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EDITOR'S NOTE

I am troubled by a recurring question: Why do so many of the countercultural films of the 1960s and 70s end in the violent deaths of their protagonists?

Let's survey a few of the most obvious: in Arthur Penn's 1967 *Bonnie and Clyde*, for instance, the iconic antiheroes, played by Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway, drive their getaway car into an unsurvivable maelstrom of gunfire (just as the real-life pair had thirty years earlier). George Roy Hill's 1969 *Butch Cassady and the Sundance Kid* features the remarkably similar demise of its titular outlaws, played by Paul Newman and Robert Redford, who aren't so much shot down at the film's close as frozen in the cinematic ether by the barrage they face when they decide to go out in style. And in Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider*, from the same year, Wyatt (played by Peter Fonda in his star-spangled Captain America regalia) and Billy (Hopper, in fringed buckskin) succumb similarly, mowed down as they ride through the American South by a shotgun-wielding redneck in a pickup.

I have taken to collecting examples of this primal scene in US cinema. (I'm sure any film buff can think of others.) Kirk Douglass' cowboy drifter in *Lonely are the Brave* (1962) is an early one. (Based on a novel by Edward Abbey and adapted for the screen by Dalton Trumbo, the film is an excellent dramatization of the conflict between the Old West and the New, between the ideal of the rugged, freedom-loving individual and a technocratic state in the service of the military-industrial complex.) In one of my personal favorites, Robert Altman's slow-burning mood piece *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (1971), Beatty's cowboy outsider McCabe catches his fatal gunshot wound while crouching in a snowbank while Julie Christie's brothel madam Mrs. Miller, his one-time business partner, lies in the throes of her opium addiction. Terrence Malick's *Badlands* (1973) and *Days of Heave*n (1978)—two of the period's most iconic films—both end with their protagonists' violent deaths, and Stephen Spielberg's early film *The Sugarland Express* (1974) ends in similar disaster when Lou Jean (Goldie Hawn) convinces her husband, petty criminal Clovis (William Atherton), to kidnap their son from foster care. Likewise, Sidney Lumet's *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975) ends with the betrayal and shooting of Sonny, Al Pacino's magnetic, crowd-baiting bank robber hero. The period even manages to recast F. Scott Fitzgerald's curriculum-essential novel *The Great Gatsby* in its own image, with Jack Clayton's 1974 adaptation ending on the scene of Redford's Gatsby floating in his own swimming pool, less the oblivious innocent of Fitzgerald's novel than a countercultural hero who can't help but recall the rockstar excess (and swimming pool death) of The Rolling Stones' Brian Jones. And Robert De Niro's Travis Bickle, from Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976), is a late example of the trope, rounding out this cast of doomed outsiders as Bickle's antisocial rage, attributed explicitly to his experiences in Vietnam, leads to his violent death.

How to explain this serially reproduced scene of the outsider-hero's grisly end? The history of film itself provides some possibilities. One explanation runs that the replacement of the Hays Code, which had policed the film industry's dissemination of morally questionable content for over thirty years, by the Motion Picture Association's rating system in 1968 untied the hands of

filmmakers, who could now represent sex and violence as they pleased, as long as their films were accompanied by the necessary ratings. In addition, the sixties witnessed the breakup of the studio system and the flourishing of independent filmmakers such as Hopper, Altman, and Malick, who embraced and celebrated a maverick ethos in their filmmaking and saw themselves in the mold of the cultural outsider as hero. And let's not underestimate the influence of European auteur-style filmmaking on US filmmakers; Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (1960) and François Truffaut's *Jules et Jim* (1962) both end similarly, after all.

Yet this almost pathological repetition of the antihero's violent demise resonates beyond these changes in the history of film production. The countercultural hero was an outlaw, and the outlaw's end is a sacrificial one, a final triumph of law and order over anti-establishment bravado. It's as if such forms of revolt represented a confluence of cultural factors too strange and beautiful to last, and all the period's films could do was to mourn the passing of this ideal in an endless, elegiac feedback loop, a reprisal *ad infinitum* of bullet-riddled death. We could thus read the phenomenon as an allegory for the containment of the radical energies of the counterculture itself, with Bonnie, Clyde, Wyatt, Billy, Butch, Sundance, and all the rest—and the hedonistic excess they represent—sacrificed on the altar of business-as-usual, of rampant suburbanization, of the creeping influence of Richard Nixon's "great silent majority," wary of the period's unrest, its antiestablishment values, its sex, its drugs, its rock 'n roll.

Of course, I am aware that this romanticized narrative of the hero's demise is a white, middle-class, (mostly) male one; for people of color, the poor, and sexual minorities, the sixties were about anything but excess. They were about demanding redress, about forcing the nation to reckon with its history of violence and repression and to make good on its rhetoric of democratic inclusion. And the counterculture has always been easy to parody; as the poet John Ashbery put it in a 1968 lecture, "[p]rotests against the mediocre values of our society such as the hippie movement seem to imply that one's only way out is to join a parallel society whose stereotyped manners, language, speech and dress are only reverse images of the one it is trying to reject."[1] No wonder the period imploded, a victim of its own self-indulgent excesses.

If the sixties had never happened, we'd have needed to invent them. Which is to say that every generation recreates its own version of the sixties, the sixties it needs. The 90s had its revamped, corporatized Woodstock; the current moment has the techno-libertarian spectacle of Burning Man, where, earlier this fall—in rich irony—a caravan of top-of-the-line SUVs carrying hordes of Silicon Valley bros to a week of excess in the desert was held up by a few climate protesters and had their fun cut short by a freak rainstorm, itself likely traceable to climate change. Even the romantic countercultural narrative of the individual's need to confront the bogus social controls imposed by "the Man" becomes co-opted. If the counterculture taught us anything, it's that rebellion needn't reject a capitalist society's drive toward a rampant accumulation of profits; rebellion itself can be rampantly profitable. One could even say that the ultimate legacy of the sixties is a politics of self that was fully in sync with emergent neoliberal values. Our current generation of tech billionaires (and would-be billionaires) attests loudly to this.

As such complicated legacies show, "America"—as a shorthand for a wide range of historical and contemporary ideologies, affects, values, and

1. "The Invisible Avant-Garde," in *Reported Sightings: Art Chronicles 1957-1987*, ed. David Bergman. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989, 393.

experiences—is itself a paradox; as the methodology best suited to its object, American studies—as the articles and reviews gathered here show—continues to aid us in understanding the paradox.

The current issue of *American Studies in Scandinavia* presents three superb articles that return us to the novels and films of the Postwar period, with its fulcrum in the 1960s, to contribute to our understanding of the many ways in which cultural artifacts become emblematic, whether intentionally or not, of their historical moments. Thorsten Carstensen's article "Is It Really Happening? The Postmodern Horror of Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby*" kicks off this issue, returning us to the claustrophobic horror of the 1968 film. Carstensen situates the film within its cultural moment, when the "paranoid horror" of Polanski's film, and others like it, allegorized cultural fears similar to those indexed by the films I list above: individual alienation and disorientation; the bankruptcy of bourgeois family values; and racial, generational, and ideological division. As Carstensen's analysis of *Rosemary's Baby* perceptively suggests, the "evil" threatening the US-American nation in the 1960s was to be found within the once-cosy confines of the neighborhood, the home, the family, and even the self.

In his contribution to this issue, titled "The Dark Comedy of the Courtroom: Norman Jewison's *And Justice for All*," Mikkel Jensen lends his scholarly attention to Jewison's 1979 film to show us the ways in which post-1960s skepticism of the system (in this case, the criminal justice system) lent itself to the production of this courtroom drama in which Pacino's lawyer-hero fails to bring about justice, and—as in the paradigm I identify above—immolates himself in the process of his failure, committing professional (if not actual) suicide. Jensen makes the highly convincing case that the film is by turns dead serious and darkly funny in its indictment of the systemic failure of criminal justice to protect the most vulnerable and threatened—in this case, sexual minorities.

Johs Rasmussen's article "Ralph Ellison Travels to Denmark: *Invisible Man*/*Usynlig Mand* and the World Location of American Literature" rounds out the issue. Rasmussen is concerned with the way literary texts travel; as Rasmussen makes clear, Ellison's quintessential 1952 novel *Invisible Man*, translated into Danish in 1969 as *Usynlig Mand*, comes, in the post-Civil Rights period, to represent an entire realm of US-American cultural experience. Ellison's protagonist—another of the period's existential outsiders—becomes a stand-in for the experiences of Black subjects in the mid twentieth-century United States, as well as an unlikely ambassador for American literature itself as a cultural export and discursive construction of the Cold War period. Rasmussen adeptly weighs the novel's dual reception—in both the United States and Denmark—to suggest that *Invisible Man/Usynlig Mand*, in its "high cultural pluralist" use of modernist technique to render minoritized cultural experience, becomes a defining text in an emerging "world literary space."

The current issue also contains timely reviews: the first, by Julie K. Allen, focuses on outgoing editor Anders Bo Rasmussen's recent book *Civil War Settlers: Scandinavians, Citizenship, and American Empire, 1848-1870*. The second, by Nancy Coggeshall, focuses on the collection *Finnish Settler Colonialism in North America: Rethinking Finnish Experiences in Transnational Spaces*, edited by Rani-Henrik Andersson and Janne Lahti. Taken together, these two contributions to American studies complicate our assumptions concerning Scandinavian and Nordic complicity in the violence of settler colonialism and its legacies.

