surface, is a place from which both external and internal perceptions may spring. It is *seen* like any other object…" Freud emphasizes "the manner in which a person's body attains its special position among other objects in the world of perception."[43] O'Hara's poem likewise demonstrates the bidirectional flow of sensation from the inside and the outside. While the first part of the poem grapples with a thought, the second part moves out to the object world to search for satisfying correspondences to thought. What is the role of the body in all this? Does it remain a passive storehouse of stimuli or can it actively interfere and differentiate its position "among other objects"?

The final couplet introduces an irreducible gesture that captures both the physical and the emotional movement of the body:

*And a*
*sob comes, simply because it is*
*coldest of the things we know.*

Like *being moved,* sobbing is a rare reaction in lyric poetry. It is colder and more reserved than weeping or wailing. There is something automatic or what Susan Rosenbaum calls "unselfconscious" about this impenetrable gesture.[44] It is not merely a matter of doing in the way objects "do… things to us." It "comes" rather as a spontaneous event that resists the kind of theoretical contemplation that O'Hara had performed at the beginning of the poem. The primary event in the poem is dictated neither by objects nor through their metonymic arrangement. With this final sob, the body acquires a unique agency that distinguishes it from objects. Such spontaneous gestures expose the need to differentiate between self as object and self as subject, or, to use Freud's vocabulary, the bidirectional movement that feeds the ego – "from without (sense-perceptions) and from within."

Movement becomes the central mediator between presence and presencing, especially when describing the potentialities in a given scene or object. Our thoughts can move forward in lyric time but even O'Hara's

[43] Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id,* trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1990), 25-6.

[44] Susan B. Rosenbaum, *Professing Sincerity: Modern Lyric Poetry, Commercial Culture, and the Crisis in Reading* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 76.

most ephemeral images are mindful of their culturally-mediated abilities to *move* someone. Being moved characterizes an imprecise affective state, and as such, is rarely encountered in poetry. It is nevertheless one of O'Hara's central affects. He uses it to blur the distinctions between the human and the nonhuman world. In "Poem" he writes, "All the mirrors in the world / don't help, nor am I moved / by the calm emergency of my / image in the rain," and in "Aus Einem April," "Haven't you ever fallen down at Christmas / and didn't it move everyone who saw you? / isn't that what the tree means? the pure pleasure / of making weep those whom you cannot move by your flights!"[45] In these examples, the affective meaning of "to move" is supplemented with the literal meaning of the word, referring to how the self is positioned.

For a poet whose attention is steadfastly committed to the instant, this semantic duality is ultimately inevitable. O'Hara's desire to move *from* and move *on* are continuously interrupted and challenged by his being moved *by* things. The poet, however, determined to move on to the next impression, always catches up with the tension which results from his departure from images and not with the images themselves. Perhaps this is the definition of anxiety. Always being late to an image so that when we discover its power to seize us, we are already entering the force field of the potentialities gathered by the next image. In semiotic terminology, anxiety accompanies the "metonymic impulse that reaches indiscriminately for the next thing."[46] It is this affective mechanism which will become the mainstay of O'Hara's poetry: The spontaneous interruption of metonymic assemblage with an event which quickens the body into supplementing its sensory and sensuous investments with embodied expression and gesture.

Let us now turn to an ekphrastic *ars poetica,* O'Hara's poem about a Jackson Pollock painting. In "Digression on Number 1," O'Hara narrates his experience of browsing through various modernist artworks which fail to *move* him.[47] After this unexcited metonymic assemblage, where metonymy uncharacteristically fails to usher what it names into presence, O'Hara encounters Pollock's painting and describes the liberating potential that he discovers in its modes of abstraction. His casual tour around the museum becomes an autobiographical survey of his aesthetic development. The poem opens with a restless voice that fails to make meaningful distinctions: "I am ill today but I am not / too ill. I am not ill at all. / It is a perfect day, warm / for winter, cold for fall." In short, *it's simply one of those days*. The theatrical language feels spontaneous and reluctant. The self is thrown into the poem without a sense of direction. "A fine day for seeing," O'Hara casually resolves. Eventually he starts

[45] O'Hara 1995, 39 and 186.

[46] Kathryn Schwarz, *What You Will: Gender, Contract, and Shakespearean Social Space* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 58.

[47] O'Hara 1995, 260.

his tour and reports seeing Miró's ceramics, "the sea by Léger," "complicated Metzingers," "a rude awakening by Brauner," and "a little table by Picasso, pink."