I am looking forward to carrying on the commendable editorial efforts that have made this journal vital to the thriving of American studies research in the Nordic countries and beyond for

so many years as I assume editorial responsibility from Anders Bo Rasmussen. I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincerest thanks to Anders for his mentorship and support, as well as to Lene Johannessen, Jørn Brøndal, and Alf Tomas Tønnessen. I would also like to extend my heartiest thanks to Aurora Eide, the journal's editorial assistant, without whom this issue would still be somewhere in the planning stages, in addition to the various readers who contributed their insights to these articles as they developed. All were indispensable in making this issue happen. I am thrilled to have this opportunity to engage with—and learn from—such a vibrant scholarly community.

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7 December 2023

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IS IT REALLY HAPPENING?

The Postmodern Horror of Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby*

Abstract: This article examines Roman Polanski's film *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) as both a symptom and a manifestation of the cultural and political upheavals of the late 1960s. Released in an era marked by rampant conspiracy theories and a growing opposition to established hierarchies and institutions, the film constitutes a prime example of "paranoid horror." Reflecting the collapse of commonly accepted metanarratives such as religion and the American nuclear family, *Rosemary's Baby* adamantly rejects the restoration of order that earlier horror movies would have provided. In fact, by questioning ontological reliability, it epitomizes the shift from the classical to the postmodern horror narrative.

Keywords: horror film, Hollywood cinema, postmodernism, paranoia, metanarratives

"This is the age of connections, links, secret relationships."

Don DeLillo, *Running Dog*

The turn to the mundane, everyday world redefined the horror genre in the 1960s. Since Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), Robin Wood notes, "Hollywood cinema has implicitly recognized Horror as both American and familial" (*Hollywood* 87). Culminating in suburban versions of the genre such as *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) and *Halloween* (1978), the postmodern horror films of the 1960s and 1970s located the threat in ordinary, everyday environments. Hollywood began to focus on monsters that emerged from within a society marked by a general sense of insecurity. The narrative goal of these films went beyond protecting society from the monster, since the monster had in fact become "an emblem of the upheaval in bourgeois civilization itself" (Sharrett 282). Rather, fighting evil meant fighting the very institutions and traditions that allowed it to exist.

Roman Polanski's film *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), a "case study of paranoia" (Hogan 80), epitomizes the shift from the classical to the postmodern horror narrative. "Instilled with indeterminate menace" from its opening shots (Newton 36), the movie begins with a young, childless married couple, Rosemary (Mia Farrow) and Guy Woodhouse (John Cassavetes), viewing a seventh-floor rental in an Upper West Side apartment building that, several decades earlier, was said to have been inhabited by cannibals and witches. Despite the building's sinister history, Rosemary initially loves the spacious apartment. As soon as they move in, she decorates it tastefully according to the latest fashions. At first, she is untroubled by their strange neighbors, Roman and Minnie Castevet, and the events surrounding them. Everything seems to be turning out fine: Guy has secured the job he wants and Rosemary finally gets pregnant. But as her pregnancy brings her to the brink of physical and mental exhaustion, Rosemary starts asking herself some uncomfortable questions: was her terrible dream of being raped by Satan more than just a dream? And what is she to make of the stories of the coven which supposedly existed in her building? Nightmares and dark fears haunt the young woman. Is Rosemary gradually losing her grasp on reality or is she indeed the victim of a sinister Satanic cult?

Rosemary's Baby, based on Ira Levin's 1967 novel of the same name, subverts our assumptions about ontological reliability and objective truth, firmly eschewing the restoration of order towards which earlier horror films tend to gravitate. As a postmodern horror narrative, *Rosemary's Baby* is informed by social alienation and the erosion of a universally accepted religious and moral framework (see Wells 6–7). It also embraces a notion of diminished individual autonomy that was ubiquitous in postwar American rhetoric.[1] By weaving a narrative that shrewdly exploits the tension arising from the presentation of multiple, conflicting versions of events, the film introduces viewers to an alternative world of the fantastic—one that lies beneath the surface of everyday life. In the postmodern underworld that Rosemary enters, belief in God is replaced by belief in the devil, and supernatural notions eclipse rational explanations. Gone is the comforting mode of the traditional horror narrative, in which good ultimately triumphs: *Rosemary's Baby* ends with the arrival of the devil's child, whose power will be "stronger than stronger," as Roman Castevet, the head of the neighborhood conspiracy, prophesies. The reign of the Antichrist "shall last longer than longer," for he is born to "overthrow the mighty and lay waste their temples." In the closing scene, we witness Rosemary giving in to her maternal instincts, gently rocking the cradle that holds the baby whose demonic eyes had left her in utter

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disbelief only moments before. Simultaneously, we, the audience, are asked to suspend our disbelief in what is as fantastic as it is unnerving. By accepting the inexplicable as an intrinsic aspect of the world, *Rosemary's Baby* undermines faith in reason and science; it celebrates the chaotic and the irrational.

While psychoanalytical approaches to horror cinema, favored by Wood and others, have proven insightful, it is equally important to acknowledge the genre's sensitivity to public events and social and political issues. The horror genre also reflects, as Waller argues, "our changing fashions and tastes, our shifting fears and aspirations, and our sense of what constitutes the prime moral, social, and political problems facing us individually and collectively" ("Introduction" 12). American horror films of the post-Kennedy era, like other genres at the time, were not only reflections and illuminations of the aftermath of the Vietnam War and national crises such as Watergate and the economic downturn. They also commented on civil rights matters, including minority rights and women's rights and abortion. One film that supports this political reading of the horror narrative is George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), a low-budget production shot in eerie black-and-white about undead corpses attacking a group of people barricaded in a Pennsylvania farmhouse. The film's final sequence, in which white men prepare a bonfire to burn the zombie bodies, recalls not only images of white supremacist violence, but also televised depictions of massacres in Vietnam (Pinedo 98–99). Other movies from the New Hollywood era addressed these issues through allegorical, neo-noir portrayals of alienated, disoriented characters, highlighting how American society was divided along generational, racial, and ideological fault lines.[2]

In what follows, I examine *Rosemary's Baby*—a milestone of New Hollywood—as a postmodern

Theatre advertisement for *Rosemary's Baby*, 1968.

reflection of the cultural and political transformations of the late 1960s. Released in an era marked by rampant conspiracy theories and a growing rejection of established hierarchies and institutions, Polanski's film can be understood as an example of what Andrew Tudor calls "paranoid horror," in which "the disordering unknown [is] often located deep within the commonplace and the threat [is] much more proximate" (215). *Rosemary's Baby*, the ultimate "reverse image of the American Dream" (Williams 99), powerfully conveys the idea that evil can no longer be conquered—it must be accepted.

Questioning All Assumptions: Paranoia in Postmodern America

Horror stories typically derive their suspense from the clash of apparent binaries. By juxtaposing good and evil, day and night, the living and the dead, sanity and insanity, and the conscious and the unconscious, these binary narratives establish parallel worlds. Their central theme is the intrusion of the harmful, if not deadly forces of the underworld into a mundane, everyday realm of control, oppression, and constraint. In Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1887), one of the classic texts of the genre, in which the main disparity is cultural, this double-world structure is particularly prominent. Jonathan Harker's journey to occidental Transylvania is a journey from oppressive Victorian England, a society of reason and rationality, into the sphere of superstition and imagination—into "some sort of imaginative whirlpool" (Stoker 8).

One of the key features of traditional horror stories is the disruption of the natural order by a formidable monster. In classic Hollywood horror films such as *Frankenstein* (1931) and *Dracula* (1931), the threat of the world collapsing into ultimate chaos was generally averted. According to the narrative logic of these "secure horror" narratives (Tudor 215), the monster is not here to stay; it is to be defeated by the rational forces of Western society and its heroes (such as *Dracula*'s van Helsing), who are called upon to make the world safe again. In this way, secure horror sets up a struggle between good and evil, the outcome of which must be the restoration of the natural order. In the 1960s, secure horror gradually gave way to a new paradigm: the paranoid, i.e., postmodern horror narrative. This was a logical progression since secure horror can only function "in the context of a culture and a social world which is confident of its own capacity to survive all manner of threats" (Tudor 220). America had lost that confidence; it had become a culture dominated by ambiguity.

Horror cinema reflects societal anxieties more than any other film genre. In the early stages of the Cold War, the monsters of American horror films were most likely to arrive from outer space or from some exotic place alien to civilized society. The political implications of these invasion narratives were hard to miss.[3] In the era of McCarthyism and the Red Scare, the fear of monsters from without expressed the collective fear of Soviet aggression. Films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) celebrated the societal consensus that potential dangers could be averted through unified action (see Biskind 103). In most of these films, nothing less than the future of the country was at stake, with the plot revolving around the need to restore American institutions and authorities. As Tudor notes, the invasion narrative assumes that only the state possesses the military and scientific resources and technical knowledge necessary to defend humanity (220). In the 1950s, the lines between good and evil and friend and foe were still clearly drawn. Thus, the warning "Watch the skies!", which concluded *The Thing (from Another World)* (1951), referred not only to the imagined threat of alien invasion. It also pointed to the duty of the American public to keep their eyes open for possible signs of Soviet aggression. In the 1960s, the threat of an intensifying Cold War was accompanied by a growing fear of an invisible enemy within. The assassination of John F. Kennedy in November 1963 sparked a paranoid fear of subjugation by uncontrollable forces, with conspiracy theories permeating American society, politics, and popular culture (Hertzberg and McClelland 52). In addition, the Vietnam War, which escalated in 1965 when the US Air Force began its bombing campaign against North Vietnam, had a profound effect on the national consciousness. As Wood points out, the violence in Vietnam, broadcast on the nightly news, not only destabilized the political system, but also affected attitudes toward authority:

> The questioning of authority spread logically to a questioning of the entire social structure that validated it, and ultimately to patriarchy itself: social institutions, the family, the symbolic figures of the Father in all its manifestations, the Father interiorized as superego. The possibility suddenly opened up that the whole world might have to be recreated. (*Hollywood* 50)