O'Hara offers a catalogue of these modernist artworks, but he is clearly not *moved* by them. The modernist artworks maintain an impersonal distance, denying the poet the opportunity to fashion a personal voice. There is a searching tone as O'Hara compresses, with skillful syntactic organization, all of these "seen" artworks into the space of a single thought and stanza. The word "see" sonically proliferates as O'Hara repeats it in the stanza: "A fine day for seeing. I see / ceramics", "and I see the sea by Léger." Despite its generality, the language is clearly probing for some meaningful habit or anchor. As readers, however, we are not able to participate in O'Hara's tour because the word-play and the descriptions of the artworks remain vague or esoteric.

After a round of concentrated "seeing," the poet returns to his reluctant attitude: "I am tired today but I am not / too tired. I am not tired at all." There ought to be some way of representing the abstract, emotional wavering of the poet's quotidian existence. But the metonymic arrangement of the modernist artworks and their mutual emphasis on the concrete have not provided the poet with the technical means. By returning to a declarative attitude, O'Hara reinforces his need to move through and beyond modernism. He is searching for a form of expression that can launch the self without a dependence on the objective world. At last, the poet sees the Pollock painting. This encounter disturbs the prevailing metonymic logic of the poem. It anchors our perception with a sharp demonstrative turn: "There is the Pollock." Pollock's drip painting invites the poet to trace its painterly gestures with an embodied imagination. Rather than studying an object, the poet finds himself implicated in "the many short voyages" of Pollock's "perfect hand." The gestural tracing of Pollock's hand movements transports him onto an imaginary landscape:

> *Stars are out and there is sea*
> *enough beneath the glistening earth*
> *to bear me toward the future*
> *which is not so dark. I see.*

Rather than studying an object, the poet finds himself implicated in "the many short voyages" of Pollock's "perfect hand." The gestural tracing of Pollock's hand movements is still metonymic, even more radically so than the contextual arrangement of the various paintings in the museum, because the "perfect hand" and O'Hara's tracing of Pollock's embodied process with his own hands, engender an exhilarating maze of part-whole relations. These gestures transport O'Hara onto an imaginary landscape. He ends the poem by repeating the declarative "I see," but this time it is devoid of objects. Earlier, this verb had served to highlight the various semantic associations that one could gather around the word. Now, the sonic patterns ("eye", "I") and the evident metaphorical meaning ('I understand') do not foreground the materiality of language as a medium. Instead, they invite the reader to embody the projectile gesture of the last lines and to experience the spontaneity of utterance as a mode of valuation in itself.

The embodied self has finally become inextricable from the 'grammars' of sensuous perception. Whereas in his homages to modernism, O'Hara was often compelled to invent intricate syntactical strategies, this encounter with Pollock allows him to realize that "we are always already part of the sentence that our grammars afford us."[48] He teaches O'Hara not to drop declarative speech acts (e.g., "I am ill… but not too ill") in favor of sensuous representation but to embrace their abstract modes of valuation. The wavering and non-committal turns of the self can indeed prepare the grounds for more embodied and gestural projections of the self "toward the future." O'Hara's encounters in the contemporary art circles and the ekphrastic mode encourage him to foreground the body as a site of agency and knowledge in cultivating aesthetic responsiveness. The gestural dynamism of his ekphrastic attempts offers new and exciting possibilities for the use and performance of the first person in lyric poetry in the postmodern era as well as in the confessional paradigm. These painterly encounters help O'Hara to master the art of maintaining a dynamic first-person voice and of keeping the voice from being constantly burdened, as in Eliot's "Prufrock," by the psychologized versions of itself in every objectual description and sensuous investment.

[48] Charles Altieri, "What is Living and What is Dead in American Postmodernism," *Postmodernisms Now: Essays on Contemporaneity in the Arts* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1998), 217.

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# Book Review:

**Gregory J. Hampton and Kendra R. Parker, eds. *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Octavia E. Butler.* London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020, 290 pages. ISBN 978-1-3500-7963-2.**

**Aparajita Nanda and Shelby L. Crosby, eds. *God Is Change: Religious Practices and Ideologies in the Works of Octavia Butler.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2021, 242 pages. ISBN 978-1-4399-2112-8.**

In the mid-1990s, having just decided to devote a chapter of my Ph.D. dissertation to Octavia Butler's neoslave narrative *Kindred* (1979), I wanted to read everything she had written, as well as all that had been written about her works. At that point, the latter proved to be more easily accomplished than the former. I could buy the 1988 Beacon Press trade paperback edition of *Kindred*, with a scholarly introduction by Robert Crossley, in a regular bookstore in San Francisco. The rest of her ten novels were only available as mass-market science-fiction paperbacks – if at all. It was, for example, very difficult to find *Clay's Ark* (1984), but finally a roughed up copy showed up in a small secondhand bookstore next to Hotel California in Palo Alto. The person selling it to me mentioned that Butler had just won the MacArthur "Genius Grant". I later discovered that she was the first science fiction writer to receive this award.