Postwar suburban affluence had obscured the fact that poverty, racism, and inequality were destabilizing American society. By the end of the 1960s, the suppressed racial, gender, and generational conflicts that had been masked by conformity and economic success finally came to the fore. Societal tensions erupted in mass demonstrations and urban riots in 1968, including violent clashes between police and anti-war protesters during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.[4] The assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy further traumatized the nation. The headlines brought to suburban family homes by newspapers and television "seemed to be news from another planet" (Cheever 64), as the protagonist of John Cheever's novel *Bullet Park* (1967) observes one morning as he reads the *New York Times*. What he finds is news of sudden outbreaks of violence and disasters of biblical proportions, both natural and man-made:

> A maniac with a carbine had massacred seventeen people in a park in Dallas, including an archbishop who had been walking his dog. The usual wars were raging. The Musicians' Union, Airplane Pilots, Firemen, Circus Performers and Deckhands were all threatening to strike. The White House secretary denied rumors of a fistfight between the President, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense. Drought threatened the wheat crop. An unidentified flying object had been seen in Ohio. A hairdresser in Linden, New Jersey, had shot his wife, his four children, his poodle and himself. A three-day smog in Chicago had paralyzed most transportation and closed many businesses. (Cheever 64)

When *Night of the Living Dead* and *Rosemary's Baby* were released in 1968,[5] American society had already experienced several waves of public paranoia. Since the early 1950s, with McCarthy's hunt for Communists and the government's nuclear tests, politicians and the media had put the population in a constant state of fear. It seemed as if the atomic bomb could explode at any moment; the "red danger" was omnipresent. The conspiracy theories flourishing after Kennedy's death fueled Americans' belief that their lives were subject to an "invisible government," as David Wise and Thomas Ross suggested in 1964. This "interlocking, hidden machinery" was alleged to determine the course of US policy (1–2).

As people became less inclined to believe in the official version of history and more suspicious of politics and the mass media, paranoia also began to permeate American popular culture. Indeed, according to Wells, the "suppression and revelation of knowledge of importance" form the subtext of many political and horror movies of the late 1960s and 1970s (86). Their postmodern narrative of conspiracy is based on an uncertainty about the true version of historical events—the manipulation of truth by the media, the question of whether it is actually possible to determine an accurate version of events, or whether we can even speak coherently about the world. *Rosemary's Baby* foreshadows the postmodern underworld of films like *The Conversation*, *Chinatown*, and *The Parallax View* (all 1974). However, while the conspiracy in Polanski's *Chinatown* is politically motivated, *Rosemary's Baby* locates it within the family, bringing the principles of the political intrigue narrative into the private sphere.

This domestic turn should come as no surprise since the family is indeed the "true milieu" of American horror films (Wood, *Hollywood* 85), even more so since the late 1960s. As Wells notes, the horror narratives of the "post-*Psycho* era" have witnessed "the systematic collapse of assurance in, and promotion of, the family and conservative family values" (85). As divorce rates soared and single-parent households grew increasingly common, it became clear that the postwar model of the nuclear family, with a breadwinner father and homemaker mother, was in part an image constructed by popular 1950s TV sitcoms like *Leave it to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*. By 1971, just three years after the release of *Rosemary's Baby*, one third of the country's college-age population expressed the belief that the institution of marriage was outdated. Ever fewer young people considered values such as religion, patriotism, and "living a clean, moral life" important (Schulman 16). The family, once a refuge from social upheaval, began to embody the increasing disintegration of American society.

The shift in societal attitudes toward the family is clearly reflected in the horror films of the era. The idea that the institution of the American family has become the primary source of violence is perhaps nowhere more evident than in Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974),[6] which links its horror to a critique of the socioeconomic failures of the American Dream. The story follows a group of teenagers looking for relatives in the middle of Texan nowhere—a setting that illustrates the turn to mundane settings in postmodern horror. They fall victim to a murderous family who used to work in the area's old slaughterhouse, an environment that evokes a familiar trope in American fiction. Since Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906), slaughterhouses—especially those in Chicago, the center of the meatpacking industry at the turn of the twentieth century—have haunted the American popular imagination as spaces that point to the grim aspects of the American Dream. Having lost their jobs due to the industrialization of the sector, the slaughterhouse family now plies their bloody trade at home. In their mad engagement in cannibalistic activities, these figures of domesticity represent a perverse image of the traditional American family. The internal structure of this slaughterhouse family is based on violence, but also on a lack of patriarchal authority, embodied by the decaying corpse of Grandpa. The demanding task of hunting down the victims and cutting them up with a roaring chain saw is reserved for one of his "boys."

Violating Boundaries: Reflections on Postmodern Horror

Informed by an overwhelming sense of paranoia, postmodern horror departs from the traditional pattern of order-disorder-order by violating the boundaries between worlds,[7] essentially revealing the juxtaposition of good and evil, of us and the monster, to be an illusion. The postmodern monster, then, does not invade our world—it is already within us, and there can be no protection from its attack. Consequently, the world of postmodern horror is "unstable" and "open-ended," as Pinedo notes: "categories collapse, violence constitutes everyday life, and the irrational prevails" (113). *Night of the Living Dead* exemplifies the shift toward disturbingly familiar settings for the unfolding horror. The characters are average people, and the terrible events take place in an unassuming Pennsylvania cemetery and farmhouse—an ordinary world transformed "into a landscape of unrelenting horror" (Dillard 20). In the film's most horrific scenes, a young girl first eats parts of her father's body before brutally murdering her mother. A turning point in the history of the horror film, this sequence made it clear that the threat to society was no longer external but lay at the heart of society itself. More recently, in the wake of the Great Recession of 2008, a variation of this trend

can be seen in a number of horror films preoccupied with sleepwalking, nocturnal paralysis, and other sleep disorders. Movies such as *Sinister* (2012), *The Conjuring* (2013), and *Dead Awake* (2016), writes Dawn Keetley, feature human monsters who are "versions of ourselves wrenched free from reason and volition" (1017).

Before embarking on our analysis of *Rosemary's Baby*, let us recall Pinedo's poetics of postmodern horror cinema. According to Pinedo's working definition, the genre "operates on the principles of disruption, transgression, undecidability, and uncertainty" (91). First, it violently disrupts the familiar fabric of everyday existence. Second, it boldly transgresses established boundaries and challenges societal norms. Third, it casts doubt on the very nature of rationality, questioning the validity of logical thought. Fourth, postmodern horror leaves the audience in a state of unresolved tension, refusing to provide neat narrative conclusions. Finally, it creates a confined realm of fear in which protagonists and audience are bound by the same unsettling experience of terror (Pinedo 90–91). While the following discussion of *Rosemary's Baby* is certainly guided by Pinedo's valuable framework, I wish to highlight the film as an early but prime example of the dominance of ontological questions in postmodern horror.[8] From its opening shots, the film's exploration of the horror inherent in the ordinary is reflected in a specific form of the architectural uncanny.[9] Located in the Dakota Building (1880–84), an iconic Upper West Side behemoth referred to in the film as "The Bramford," the young couple's new home is the site where supernatural horror, domestic melodrama, and Victorian aesthetics intersect. The building itself carries a rather sinister history: as their friend Hutch informs them, this "repressed Gothic house" (Williams 101) was once inhabited by witches and has witnessed several mysterious deaths. Perhaps even more unsettling is the apartment's architecture. With its "dilating rooms and womblike corridors," (34) as Virginia Wright Wexman notes, it takes on qualities reminiscent of the labyrinthine castles often associated with horror stories.[10] From the moment Guy and Rosemary enter with their real estate agent, the apartment exudes an eerie atmosphere. Both the film's frequent shots of half-open doorways and the fact that characters and actions are often only half seen suggest the existence of a hidden reality (Wexman 40). A chest of drawers that has been moved to barricade a closet amplifies this ontological uncertainty. It is in the apartment, of all places, that Rosemary experiences a profound sense of alienation. What should have been a place of refuge and protection becomes for Rosemary a hopeless space of paranoia, where the uncanny has taken root in the very fabric of furniture and wallpaper.

Rosemary's Baby, like many horror movies of the late 1960s and 1970s, can be read as a cinematic response to contemporary social upheaval and the questioning of mainstream American values. The film makes clear that in a paranoid world, the once-trusted institutions no longer offer protection from evil; even friends, neighbors, or family "might prove unpredictably malevolent" (Tudor 221). Most obviously, marriage has lost its 1950s sanctity. In Polanski's perverted version of the nuclear family, the husband is indeed the last person to be trusted. In abusing and oppressing his wife, Guy embodies the familiar that begins to frighten us. Rosemary's profound tragedy stems from her inability to comprehend her husband's sinister intentions. Notably, as "both a product of and widely distributed participant in the anxieties and conflicts of that specific moment" (Valerius 116–17), *Rosemary's Baby* engages with pressing real-world issues in a decidedly postmodern way by implying that the line between historical fact and fictional representation is ultimately unreliable. By rethinking the popular image of John F. Kennedy and constructing a link between the Pope's visit to New York and Rosemary's traumatic "baby night," *Rosemary's Baby* emphasizes ontological uncertainty

and becomes an example of what Linda Hutcheon has called "historiographic metafiction" (5). Not only does the film suggest that the Pope himself may act as Satan's emissary, but the embedding of Kennedy in the story carries similar connotations. With its revisionist postmodern impetus, the film rejects the image of Kennedy as a figure of hope; instead, it presents him as both a radical Catholic and, through his association with Roman Castevet, a devil's advocate. Kennedy appears in Rosemary's dream as the captain of a yacht headed for a typhoon. When Rosemary asks why her best friend Hutch is not allowed to join them on the cruise, Kennedy replies, "Catholics only. I wish we weren't bound by these prejudices but unfortunately, we are."