At the time of her untimely death in 2006, Butler had published 12 novels and a collection of short stories: *Patternmaster* (1976), *Mind of My Mind* (1977), *Survivor* (1978), *Kindred*, *Wild Seed* (1980), *Clay's Ark*, *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988), *Imago* (1989), *Parable of the Sower* (1993), *Parable of the Talents* (1998), *Fledgling* (2005), and *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (1995, 2nd ed. 2005). Today, all of Butler's novels (except *Survivor*, according to her wish not to have it reprinted after 1981) are available as trade paperbacks. The novels of the Xenogenesis trilogy – *Dawn*, *Adulthood Rites,* and *Imago* – have also been published together as *Lilith's Brood* (2000) and the Patternist series – *Wild Seed*, *Mind of My Mind*, *Clay's Ark*, and *Patternmaster* – as *Seed to Harvest* (2007). In 2021, Library of America published the volume *Octavia E. Butler: Kindred, Fledgling, Collected Stories*, which includes essays by Butler in addition to the two novels and her short stories.

The academic as well as general interest in Butler has grown exponentially since 1995. A search in the MLA International Bibliography database using the words "Octavia Butler" yields 26 hits for the period 1982–1995. One of them is Joe Weixlmann's two-page "An Octavia E. Butler Bibliography" from 1984; the first page deals with the publication histories of Butler's works, while the second page lists some interviews and a handful of articles, but mostly book reviews and brief mentions of her novels. An MLA search 1982–2005 yields 145 hits, while 1982–2021 gives 521. Published in 2008, Ritch Calvin's "An Octavia E. Butler Bibliography (1976–2008)" lists over 90 journal/magazine articles and 70 chapters and sections of books as well as over 80 theses/dissertations with substantial discussions of Butler's works. So, turning to the two books under review here, *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Octavia E. Butler* (2020) and *God Is Change: Religious Practices and Ideologies in the Works of Octavia Butler* (2021), I was interested both in how they would engage with earlier research on Butler and in what new insights they could provide in this bourgeoning, multidisciplinary research field.

*The Bloomsbury Handbook to Octavia E. Butler* (*Handbook*) is a handsome, expensive hardback volume. Unfortunately, it partly literalizes the adage that one should not judge a book by its cover. Reading through it made me wonder if I had totally misunderstood what was meant by the word "handbook." However, when checking the publisher's website, I discovered that my expectations had been well-founded:

> *Bloomsbury Handbooks is a series of single-volume reference works which map the parameters of a discipline or sub-discipline and present the 'state-of-the-art' in terms of research. Each Handbook offers a systematic and structured range of specially commissioned essays reflecting on the history, methodologies, research methods, current debates and future of a particular field of research. Bloomsbury Handbooks provide researchers and graduate students with both cutting-edge perspectives on perennial questions and authoritative overviews of the history of research. ("Bloomsbury Handbooks")*

What is most glaringly missing, despite being promised on the cover of the book, is "a comprehensive bibliography of works by Butler and secondary scholarship on her work …," that is, an update of Calvin's 2008 bibliography. There is not even a joint list of references for the individual contributions at the end of the book, and the dearth of focus on "critical reception" and "criticism and scholarship" is underlined in the index through the scarcity of page references for these entries under "Butler, Octavia E." In this respect, Gerry Canavan's biocritical *Octavia E. Butler* (2016) – drawing on his archival research on Butler's personal papers, which have been available at the Huntington Library since 2013 – has more to offer the researcher or student as it includes a chronology of Butler's life and achievements as a writer (xvii–xviii), and a fairly extensive bibliography of secondary sources (209–217).