"Baby Night": The Violation of the Female Body

A key feature of horror movies is the repressed desire of their characters to escape the mundane world and experience the attractions of the dangerous but more vivid underworld. As Sigmund Freud argued, society constantly feels the need to control people's desires, to contain them within defined structures. In horror films, these previously repressed forces of ecstasy and disorder return to life and threaten to overwhelm the characters. In a paraphrase of Freud's ideas, Wood has shown that the monstrous Other represents "what is repressed (but never destroyed) in the self and projected outward in order to be hated and disowned" ("An Introduction" 9). The Apollonian surface of control and order opens up to an abyss of danger, a sphere of the irrational and primal. The horror narrative can thus be seen "as an amalgam of desire and inhibition, fascination and fear" (Pinedo 107). One reason for the appeal of the underworld is its unbridled sexuality, often embodied in the figure of the vampire. This may explain why Mina and Lucy in Stoker's novel are attracted to Dracula: he allows them sexual experiences that are otherwise repressed in Victorian England. By bringing to the surface what is constantly denied, Dracula channels the dark side of human nature, a sphere whose essence cannot be rationally grasped.

Rosemary's Baby essentially revolves around a troublesome twist of this constellation. Rather predictably, Polanski's film juxtaposes the sphere of sexuality with the world of Catholicism. While Rosemary feels increasingly isolated from her own family's faith because of Guy's Protestant background, she relives her Catholic upbringing in hallucinatory dreams that allude to her repressed sexuality. In these dreams, Rosemary is repeatedly shown wearing nun-like garb and being scolded by a nun who disapproves of her behavior. More disturbing, however, is the film's key episode, a surrealistic dream-as-reality sequence typical of postmodern horror cinema (Pinedo 94), in which Rosemary enters the Dionysian underworld and undergoes an "immersion into the dark forces behind Western civilization" (Williams 104). Rosemary, who has been trying to get pregnant for some time, eagerly anticipates an intimate evening with Guy. However, due to the chocolate mousse dessert prepared by Minnie Castevet, she will experience the long-awaited "baby night" in a state of drug-induced unconsciousness. Shortly after Rosemary passes out, a series of disparate, shocking images blur the line between hallucination and reality, leaving the viewer thoroughly disoriented. Rosemary is taken on a fateful journey into the unconscious—a journey that not only liberates sexual desires previously suppressed by Catholic rules, but also perverts those desires in a rape scene. Through shifting camera angles, Polanski intercuts Rosemary's fantasy with visual and auditory elements that imply that she is dimly aware of being carried into the adjacent apartment where she is then victimized in a Satanic ritual. As Va-

lerius observes, "[h]er dreams register her sensory experience, combine it with memory, emotion and the material of her subconscious, and transform it into fantasy" (123).

We first see Rosemary floating on an ocean raft, her red dress alluding to the sexual encounter to come. Then she appears on a yacht, standing next to John F. Kennedy. Another shot shows her walking naked on deck. When the ship is caught in a storm, an African American helmsman orders Rosemary to "go down below." Still naked, Rosemary descends a flight of stairs, crossing over into the underworld—the world of the unconscious. In this womb-like space, a coven awaits her, ready to sacrifice her purity in a satanic ceremony. While the members of the coven, including Guy and the Castevets, hum their songs, Rosemary is tied to a mattress and her body is painted with red blood. As Guy approaches Rosemary and begins to penetrate her, her face indicates sexual pleasure—until she regains consciousness, opens her eyes, and realizes that it is not her husband. Guy's face has changed to that of the devil, his green eyes staring violently at Rosemary, who is terrified but unable to move. When Rosemary wakes up the next morning, she notices that her body is covered with scratches, but refuses to accept her experience as real. Instead, she remembers the nocturnal violence as a dream: "I dreamed someone was raping me. I don't know, someone inhuman." Guy informs her that he "didn't want to miss baby night" and admits to having sex with her: "It was kind of fun in a necrophile way." Rosemary is appalled, but soon forgives Guy, displacing the horrific events when she discovers that she is pregnant.

After learning of her pregnancy, Rosemary seems to undergo a personality change, as indicated by her new haircut. The extreme pain she endures during most of her pregnancy also suggests a fundamental physical transformation—a metamorphosis that is at the heart of the paranoid horror narrative (Tudor 99 ff.). She gradually loses weight and acquires a ghostly appearance, accentuated by her unusually pale face. Although she and her friends notice this transformation, her faith in authorities and her husband prevent Rosemary from seeing another doctor. The sadistic Dr. Abraham Sapirstein, a prominent obstetrician recommended by the Castevets, who turns out to be one of the architects of the conspiracy, keeps assuring Rosemary that her pain will soon go away and refuses to prescribe any medication. Instead, he advises her to drink herbal mixtures, which Minnie is eager to prepare. Abusing his dominant position as a figure of trust, Dr. Sapirstein also discourages her from seeking information and outside opinions about pregnancy: "Please don't read books. And don't listen to your friends either."

The violation of the female body by a male villain is, of course, a recurrent theme in horror movies, and *Rosemary's Baby* is most certainly "a film about men controlling women's bodies" (Jones 185). After all, Rosemary's monstrous husband Guy has agreed to a Faustian pact: while he is promised success as an actor, she will give birth to Satan's son. As a result, her body itself becomes the site of unspeakable horror.[11] In the context of the 1960s feminist movement, however, the spectacle of her pregnancy need not be read as a misogynistic commentary on the maternal body, but rather as a rejection of the conservative belief that women should fulfill their role in society as mothers. By undermining the ideal of white, middle-class pregnancy, Valerius argues, the film "contests the essentialist conflation of women with maternity and the paternalistic medical and legal restrictions on women's access to abortion prior to Roe v. Wade (1973), which enforced that conflation in practice" (119).

Rosemary's own conservative attitude toward family and her desire to have a child are expressed in a cynical universe. Caricaturing the conventional notion of the child as a symbol of the future, her demonic child's destiny is to turn the world order upside down, thus symbolizing the disintegration of family structures. In this way, *Rosemary's Baby* explores another recurrent theme of postmodern horror: children have lost their status as figures of innocence and purity. Like everyone else, they are corrupted by society and no longer serve as signs of hope. *Rosemary's Baby* turns the sacred child into the embodiment of evil: as a symbol of the dark side of the American Dream, the Antichrist which Rosemary gives birth to suggests an apocalyptic future. *Rosemary's Baby* thus reflects upon a social reality that troubled the entire nation: children seemed to have become a threat to the social order and the values of the older generation. Above all, Rosemary's child reminds viewers of "the horrifically familiar embodiment of difference" (Sobchack 178). It is the manifestation of the Other that we fear and seek to suppress.

Postmodern Ambiguity: *Rosemary's Baby* and the Absence of Metanarratives

Jean-François Lyotard famously defined the postmodern condition as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv). This implies a fundamental skepticism about all-encompassing explanations of the world, especially those with totalitarian tendencies. Among the various grand narratives that have faced considerable challenges since the 1960s, religion stands out as a significant example. It is in this context that *Rosemary's Baby* unfolds its subversive potential. By intertwining the themes of skepticism and religious anxiety, the film presents a poignant examination of the postmodern condition.

As Derry points out, *Rosemary's Baby* was released against a backdrop of societal tensions surrounding religious faith and disbelief including

> the election of a new pope in 1964; the well-publicized notion of "God Is Dead"; the crisis in the Catholic church as so many priests and nuns left the church; the explosion of interest in astrology, horoscopes, and Eastern religion; and the sense in the United States of a special need for a spiritual connection at a time when church attendance had decreased and the country was undergoing social cataclysm. (168–69)

Rosemary's Baby explores the nature of Catholicism and captures the atmosphere of shattered faith prevalent in 1960s America. According to Rosemary's neighbor, Roman Castevet, Catholicism is mere show business, driven by public perception rather than genuine holiness: "No Pope ever visits a city where the newspapers are on strike." His contempt for the Pope is particularly telling in the presence of Rosemary, who was raised Catholic. On several occasions, the film emphasizes the process of secularization and even commodification that has affected the Church. Watching the Pope address a crowded Yankee Stadium, Guy notes striking parallels between this televised speech and ordinary television commercials, further reinforcing the correlation between Catholicism and the realms of entertainment and spectacle.

By emphasizing the ambiguous nature of Catholicism, *Rosemary's Baby* is deeply reflective of a society in which the unconditional belief in God, as a central metanarrative, is being shattered. The film not only alludes to the founding of the Church of Satan in the 1960s, which sparked curiosity about clandestine Satanic cults, but also darkly parodies the birth of Christ by depicting the conception of the Antichrist through an act of violence. This narrative choice challenges the fundamental dichotomy between good and evil. According to Wexman, several

scenes in the film suggest that Polanski deliberately equates orthodox religion with the inhuman rituals of profane sects. As a result, the film "speaks to the ludicrous nature of all religious beliefs, for all religions grant the world an unambiguous meaning that the film wants to deny" (39–40).