Neither does the introduction to the *Handbook* offer an "authoritative overview of the history of research" on Butler's works. As indicated above, this research field was wide-ranging already in 2008, and Ritch's 30-page bibliography was published in an Octavia Butler Special Issue of *Utopian Studies* edited by Claire Curtis, which was also published by *Science Fiction Studies* the same year. This special issue is not mentioned in the first paragraph of the introduction, which appears to be accounting for previously published books and special issues entirely devoted to Butler and her works, but also fails to mention Florian Bast's monograph *Of Bodies, Communities, and Voices: Agency in Writings by Octavia Butler* (2015), as well as *Strange Matings: Science Fiction, Feminism, African American Voices, and Octavia E. Butler* (2013), edited by Rebecca J. Holden and Nisi Shawl. Besides these, *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Octavia E. Butler* (2019), edited by Tarshia L. Stanley, focuses on how Butler's works are taught across a number of different disciplines in the USA. So, when the next paragraph of the introduction goes on to claim the *Handbook* – at times erroneously referred to as the *Companion* (one of a number of editing or proofreading flaws) – to be "surveying past and current scholarship on Butler" as well as "point[ing] forward to new directions and new agendas in Butler scholarship on both domestic and international levels" (1–2), I am already unconvinced of it accomplishing all that.

The introduction goes on to present the Patternist series, the Xenogenesis trilogy, and the Parable series in one paragraph each, before clumping together *Kindred* and *Fledgling* in two sentences; the second of these assures the reader that "[t]hey are, however, well-written narratives that broach the issues of slavery, race, sex, gender, and identity in very similar ways to the novels that belong to the *Patternist* series and the *Xenogenesis* trilogy" (3). This treatment shows a remarkably arrogant or ignorant view of the place of *Kindred*, in particular, in Butler scholarship and teaching. As Sandra Y. Govan, who is and has been an important Butler critic from the 1980s and onwards, points out in her excellent "Foreword" to the *Handbook*, Butler informed her that *Kindred* "has never been out of print" (xv), which as indicated above is no mean feat for a speculative fiction novel published in the 1970s.

The rest of the introduction is a chapter outline of the 14 chapters or essays divided into the three parts named after Butler's Xenogenesis trilogy: "Dawn," "Adulthood Rites," and "Imago." The thought behind the division of essays into these three sections is not, I think, that well explained; however, when I go through the chapters there seems to be some rough chronology, although not absolute, based on the publication years of Butler's works. "Dawn" includes speculative-fiction writer Steven Barnes's brief reminiscences and reflections on Butler and what she feared most about human nature; an essay employing Patternist philosophy and neuroscience to read the Patternist series

(1976–1984); one reprinted article on disability and race in "The Morning and the Evening and the Night" (1987); and an essay discussing consent in the posthuman era by looking at "Bloodchild" (1984) and "Amnesty" (2003). "Adulthood Rites" includes four essays that to varying degrees focus on the Xenogenesis trilogy (1987–1989) in terms of the motif of the vampire, posthumanism, and colonialism, respectively. In my estimation, these four are among the least interesting contributions to the volume, and the fourth, which deals with "Bloodchild" and *Survivor* (1978) as well as *Dawn*, entirely neglects to engage with previous criticism on Butler's works. "Imago" begins and ends with essays that focus on visual elements, in the first case different covers of *Kindred* and in the second Damian Duffy and John Jennings's 2017 graphic novel adaptation of *Kindred*. In contrast to what the introduction says (yet another a sign of flawed editing), the essay discussing the covers of *Kindred*, which is in part based on archival research and may be the best contribution to the entire *Handbook*, is followed by two essays on the Parable novels (1993, 1998), including comments on the planned third novel, "Parable of the Trickster." The first of these essays discusses apocalypse, Afrofuturism, and theories of "the Living" beyond human rights by using a cultural analysis approach and performing an intertextual reading of the two Parable novels. The second, which draws on the Octavia E. Butler archive at the Huntington Library, focuses on trauma, technology, and the trickster in the unfinished Parable trilogy. Chapter twelve links "Bloodchild" to pregnant man stories (mpreg) in fan fiction and explores the theme of reproductive anxiety as it is made visible through a male body. By using the concept of the taboo, the next chapter deals with how particularly *Dawn*, "Bloodhild," and *Fledgling* (2005) can provoke discomfort in readers, and argues for foregrounding this reaction when teaching in order to encourage students to talk about it. Although the quality of the contributions are uneven, the *Handbook* thus includes discussions on all of Butler's novels and some of her short stories, as well as, more or less rewardingly, covering a wide variety of themes and approaches. It is further framed or perhaps rather grounded by the "Foreword" by Govan and a fine "Afterword" by speculative fiction writer Tananarive Due.