The failure of religion in an age of secularization is also evident in other horror films of the period. While in *Night of the Living Dead* a character's remark that "there's not much sense in my going to church" reflects society's increasing disinterest in organized religion (see Dillard 17), William Friedkin's shocker *The Exorcist* (1973) presents viewers with a more ambiguous stance. Although divine forces are unable to prevent the devil from entering the body of a young girl named Regan, the ancient practice of exorcism proves to be the only effective way to defeat the invading evil and save her. But when the old priest finally begins the exorcism, the devil already has a firm hold on the girl; he can only be defeated by killing the person he possesses. The younger priest sacrifices himself by forcing the demon into his own body. By committing suicide, he kills the demon and becomes a Christ-like martyr. Catholicism proves successful in defeating the intrusion of evil: thanks to the newly won power of religion, the old order can be restored; Regan regains her pre-pubescent innocence, completely unaware of the horrific events her body has played host to. Consequently, the film can be seen as a reactionary response to *Rosemary's Baby*, which promotes a definite challenge to the world order by turning Christian values on their head. Rosemary accepts the devil's child as her own—a child born to rule the world, born to "redeem" humanity from Christianity. Given the waning influence of religion, Rosemary lacks the means to defend herself against the onslaught of evil.

As a typical postmodern character, Rosemary operates within an arbitrary interplay of overdetermined signifiers that constantly shift their meanings. The Castevets initially appear to be "the most wonderful people in the world," as Terry Gionoffrio, their foster daughter, observes. A former homeless drug addict, she was adopted by the Castevets two months earlier. If not for them, she would "be dead now," says Terry: "That's an absolute fact: dead or in jail." The Castevets' integrity is called into question, however, by Terry's remark that at first, she thought they wanted to use her for "some kind of sex thing." In fact, they mean for her to play a crucial role in their coven; faced with the prospect of giving birth to Satan's son, Terry then commits suicide. Similarly, Terry's talisman functions as an overdetermined signifier. When Rosemary first sees it on Terry, she exclaims how beautiful it looks. With Terry's death, however, the good luck charm loses its positive connotation, and Rosemary, instinctively doing the right thing, refuses to wear it when Minnie presents it to her as a gift. After hiding it for some time, she finally decides to put it on despite her initial refusal—and inadvertently nurtures the devil's child within her. However, Rosemary only realizes that the piece has become a sign of doom when she learns that Dr. Sapirstein has the same pendant.

Time and again, *Rosemary's Baby* illustrates that, as Pinedo writes, the postmodern horror narrative "operates on the principle of undecidability," blurring "the boundary between subjective and objective representation by violating the conventional cinematic (lightning, focus, color, music) codes that distinguish them" (94). By constantly confronting the audience with two conflicting interpretations of the same events, Polanski's film denies the existence of ultimate knowledge until the very end. This uncertainty stems in no small part from the absence of an omniscient narrator. Since the entire story is told from Rosemary's point of view, the audience

is never presented with any objective clues that might help evaluate the likelihood of a conspiracy. Polanski thus creates a classic example of what Braudy has called "the closed film," which lures the viewer into a fictional world by means of a "claustrophobic identification of our point of view with that of one character" (48–49). Until the very end, the movie toys with the idea that Rosemary is mad: is everything the viewer sees a figment of Rosemary's imagination, or is the conspiracy actually real? The conspiracy may well be "a solipsistic delusion with no reality in the world outside her mind" (23), as McHale describes Oedipa Maas's vision in *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965), Thomas Pynchon's paranoia novel. Rosemary herself is horrified by the consequences of each possibility: either she is mentally ill, or her paranoia is legitimate—and she has indeed been raped by the devil. It is this striking ontological ambiguity that distinguishes *Rosemary's Baby* from traditional narratives. Shifting, in McHale's terminology, from an epistemological question ("how can I know the world?") to an ontological one ("what world is this?"),[12] the film becomes a postmodern experiment in storytelling.

By minimizing artificial cinematographic elements and instead using long takes and real-time shots, *Rosemary's Baby* effectively enhances the film's ability to immerse the audience and facilitate their willing suspension of disbelief. In contrast to the traditional horror narrative, which locates the monstrous in remote and often bizarre places (the isolated island in *King Kong*, for example, or the Eastern European ambience in *Dracula*), *Rosemary's Baby* is set in a modern urban environment. In an homage to Hitchcock's opening of *Psycho*, the film begins with a moving camera over New York. This camera, however, does not descend into the city; the perspective remains a bird's eye view, suggesting the existence of an invisible power that controls the lives of the characters. The movie's naturalistic mise-en-scène contributes to the suspension of disbelief. Only gradually does the film open up the possibility of an unfamiliar world existing beneath reality as we know it. The illusion of reality—the verisimilitude—that Polanski seeks to establish at the beginning of *Rosemary's Baby* is intended to support the audience's suspension of disbelief and to create the impression that things have never been "so clearly seen, so concrete, so 'real'" (Kinder and Houston, "*Rosemary's Baby*" 18).

Postmodern occult films such as *The Exorcist* are based on what Clover has characterized as a "split between two competing systems of explanation—White Science and Black Magic" (66). While the system of White Science is typically represented by doctors resorting to "surgery, drugs, psychotherapy, and other forms of hegemonic science," the world of Black Magic is dominated by practices like "satanism, voodoo, spiritualism, and folk variants of Roman Catholicism" (66). The plot of the occult film, therefore, revolves around persuading rational characters—and, by extension, the audience—that Black Magic is both necessary and superior (67). As the parapsychologist in *The Haunting* (1963) tells us, "The supernatural is something that isn't supposed to happen, but it does." Suspension of disbelief in the inexplicable is central to *The Exorcist*, which ultimately rejects the system of rationality as a metanarrative. The entire first half of the movie is devoted to finding scientific explanations for Regan's alarming behavior. Although the possessed girl is subjected to harrowing medical examinations, it is impossible to find any clue to her illness; modern treatments and machines of utterly futuristic design, "the most sophisticated forms of White Science" (Clover 97), prove ominously ineffective. To liberate Regan from her torment, the narrative requires a rejection of all the rational assumptions on which the enlightened Western world is built; it means, to use Clover's phrase, accepting the superiority of Black Magic over advanced White

Science. By the time medical and psychological interpretations are rejected "in favor of a phenomenological devil" (Kinder and Houston, "Seeing" 47), however, the demon's power has become so overwhelming that it is capable of destroying even the priests who attempt to exorcise it.

It is this delegitimization of scientific discourse that *Rosemary's Baby* also orchestrates. In the postmodern logic of the film, Rosemary could have avoided her fate if she had been willing to question what Pinedo calls "the validity of rationality" from the very beginning (95). In postmodern horror movies, the only characters who can effectively defend themselves against the onslaught of the supernatural are those who resist the notion that the world operates according to rational principles. But by the time Rosemary, with the help of the book on witchcraft she gets from Hutch, finally suspends her disbelief in Black Magic, the unthinkable is well underway.

As Rosemary uncovers more and more plausible evidence of the coven's existence, the audience must decide whether to believe that the conspiracy is "really happening." Polanski succeeds in confusing the audience about which version of events to believe. Visual images of imprisonment, such as Rosemary's gray and white striped dress, the phone booth from which Rosemary makes an appointment with Dr. Hill, and the shadows of the blinds in the doctor's office, reinforce the notion that she is entrapped. Even at the beginning of the film, when Guy and Rosemary first visit the apartment, the camera's focus on the sliding elevator doors hints at this confinement. And yet it is not clear whether the trap exists only in her mind, for in Rosemary's world "the psychological and the factual are terrifyingly indistinguishable" (Wexman 36). Ultimately, however, the narrative of *Rosemary's Baby* is designed to convince us to accept the supernatural interpretation. As Wells points out, we, as viewers, are compelled to adopt Rosemary's perspective because "otherwise our own sanity, sense of perspective, and rational order are also questioned and eradicated" (83). Therefore, as Rosemary adjusts to the idea of a satanic plot against her, the audience must also suspend their disbelief in the existence of an alternative universe—a world where the rationally impossible becomes possible.

Conclusion

In its ultimate surrender to an irrepressible evil—a power that cannot be destroyed by the forces of the good—*Rosemary's Baby* departs from classical horror narratives, which typically conclude with the death of the vampire or the destruction of the monster. The film's postmodernism comes to the fore in its final moments, where the very essence of family and motherhood is rendered utterly absurd. As she continues to hear infant cries in the building, despite having been told that her baby was stillborn, Rosemary is determined to get to the bottom of things. Her paranoia turns out to be justified. Opening the barricaded door that connects the Woodhouse and Castevets apartments, she ventures into the underworld, "leaving home for a Satanic Wonderland," as Lucy Fischer aptly puts it (454).[13] There she encounters the members of the coven, who inform her that the devil is not a figment of her imagination, but that "he really exists"—and that he has chosen her to bear his son. Terrified, but having crossed the point of no return, Rosemary ends up accepting her maternal responsibilities and embracing the baby as her own, no matter how gruesome "its eyes" may be. In a perverse twist, the movie thus establishes an alternative image of the Holy Family. Violated by the devil, Rosemary embodies a distorted version of the Immaculate Conception.

Rosemary's giving birth to the devil's child makes a return to the old order impossible. It is precisely this child's destiny to destroy Christianity, thereby creating a "new world order" that turns the universe as we know it upside down. While the structure of the classical horror film is still intact in Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*—i.e., society succeeds in defeating evil—*Rosemary's Baby* embraces the sense of continuous disruption typical of postmodern fiction. Unlike earlier films about witchcraft (e.g., *The City of the Dead* [1960], *Witchcraft* [1964], and *The Kiss of the Vampire* [1964]), *Rosemary's Baby* does not restore the old spiritual order in general or domestic harmony. Instead, it accepts the power of the cult.

In a universe ruled by the music of chance, there is a tendency to project meaning by creating conspiracies. The possibility that some hidden structure exists beneath the chaos can provide comfort: the narrative of conspiracy, after all, is one of reliability. In *Rosemary's Bab*y, the existence of Satan paradoxically conveys a sense of hope because it implicitly invokes a God who opposes evil forces. When Rosemary finally accepts the devil's child as her own, she also accepts the advent of a new era that replaces the surface world of reason with an underworld of Black Magic. As a supernatural explanation for the inexplicable, the devil serves as an unequivocal answer to the ontological questions raised by the film. His incarnation not only reverses traditional values. It also provides a new "grand narrative"—and thus compensates for postmodern uncertainty.

Notes

1. For a discussion of this postwar notion of conspiracy, see Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy*, 1–6. See also Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, who argues that the questioning of concepts such as autonomy, certainty, and authority is characteristic of postmodernism's "interrogative stance" (57).

2. An insightful account of New Hollywood's social preoccupation is given by Lev, *American Films of the 70s*, 55–61.

3. The term "invasion narrative" is used by Tudor in *Monsters and Mad Scientists*. Tudor writes that "horror movies typically depend upon a very direct embodiment of the classic order–disorder–order sequence. . . . [A] monstrous threat is introduced into a stable situation; the monster rampages in the face of attempts to combat it; the monster is (perhaps) destroyed and order (perhaps) restored" (81). Tudor then defines "three fundamental horror movie-narratives," one of which is the invasion narrative, in which the very existence of society is threatened by a monster from beyond.

4. For a discussion of the impact of urban revolts in the Sixties, see Levy, *The Great Uprising*.

5. According to Waller, the horror cinema of the late 1960s represents a distinct departure from 1950s horror ("Introduction" 2). Jancovich, however, denies such a break and regards the 1950s "not as a static period, but as a process during which the central features of post-1960s horror developed and established themselves" (4). Rather, Jancovich emphasizes a thematic shift within 1950s horror "away from a reliance upon gothic horror and towards a preoccupation with the modern world." The threats in these films "are associated with the processes of social development and modernisation" (2).

6. Williams regards the very form of the horror genre as having "an intrinsic relationship with family situations." Based on Freud's assumption that "vulnerable children" often acquire feelings of paranoia and threat "in early family life," Williams suggests that the depiction of dysfunctional family structures lies at the core of many horror films (17–18). Williams argues that even the Universal horror films of the 1930s "attempted to externalize a horror that really originated from within the family" (30).

7. According to McHale's often-quoted definition, the plurality of worlds is the dominant feature of postmodern fiction. See McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*.

8. My reading is based on McHale (*Postmodernist Fiction*), who argues that the shift from modernist to postmodernist fiction is one from epistemological to ontological inquiry.

9. For a discussion of elements of the uncanny in *Rosemary's Baby*, see Schlepfer. For an in-depth exploration of the built environment through notions of the uncanny, see Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, particularly his discussion of "unhomely houses" (17–44).

10. Cf. also Sharon Marcus's reading of the Bramford in Levin's novel: "The Bramford explicitly represents the antithesis of modernist architecture, with its combination of Victorian and Gothic styles and an interior that suggests the labyrinthine, the invisible, the overstuffed, and the slightly decayed" ("Placing *Rosemary's Baby*" 127).

11. The female body is often turned into a site of horror in postmodern horror cinema. Perhaps most (in)famously, William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973) explores this theme in a rather graphic and disturbing way, confounding audiences by zooming in on the torment of a twelve-year-old girl who may be possessed by an evil spirit (or suffering from a neurological disorder). It can be argued that societal ills manifest themselves in the girl's affliction.

12. This shift is central to McHale's argument in *Postmodernist Fiction*.

13. As Fischer argues, "[i]n journeying to the Castevets' suite, Rosemary links woman's conscious and unconscious pregnancies, her ecstatic and despondent views, modern and ancient medical practices, scientific and mystical beliefs, realistic and supernatural portrayals" (454).

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THE DARK COMEDY OF THE COURTROOM:

Norman Jewison's *And Justice for All*

Abstract: This article examines *And Justice for All*'s (1979) peculiar spin on the courtroom drama. Though the film embraces a mode of seriousness to portray sexual violence and an unjust criminal justice system, it also includes an undercurrent of dark comedy and absurdity. The article shows how the film incorporates dark-comedic absurdity to emphasize how severely malfunctional the criminal justice system is. While the film reproduces the lawyer-as-hero trope known from earlier eras in American film history, it is very disillusioned with the state of the criminal justice system as such. In this sense, it gives viewers a recognizable lawyer-hero to root for even though the film invites viewers to be very skeptical of the state of the system.

Keywords: courtroom drama, *And Justice for All*, dark comedy, the system, heroic lawyer

Norman Jewison's *And Justice for All* (1979) is a rare exception in the history of the courtroom drama. Its portrayal of sexual violence and an unjust criminal justice system is marked by a mode of seriousness, but the film also includes an undercurrent of dark comedy and absurdity. Depicting its protagonist, lawyer Arthur Kirkland (Al Pacino), as an idealist working in a dysfunctional criminal justice system, the film offers a vote of confidence to the classic lawyer-hero trope in American film history, but the film's portrayal of Arthur's milieu relays a fundamental disillusionment with the state of the criminal justice system at the close of the 1970s. Informed by the pressing social issues of its day, the film mixes seriousness and darkly comedic absurdity to articulate a desperation about the injustices it portrays.

Courtroom dramas from the postwar era usually portrayed lawyers "in glowing terms" (Asimow 1132). Lawyers were "springing to the defense of the downtrodden, battling for civil liberties, or single-handedly preventing injustice," which, to law and popular culture scholar Michael Asimow, is indicative of "the popular culture of the time in which attorneys were widely respected" (1132). Indeed, in 2003 the American Film Institute singled out the iconic character Atticus Finch (Gregory Peck), the lawyer-hero from Robert Mulligan's 1962 adaptation of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, as the greatest hero in American film history. Several people have taken issue with Finch, whom they see as the embodiment of the white savior trope (James; Haines), but that does not change the fact that, to some observers at least, American popular culture's premier hero is an attorney.

The courtroom drama speaks to serious issues ranging from racial injustice in *To Kill a Mockingbird* to homophobic ostracization in *Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme, 1993). The gravity of the issues that the genre speaks to is often accompanied by what one could call, to borrow film

scholar Birger Langkjær's take on cinematic realism, "a mode of seriousness" (25–26 and 75–79). Langkjær argues that realist films are marked by this mode of seriousness, by which he means that realist films do not just depict serious subjects such as, say, childrearing, disloyalty, war, or illness. Viewers are also strongly invited to see such films' content in a serious way (Langkjær 25–26). *Tropic Thunder*'s (Ben Stiller, 2008) portrayal of the Vietnam War is satirical and comedic, which means that it is not marked by the mode of seriousness present in, say, *Apocalypse Now*'s (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979) depiction of that war.

Langkjær's argument concerning the mode of seriousness also applies to the courtroom drama. This genre emphasizes the gravity of the issues it portrays, for instance with regard to workplace homophobia in the case of *Philadelphia*. *And Justice for All* takes on several weighty subjects—injustice, sexism, murder, and rape—in a serious manner, but it also features several comedic elements. But what are we to make of this film's simultaneously serious and comedic treatment of the American criminal justice system? This article shows how the film's mix of seriousness and dark comedy articulates a sense of politically charged desperation about gender-related social issues. Contributing to a deeper understanding of the humor in this film, the ar-

ticle further explores how the film's generic hybridity and aesthetics are intimately connected to the film's attempt to engage with 1970s cultural-historical trends with regard to a more general skepticism of the system.

And Justice for All (1979)

The opening credits of *And Justice for All* foreshadow the fate of its idealist protagonist, lawyer Arthur Kirkland. Footage of a Baltimore courthouse set to the sound of a group of children extradiegetically reciting the Pledge of Allegiance—which includes the film's title—is the crux of this montage sequence. Law and humanities scholar Jessica Silbey notes that this montage "begins with the juxtaposition of the wide sunny steps of the courthouse building and its narrow dark halls in the entry way" (101). The sunlit shots of the courthouse invoke a notion of a well-reputed court system, but the "narrow dark halls" suggest a contrast between the outward appearance of the courthouse—synecdochic of the court system as such—and the actual workings of this system 'behind the scenes.' This montage suggests that the film's protagonist will have to navigate within a criminal justice system marked by a distance between its appearance and its reality.

Much of the montage establishes the grandeur of the courtroom, but we also see a sign saying: "No chewing gum while court is in session." The discrepancy between the solemnness of the décor of the Baltimore courthouse and the sign outlining rules about chewing gum foreshadows the irreverence with which the film will portray the court system. Taken together, this opening montage and the title of the film intertextually invoke central ideals relating to the American criminal justice system. If any viewers were to consider the notion that this film was made only for entertainment purposes, the opening of the film rebuts that notion by activating the ideals that the film wishes to engage with.

Several critics have engaged with the opening montage and the paradoxes it entails. Silbey notes that the mise-en-scène of this opening scene activates certain viewer expectations, arguing that "we are awake to the possibility of fault and corruption while we remain wary, however hopeful, of the impact of a specific verdict on our faith in the law's ability to achieve an enduring order and justice" (101). The allusions to the Pledge of Allegiance signal a belief in the system's ideals and profess a sense of loyalty to it. This belief, however, is quite the contrast to how Arthur experiences a broken criminal justice system. Lawyer and film critic Allen Rostron argues that "these opening sequences affirm from the outset a faith in America's basic ideals, but they associate that faith with innocence and naivete by giving voice to it through children" (60). In this sense, the film presents itself as a critique of the American criminal justice system, but this is a critique that does not reject what the film presents as the ideals of the nation. The film, too, 'pledges its allegiance' to central tenets in American society, but it rejects what it sees to be the realities of the system in the 1970s and faults the system for not being able to deliver on its promise about securing "justice for all."