Honing in on one particular aspect of Butler's works, *God Is Change* is obviously more thematically coherent than the *Handbook*, but it still offers a wealth of different approaches to and perspectives on, primarily, the Xenogenesis trilogy and the Parable novels, and, to a lesser extent, a few of Butler's short stories and *Wild Seed*. The title of the volume, *God Is Change*, is taken from one of the verses in the *Books of the Living* that the young protagonist and narrator of *Parable of the Sower* writes to express a new religion that she "discovers" and calls Earthseed. *God Is Change* contains 16 chapters divided into three parts: "Spiritualities and Religious Constructs," "Trauma and Healing," and "Black Liberation and Notions of Freedom." Most of the chapters include cross-references to other chapters in *God Is Change*, which contributes to the coherence of the volume, and most of them also engage with previous Butler scholarship.

*God Is Change* has a very good introduction with an opening that really captures the reader's attention by placing Butler's Parable novels both in the political landscape of the 1990s and in that of Trump's administration. The introduction moreover conscientiously and helpfully does the work that the *Handbook* fails to do of relating the present volume to earlier Butler research, in general, and, in particular, to scholarship on religion in and in conjunction with Butler's works. The editors claim that "critical work on her corpus has proliferated" since her death in 2006, which in one sense is accurate, although the proliferation, as I have shown, started at least ten years before her death. They then bring up a number of aspects, themes, and perspectives that Butler scholars have focused on and employed: "the dystopian and utopian dimensions," "the liberatory potential of her generic innovations along dimensions of race, gender, politics, science, and culture," "the transgressive power of erotics," and, quoting Chuck Robinson, "critical race theory, Afrofuturism, black feminism, queer theory, and … disability studies" (3). They also highlight the importance of research drawing on the Octavia E. Butler archive at the Huntington Library. This overview, the editors admit, "represents the proverbial tip of the iceberg both in breadth and volume" (4). They then go on to sum up previous Butler scholarship on religion and position *God Is Change* in relation to it, before introducing the three parts of the volume as well as the chapters within each part.

"Spiritualities and Religious Constructs" include chapters that cover much religious ground. From editor Aparajita Nanda's discussion of Hindu evocations in *Lilith's Brood* onwards, I consider this part to be the strongest in a volume that in general contains much of interest and of high quality academic writing. Here the titles of the chapters may give some indication of the richness of this part: Christopher Kocela's "God Is Change, Impermanence Is Buddha Nature: Syncretism in Butler's Earthseed and Dogen's Zen"; Charlotte Naylor Davis's "Butler's Invention of Scripture in Light of Hebrew Literature," where Davis compares the Parable novels' *Books of the Living* to Biblical wisdom literature; Mary M. Grover's "Regarding the Other in Octavia Butler's Xenogenesis: Toward a Posthumanist Ethics," in which Grover complements Levinas with Seyla Benhabib to discuss Butler's posthumanist sense of ethics; and Chuck Robinson's delightful "*Parable of the Talents* as Genre Criticism and the Holy Spirit of Speculative Fiction."

In the "Trauma and Healing" part, Kegan Osinski's chapter " 'Only Actions': Ritual and the Embodied Processing of Trauma in *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*" manages to breathe new life into using trauma theory for reading fiction. Another chapter of particular interest in this part is "'We Trade the Essence of Ourselves': West African Spirituality in Xenogenesis's Oankali," in which Ebony Gibson comes out as pro-Oankali, and examines Butler's use of Yoruba culture by drawing on her own experiences of Ifa spiritual practices. Embodiment is central in this part and also some of the chapters in the last part: "Black Liberation and Notions of Freedom." Here we find, for example, Brianna Thompson's "Erotic Pedagogy in *Parable of the Talents*: Freedom and Community through Touch." The last two chapters focus on Butler's works in the context of the US today and reconnect with the beginning of the introduction. Michael Brandon McCormack's "The Violence of Making America Great Again: Religion, Power, and Vulnerable Bodies in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Talents*" begins by discussing the interest in Butler's Parable novels as prophecy in popular online media during the campaign for and after the election of Trump, and ends by gesturing towards the writings of womanists and social justice activists who pick up on the possibilities for surviving and thriving in Butler's works. Editor Shelby L. Crosby's "Creating New Worlds: Earthseed as a Tool for Black Liberation" (a title which Crosby seems to have changed late in the editing process, since the chapter is referred to as "Practicing the Future Together: …" both in the introduction and by McCormack [8, 218]) highlights Butler's impact on social justice activists and how Earthseed has generated social activist communities outside the literary world such as the Wild Seed Community Farm and Healing Village in upstate New York.

So, while *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Octavia E. Butler*, despite some valuable contributions, does not live up to expectations (nor to being a handbook according to the publisher's description), *God Is Change: Religious Practices and Ideologies in the Works of Octavia Butler* delivers more than expected. I wholeheartedly recommend *God Is Change* to anybody who is interested in Octavia Butler's Xenogenesis trilogy and Parable novels.

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# Book Review:

**Frank Kelleter and Alexander Starre, eds. *Projecting American Studies: Essays on Theory, Method, and Practice*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2018. 314 pages. ISBN: 978-3-8253-6847-0.**

Questions of what American Studies is, and discussions about what theories, methods, and practices that ought to shape it, are almost as old as the field itself. Taking a cue from Henry Nash Smith's 1957 article "Can 'American Studies' Develop a Method?," and Donald Pease and Robyn Wiegman's anthology *The Futures of American Studies* from 2002, the edited volume *Projecting American Studies* sets out to "look for emerging agendas and timely conversations in American Studies" (p. 9). The book is a product of the German American Studies conference "Looking Forward, 2014," organized in the fall of 2014 in Berlin. As with any printed discussion about a state of the field, this volume too provides a snapshot of a particular moment in time. Judging by references made in several of its essays, the volume was finalized in the immediate wake of the 2016 presidential elections and first months of the Trump Administration.

Edited by cultural studies scholars at the JFK Institute for North American Studies at the Free University of Berlin, Frank Kelleter and Alexander Starre, the book centers its inquiry on the word "project." As explained by the editors, "everyone who is project-ing (pursuing a research project) is always also projecting (forecasting on the basis of available data)" (p. 10).

The volume thus attempts to both canvass current trends within the field, and to outline prospective futures for American Studies, in Germany and beyond.

The volume contains nineteen essays, introduced by a preface and a prologue, structured in seven thematic sections: "Reading Narrative, Narrative Readings," "Fields and Spaces of Cultural Exchange," "New Urbanisms," "Affective Resonances," "The Uses of Interdisciplinarity," "Literary Actions," and the concluding section "Where Are We Now?" The sections thus highlight aspects of narrative, affect, space, and interdisciplinarity. Although the motivations for selecting these themes are not explicitly addressed, the thematic structure itself can thus be read as both an inventory of the current field (in Germany, in 2014–2016), as well as a potential call for its future development. Of the twenty-three contributing authors, a full twenty-one comes from literary studies or cultural studies, joined by one historian and one political scientist. This roster of authors is, at least partly, a testament to current landscape of American Studies at German universities, which is dominated by literature and culture. Given the book's dual meaning of *project-ing*, it is however unclear how this disciplinarity lopsidedness may affect a discussion about the future of a broad and interdisciplinary research field. Such an acknowledgement would have been welcome.

The style and presentation of the chapters spans the personal, the academic, the theoretically explorative, and the artfully creative. Some essays engage with scholarships and inquires that might primarily be of interest to readers working within a certain area of study. This includes James Dorson's reading of naturalism after the New Historicism; Rita Felski's essay on literary criticism, attachment, and identification; and Daniel Stein's exploration of methodological approaches in American Studies and Superhero Studies. Other essays present scholarship-in-progress, and outline empirical and theoretical insights from ongoing research, such as Florian Sedlmeier's study of William Dean Howells and the late-nineteenth century institutionalization of U.S. literature; Heike Paul's essay on civil sentimentalism in contemporary U.S. culture; and Alexandra Boss and Martin Klepper's analysis of 1930s commercial mass culture through an unorthodox comparison of the young adult fictional character "Nancy Drew" and the African American newspaper the *Chicago Defender*. A notable essay—the longest of the volume—is Winfried Fluck's exploration of narratives about the American South. Part review of southern historiography and part critique of New Southern Studies and Hemispheric Studies, Fluck argues that the South today "defines America to a much larger degree than realized before" (p. 74), and should be granted a different, more prominent, role in examinations of national U.S. narratives.

A couple of essays bring forth themes that more explicitly engage the present and future of the field itself. Although grounded in particular German American Studies circumstances, these themes have clear resonance also in a Nordic American Studies context. The first broad theme concerns the nature of American Studies conducted in and from Europe, relating to the last decades' transnational turn of the field. Frank Kelleter, for example, discusses the benefits of the outside vantage point. Noting that much American Studies scholarship outside the U.S. tends to "duplicate the concerns, vocabularies, and cadences of American Self-Studies" (p. 297), he encourages non-U.S. Americanists to embrace their different epistemological conceptualizations and theoretical groundings.