Aside from flagging central themes, the earliest scenes of the film also establish an absurdist tone. An early court scene shows a defendant eating lottery tickets lying on a table in a Baltimore courtroom—important pieces of evidence in the case against him—without anybody paying notice to his actions. Then a fight breaks out that is only interrupted when Judge Francis Rayford (Jack Warden) enters the courtroom and fires his gun in the air before posing the ironic question: "Gentlemen, need I remind you, you are in a court of law?" This line is reminiscent of a similar scene in Stanley Kubrick's absurdist classic *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), in which President

Merkin Muffley (Peter Sellers) admonishes two people for fighting in a deeply ironic location: "Gentlemen, you can't fight in here. This is the war room!" In the case of *And Justice for All*, its early courtroom scene becomes absurd by juxtaposing Judge Rayford firing his gun into the air while lamenting the behavior he is witnessing. Arthur's request for a recess so that his "client could get something to eat [because] he's obviously very hungry" underscores the comedic nature of the scene. With a defendant eating evidence, a psychical fight breaking out in a courtroom, and a judge firing a gun, the scene signals the inclusion of absurd elements into this otherwise serious portrait of a dysfunctional criminal justice system.

This scene, however, is quite the contrast to how the film first introduces Arthur as a character only minutes earlier. A young crossdresser, Ralph Agee (Robert Christian), is booked in jail, where Arthur is being held for having been found in contempt of court the day before. The crossdresser is visibly terrified of going to jail and is only objectified further when he is forced to undress in front of other inmates, who are catcalling him. The dim lighting in this prison scene—a stark shift from the lighting scheme used in the opening montage—visually suggests that the prison system is the dark underbelly in the film's vision of Baltimore's criminal justice system. Arthur objects to how Agee is being treated but is summarily brushed off. The indignity of this crossdresser's treatment is presented as no laughing matter—this is portrayed in a mode of seriousness—but the film's take on the criminal justice system is both absurdist and comedic. Sidney Lumet's classic *12 Angry Men* (1957) went in the opposite direction in its depiction of how Juror 8 (Henry Fonda) continuously challenges each of his fellow jurors' reasons to convict the defendant. Lumet's dialogue-driven parlor drama arguably represents a defense and celebration of the principle of reasonable doubt and is antithetical to Jewison's comedic-absurdist take on the courtroom drama. Put briefly, the criminal justice system works in Lumet's vision, which clashes with Jewison's vision. This skepticism is connected to broader cultural and societal developments that affected the US when the film was produced and released.

The 1970s shook American culture and society. Law and humanities scholar Nicole Rafter argues that American 1970s cultural texts were informed by the two biggest political maladies of the era: The Vietnam War and Watergate (44–49). Indeed, historian Thomas Borstelmann notes how the US witnessed a precipitous drop in public trust in the government in the years leading up to the release of *And Justice for All*. In 1965, 75 percent believed that they could "trust the federal government" (46). By the end of the 1970s, that number had dwindled to a mere 25 percent, and professing a belief in the system was on the wane. Borstelmann sees Jimmy Carter's 1976 win over Gerald Ford as indicative of this skepticism. The election of Carter marked the first time since Woodrow Wilson that a politician ascended to the presidency with no experience in federal politics: "Experience in Washington became a political burden rather than an asset, a remarkable measure of voter distrust in their government" (Borstelmann 46). Recent research by the Pew Research Center shows that public trust in the US government has never recuperated to the high levels registered in the 1950s and 60s. I should add that the Baltimore criminal justice system in which Arthur works, of course, is not to be mistaken for a branch of the federal government. But this skepticism of American government nonetheless seems to inform *And Justice for All*'s portrayal of American society in the 1970s. Articulating this skepticism through the storylines of the three clients whom Arthur represents, *And Justice for All* emphasizes that the issues it addresses are to be taken seriously.

The film's critique of the criminal justice system places it at odds with one body of film, but it also aligns *And Justice for All* with another tradition in American film history. Citing examples such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Inherit the Wind* (Stanley Kramer, 1960), *Anatomy of a Murder* (Otto Preminger, 1959), and *The Young Philadelphians* (Vincent Sherman, 1959), Law and American Studies scholar David Ray Papke argues that American law films in the 1950s and 60s "established the now classic tale of noble and articulate lawyers representing deserving clients, primarily in courtroom trials," which ended up establishing this view as a "cultural norm" (1492). Legal and cultural historian Norman Rosenberg, however, argues that 1950s visions of a functional system were predated by so-called law noirs in the 1930s and 40s, which, to him, raised "doubts about the ability of the trial process to achieve satisfactory closure and about the adequacy of legal language itself" (344–45). In this sense, *And Justice for All*'s skepticism of the criminal justice system calls back to law noirs like *Fury* (1936) and *Stranger on the Third Floor* (1940). Tacitly invoking both of these film traditions, Jewison's film aligns itself with the skepticism of the law noirs while it also counters the then more recent cultural norm of "noble and articulate lawyers" (Papke 1492) of the 1950s and 60s. *And Justice for All*'s way of intersplicing a mode of seriousness with a dark-comedic and seemingly fatalistic sentiment suggests that, to Jewison, it was only by disrobing the justice system of the veneration it was becloaked in in earlier films that it was possible to really take issue with the serious problems that the criminal justice system faced in the 1970s.

Three Stabs to Arthur's Sense of Justice

And Justice for All chronicles how Arthur becomes disenchanted with the criminal justice system through his experience in working with three different clients. Having been arrested after reluctantly participating in an attempt at armed robbery, Ralph Agee hires Arthur as his attorney. Agee is guilty, but Arthur believes that his objections to parts of the case might help Agee get probation instead of a jail sentence. But when Arthur is about to present his arguments at a hearing, his colleague Jay Porter (Jeffrey Tambor) is having a mental breakdown at the courthouse. Arthur chooses to accompany Jay as he is being hospitalized but instructs his colleague Warren Fresnell (Larry Bryggman) to fill in for him when the court reviews Agee's probation report. But Fresnell forgets to submit Arthur's corrections to the report, and Agee consequently faces imprisonment and not probation, which Arthur had hoped and believed would be the result. Agee, fearing how he will be treated in prison, commits suicide after his sentencing.

Another experience that shakes Arthur's faith in the system is his handling of the case of Jeff McCullaugh (Thomas G. Waites), who has been imprisoned for several months due to two lawyers' incompetent way of dealing with a case of mistaken identities. Judge Henry T. Fleming (John Forsythe) is untroubled by the innocent McCullaugh's imprisonment and merely concludes that the relevant paperwork had been filed three days late when Arthur calls for McCullaugh's release. Continuously beaten and raped by fellow inmates in the Maryland prison system, the desperate McCullaugh gets hold of a gun and sets up a hostage situation in the prison. He is ultimately killed by a police sniper. As film scholar Paul Haspel notes, "[a] simple, law-abiding man all his life, he finally commits a criminal act because of the justice system" (128). The fact that McCullaugh is imprisoned through no fault of his own delegitimizes the authority and fairness of the criminal justice system. Legal scholar Lawrence Travis III explains that "the components of the justice process are police, courts, and corrections" (3). This fact is important to bear in mind when considering *And*

Justice for All's indictment of the criminal justice system. It chiefly indicts a faulty court system, but it also problematizes the realities of incarceration (a central part of corrections) by having both Agee and McCullaugh die while in the custody of the Baltimore prison system. The death of McCullaugh by the hands of a law enforcement sniper means that the film also takes issue with an aspect of policing. But this critique is much less central to the film than its criticism of the courts and the prison system. Unlike McCullaugh, Agee has committed a crime, but he is treated harshly and unfairly, as we see in Fresnell's mismanagement of the hearing, as well as in Agee's fears concerning the treatment he will have to endure in prison. Law and humanities scholar Ross Levi notes that the film's "sympathetic portrayal of a transgender client" and its emphasis on how "society's oppressed become even more victimized in the justice system" make the film "ahead of its time" (16). By today's standards, informed by contemporary gender discussions, the film resembles a metoo-esque articulation of gender inequalities.

The third of the cases that shake Arthur's faith is the most central one, both in thematic and narrative terms. Judge Fleming, whom Arthur already has an adversarial relationship with due to his refusal to release the innocent McCullaugh from prison, is charged with beating and raping a young woman. The establishing shot of the building where Arthur meets with Fleming to discuss the judge's case is accompanied by ominous extradiegetic music that foreshadows how Fleming will strongarm Arthur into defending him in court. The unorthodox and suicidal Judge Rayford is a friend of Arthur's, and he suggests that Arthur should take the case, and so does Arthur's girlfriend, Gail (Christine Lahti). Arthur is ultimately able to make Fleming admit to him that he is guilty, and Arthur struggles with the prospect that he might be able to get Fleming acquitted. After Ralph Agee's suicide and the murder of Jeff McCullaugh, Arthur cannot handle the possibility of Fleming going free. All three storylines push Arthur. All of them point to a dysfunctional criminal justice system that Arthur, in the end, must distance himself from in order to keep his conscience and his self-image.

After witnessing the murder of McCullaugh firsthand, Arthur is seen sitting on a park bench, staring despondently into the air when a group of joggers run past him. Arthur impulsively and somewhat strangely gets up and follows the group. Rostron believes that there "is no explanation of why or where he was running. The scene is incoherent, except perhaps as a reference to Rocky's memorable runs through Philadelphia" (64), but Haspel notes that film critic Robert Zarkin is on the mark when he argues that Arthur's actions demonstrate the "sheer mental fatigue" that he experiences in the wake of Agee and McCullaugh's deaths (132). Getting up and running is a sign of his exhaustion, and this scene is thus narratively important in terms of understanding the seemingly impulsive decision Arthur makes during his opening statement in the criminal case against Judge Fleming. Viewers need to understand why Arthur, a thoroughly ethical and professional lawyer, snaps in court and exposes his own client. When Arthur starts turning against Fleming, the presiding Judge Rayford tells Arthur that he is out of order, but that only sends Arthur over the top and he starts yelling:

> You're out of order! You're out of order! The whole trial is out of order! They're out of order! That man, that sick, crazy, depraved man raped and beat that woman there, and he'd like to do it again. He told me so! . . . You son of a bitch, you! You're supposed to stand for something! You're supposed to protect people, but instead you fuck and murder them!