The second broad theme is interdisciplinarity. An essay by Boris Vormann argues that American Studies needs to be "reinvented as interdisciplinary area studies" (p. 183). A central concern of Vormann is, in light of the literary and cultural studies dominance, that social science research is not sufficiently considered an integral part of the field.

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Looking to the future, Vormann calls for American Studies scholars to pursue a "qualitative interdisciplinarity" (p. 189), centered on deep cooperation between humanities and social science scholars in defining research problems, analyzing, and writing. The necessity of scholar collaboration for creating new, cross-disciplinary epistemological and methodological sensibilities is also explored in an essay by Simon Wendt. There is, however, a curious and paradoxical tension between the resounding calls of these essays and the very structure of the volume itself. In terms of its contributing authors and featured essays, the volume overall is noticeably limited in its interdisciplinarity. It is a tension illustrated by the fact that the section on interdisciplinarity (Section V) is being immediately followed by the decidedly disciplinary exposé of "Literary Actions" (Section VI). If there was a projection about the future here, that message becomes very much muddled.

*Projecting American Studies* stimulates thinking about the state of American Studies scholarship. It is, however, somewhat unclear who its intended audience really is. The book is generally too theoretical, and at times jargony, to be directed to students, but it is also too granular and disciplinarily limited to immediately appeal to the broad community of multi-(or inter-)disciplinary Americanists. While it is refreshing that the editors have allowed for a high degree of stylistic individuality in each essay, their variations unfortunately appear as an unevenness that stymies the volume's impact. This is especially the case when it comes to the volume's "forecasting" about the future development of the field. Does the book seek to push a new direction for American Studies, or is it satisfied with reflecting individual thoughts about its future? In lieu of a coherent—or at least articulated—editorial directionality, that question is left unanswered. Bearing these caveats in mind, *Projecting American Studies* contains several insightful and provoking essays, and serves as a call for Americanists beyond Germany to reflect on their own projects and practices—including in the Nordic countries.

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# Book Review:

**Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall. America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2021. 464 pages.**

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Modern international relations are in a transitional and unstable position. The collapse of bipolarity and later the failure of the "unipolar moment" occurred quickly. The rapid growth of authoritarian countries in the twenty-first century, the strengthening of China, the acquisition of relative independence in foreign policy, and the transition to the expansion of some regional powers are signs of the modern world. At the same time, the system of international relations has historically been established for quite a long period, and so sharp changes in paradigms and structures of international relations force scientists to return to the study of the historical bases that led to the current state. The history of the Cold War is an area of knowledge that has been studied in sufficient detail by scientists around the world.

The monograph *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* written by two brilliant international scholars and historians deserves particular attention. The book is published by Harvard University Press and focuses on domestic political aspects in the United States in a global bipolar confrontation era. The study consists of nine chapters. Each one explores different stages and problem areas of the Cold War. In addition, the authors accompanied the book with an extensive introduction and conclusion, which contain the general conclusions of the study. The monograph is written using historical research methods and is a historical work that also uses IR studies methods.

The book's aim is "principal concern is the United States, the most powerful actor in the global system after 1945. In concentrating on the foreign policy of one nation, we are consciously bucking the historiographical trend toward international history."(4) This research is based on such issues as the acceptance of US decisions regarding the Cold War, and it requires immersion in American sources and knowledge of American institutions, political culture, and social structure. This book highlights US actors and US actions to explain better America's external behavior in the decades after World War II and understand whether this behavior was defined more by external or internal variables.

The beginning of the study confirms America's special political position in the world. At the end of World War II, the United States reached the most prominent world economy level. This was due to the absence of significant consequences of the war in all spheres, unlike Europe and East Asia. Moreover, the United States already had an atomic bomb at that time. The success of the United States in the Cold War was easy and complete, and for this, it was not necessary to defeat the USSR. At the same time, after 1991, the United States continued to invest in defense, expand its geopolitical influence and cooperate with military objects worldwide. By the beginning of the new century, America had become a leader in the unipolar world, and this should be seen as a total defeat of the idea of the Soviet state.

Definitely, in this book, as in any study of the Cold War, the legacy of George Kennan, the policy of Containment, regional conflicts in which the United States and the USSR participated, and the arms race are mentioned.Thus, the authors rightly note that Containment was based on the core insight, articulated most famously by George Kennan, that the Kremlin did not seek immediate military conquest and that if it were prevented from opportunistically expanding into key industrial areas, it would be effectively shackled. Kennan prophetically predicted over the long term. The USSR would be forced inward upon itself and eventually would implode.

Criticism of the overly expansionist policies of President Truman's period is also interesting. So the authors mention that Kennan's and Walter Lippmann's were afraid that US policy would become overly aggressive and unrestrained. The author claims that president Truman expanded the war in Korea when a much more limited intervention to preserve the status quo would have produced the same results. Thus Eisenhower undermined and helped topple legitimate regimes in Iran and Guatemala that posed no threat to the United States, sowing the seeds of long-term anti American resentment (357). American leaders adhered to a containment policy from any provocations leading to World War III. Deterrence was supposed to show the USSR that they had no chance of spreading their control using intrigue and intimidation. They will have to deal with the USA. And then, having reached a political balance, start negotiations with Moscow.

Surely, an essential role for the success of the United States in the Cold War was played by their attitude towards European allies and their willingness to enter into diplomatic relations, including with opponents. The US was ready to negotiate with the UK, France, and West Germany to achieve mutually beneficial results. This has served as significant achievements - the Marshall Plan, the Berlin Airlift and the NATO Alliance. Given the bipolar nature of the Cold War, US leaders could have acted more unilaterally in this early period, imposing American policy on Western Europe, following the example of the USSR in Eastern Europe.

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Little attention is paid to how US diplomacy managed to break up China and the USSR. Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger used skillful triangular diplomacy in the early 1970s to reduce tensions between the United States and the two major communist states and to deepen the Sino-Soviet schism. To Kennan, this state of affairs seemed to suggest something rather radical about America's Cold War: that it had begun for necessary geopolitical reasons and had been waged effectively in its early years, but that it had been protracted for another thirty-five years for reasons mainly internal to the United States, rather than in response to external pressures and perils. The Soviet Union, he firmly believed, had long since ceased being a plausible threat to America and its allies. Nevertheless, political grandstanding and alarmist militarism dominated U.S. foreign policy.

The political balance had mainly been achieved by 1949. The scale tilted toward the United States and the West to the extent it had not. However, Washington declined to pursue a general political settlement at midcentury and still had not done so when Kennan took the stage at Grinnell College three and a half decades later. The Cold War raged on, and Europe remained divided into armed camps. Since 1950 America had repeatedly projected its military power into far-flung corners of the world, in the name of Cold War imperatives and at colossal material and human cost. Moreover, despite America's great advantage over the USSR in almost every geopolitical arena, Washington politicians and lobbyists warned of present dangers, of windows of vulnerability, of imminent doom. What follows is a study of American foreign policy during the half-century between the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. It is not a study of American domestic politics per se, but rather of the shaping of America's Cold

There is much to admire in this week and internationalizing the study of the Cold War can have tremendous explanatory power. But it is not the only approach to studying post-1945 American foreign policy, or necessarily the most productive. However, as Kennan asserted and as the following chapters will demonstrate, America's response to these dangers does not comprise the whole of U.S. policymaking during the Cold War. No less a figure than President Dwight D. Eisenhower hinted at this reality in his extraordinary Farewell Address in January 1961, when he referred to the "military-industrial complex" already affecting America's Cold War in myriad and far-reaching ways. Composed of the military establishment, the arms industry, and the congressional backers of these two institutions, this "complex" became a power within itself, a vested interest largely outside the perimeter of democratic control, and arguably the single greatest factor in post-1941 economic life in the United States (7).

The book argues that the creation and maintenance of this armed establishment (which had its Soviet counterpart), together with the export of significant quantities of arms to other countries, provides a key part of the answer to a question that is likely to loom large in Cold War historiography in the years to come: why did the conflict last so long? (8).

The authors emphasize that the US policy in the Cold War era eventually became justified not so much by an external threat and the need to fight the USSR and the communist threat but by internal political reasons. The authors mention the term "intermestic" (international-domestic), which in their opinion reflects the decision-making process in that era. Policy, in Kenneth Waltz's acute formulation, became capricious. The book by Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall is unique for its novelty and a fresh look at the Cold War issue. The study deserves the attention of scientists interested in the current confrontation between the United States and Russia and the impending confrontation between Washington and Beijing.

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**Book Reviews**
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