Arthur's belief that both the judge and the trial are "out of order" is the film's clearest articulation of the idea that it is the system itself that is at the root of the problems that Arthur experiences. Arthur is dragged out of the courtroom and the camera cuts to Fleming, whose facial expression shows how this turn of events marks a defeat for him. This shot of Fleming is the film telling us that Arthur's deed is efficient in achieving justice, though Arthur must ostracize himself from the system to do so. Had Fleming gazed with, say, bafflement or amusement at Arthur's outburst, the scene would have had a different tone to it. Film scholar David Bordwell argues that we must consider the creative choices a filmmaker must make, arguing that "the filmmaker chooses an option in order achieve some end" (370). The choice to cut to Fleming and pick a shot where Fleming has that exact facial expression indicates how we are to understand Fleming's experience of defeat, and, in turn, understand that Arthur's actions do have an effect other than his choosing, quite likely, to be disbarred as a lawyer. His facial expression, then, is central to how the film resolves its plot.

Prosecutor Frank Bowers (Craig T. Nelson), however, is upset that Arthur gets to best Fleming. He wanted that 'prize' for himself. Haspel notes that in two different scenes, Frank uses football metaphors to frame his case against Fleming (130). When Arthur tries to persuade Frank to drop the case against Fleming, Frank reveals his career ambitions with his case: "It's the Super Bowl, Art. It's the Super Bowl and I'm the quarterback." In Frank's opening statement to the jury in the courtroom scene at the end of the film, he tells the jury that this case could be their "goal-line stand." These football metaphors reveal that Bowers's way of thinking revolves around notions of winning and losing and has nothing to do with pursuing justice. He is purely motivated by ambition. This is part of *And Justice for All*'s critique of the criminal justice system: many people in the system fail to focus on securing justice. Frank Bowers wants a career, Fleming is unconcerned with the imprisonment of the innocent McCullaugh, and when Warren Fresnell learns that Ralph Agee is imprisoned after Fresnell mishandled Agee's hearing, he complains that case was "nickel and dime." While the film criticizes Bowers for thinking about his career instead of justice, it excoriates Fresnell for focusing on economic gain instead of the clients. "They're people, Warren," Arthur reminds his colleague. Arthur is the odd one out as an idealist in this world.

Rejecting the System

The Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, and the effects of inflation and the oil crisis fueled a growing distrust of the American government (Borstelmann 21). These developments arguably fostered a more skeptical general view of the system, and this skepticism eventually made its way to the big screen in the form of, for instance, Sidney Lumet's *Network* (1976), in which a television network tries to exploit a news anchor's enraged rants against society for its own benefit. Three years later, *The China Syndrome*'s (1979) depiction of a coverup of safety issues at a nuclear power plant furthered this skeptical view of the system. *And Justice for All* also articulates a concern for how the system is faulty given the fact that it cannot provide justice in the cases of Agee, McCullaugh, and Fleming. The film shows Arthur to be a good person trying to do good work, but the system thwarts his efforts. Portraying him as moral by showing him to conscientiously defend his clients and to consistently visit his grandfather, who suffers from dementia, the film even uses his surname—'Kirk' is the Scottish word for 'church' (Tomasulo 52)—to flag his moral nature. It is symbolically significant that it is Arthur's grandfather who praises him for being a good and honest lawyer and affirms

a belief in the criminal justice system. Arthur begrudgingly responds that "being honest doesn't have much to do with being a lawyer, Grandpa." The film suggests that being honest is a good thing, but also shows how honesty is not conducive to functioning well in the criminal justice system. Jewison's film thus offers one iteration of the classic American championing of the vigilante good guy against institutional forces we also see, for instance, in *Dirty Harry* (Jensen 73).

The issue of sanity and functionality in the criminal justice system is further explored through Jay Porter's storyline. Jay has been going through severe emotional distress since learning that a murderer he got acquitted on a technicality has killed two children. In one scene Jay shows up late at night at Arthur's home in complete dismay, and another scene shows Jay throwing ceramic plates around the hallway of the Baltimore courthouse. Jay has done what he was supposed to do in defending his client to the best of his ability, but his storyline shows that his actions negatively affect his mental health, thus making him poorly fit for working in the criminal justice system. Jay's guilty conscience about the tragic outcome of playing by the rules of the justice system is a contrast to Arthur's backstory. Fleming knows that Arthur once broke his oath of confidentiality by informing the police that a client of his had told him fantasies of sticking fireworks into people's mouths. When the news media starts reporting on that actually happening, Arthur betrays his duties as a lawyer for the sake of public safety and informs the police of what he knows. Arthur thus only takes on Fleming's case because he is forced to do so. Jay, however, has done what he was supposed to do, and this experience leads, in a way, to the murder of two children. Conversely, Arthur has done what he was not supposed to do as a lawyer, but he is able to help protect people because of it. But only Arthur breaks the rules of the legal profession. He has broken the rules, but his conscience is clear. This contrast between what is sanctioned by the legal profession (which lands Arthur in a problematic situation) and what is not (which leaves Jay in ethical distress) demonstrates the problems in this criminal justice system.

And Justice for All further develops this discussion of the system through Arthur's relationship with Gail Packer, who works for an ethics committee that oversees legal professionals working in Baltimore and which tries to ensure the functionality of the criminal justice system. Arthur is skeptical about the success the committee will be able to achieve, a point the film also articulates by making the committee uncritical of the suicidal Judge Rayford. Suggesting that the internal form of review with which the criminal justice system self-regulates is inadequate or even misdirected, the film rejects the belief that the system will be able to fix itself as it stands now.

At one point, Arthur and Gail are discussing this issue, and although the film is focalized through Arthur, it does not derogate Gail's point of view. It is more dialogic than that. Literary critic M. H. Abrams defines the *confidante* as a character who is of only minor importance to the plot but who serves as "a plausible device for communicating to the audience the knowledge, state of mind, and intentions of a principal character" (46). To some extent Arthur's scenes with Gail are important in terms of the film communicating his worldview to the viewer, but Gail is more than a mere confidante. Her viewpoint is presented in full seriousness. As one of their discussions draws to a close, Arthur doubts their compatibility, but Gail muses that their opposing viewpoints can help "keep a little friction between" them, which can be a good thing for them as a couple. Their ideological discussion about the criminal justice system fades into the background for a bit to allow them to contemplate their relationship. As a result, these scenes

function to develop Arthur and Gail as characters instead of merely working as representations of divergent viewpoints on the film's central theme.

Arthur's critical stance towards the system ties the film into a strong trend in American history. American Studies scholar Grace Elizabeth Hale notes that oppositional stances can be found both on the left and the right in American cultural history (6–7), and the fact that *And Justice for All* problematizes the mistreatment of a crossdresser in police custody shows that the film's critique comes more from the left than from the right. This point is important to note given the fact that the film articulates its critique of the criminal justice system in the wake of the years of the Warren Court. Earl Warren's tenure as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court (1953–69) is commonly considered to be an era of legal liberalism in the sense that the court used its power to create social reforms that affected the nation and benefitted millions of Americans, including African Americans, women, and workers (Belknap 68). Legal scholar Mark Tushnet notes that liberals would later "yearn for a return to the Warren Court's true course, just as conservatives take the Warren Court to represent everything a Supreme Court should not be" (qtd. in Belknap 65). Key rulings of the Warren Court include, famously, the 1954 *Brown v. Broad of Education* decision that ended the legality of school segregation, the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* decision that decriminalized interracial marriage, and the 1966 *Miranda v. Arizona* decision that called for police officers to inform arrestees of their rights regarding how their statements can be used in criminal proceedings. In the 1960s, the Warren Court's liberalism worked in tandem with Democratic President Lyndon B. Johnson's policies. Both Warren and Johnson "believed that what they regarded as the flaws in the economy, society, and government of the United States could be corrected through legal means" (Belknap 70).

But even though liberal America had experienced crucial victories in both the courts and in Congress since the mid-1950s,[1] several challenges remained in terms of securing rights for some groups. The fact that the Equal Rights Amendment was never ratified (Kruse and Zelizer 69–72) bears witness to the headwind that some liberal causes experienced in the 1970s. This backlash against feminism informs the fact that *And Justice for All*'s critique of the criminal justice system is oriented so much towards crimes of a sexual nature, including rape of both women and men, as well as transphobia. That, however, does not change the fact that the film is focalized mainly through a male attorney and the fact that the woman whom Fleming raped has no voice or agency in the film. Thus, there are limits to *And Justice for All*'s feminist politics, but it is significant that the cases it portrays all center on sexual violence.

The film thus responds to, and is a part of, two interlinked cultural and political developments in 1970s America: feminism and the backlash against it, as well as anti-establishmentarian discourses, as witnessed by the rise in skepticism regarding the government (Borstelmann). The film's strongest connection to anti-establishmentarianism is the fact that it resolves its plot by making Arthur distance himself from the criminal justice system. Pointing to the symbolic significance of the final scene of the film, Rostron notes that Arthur ultimately "must abandon the system" (65). Arthur is seen sitting on the steps of the Baltimore courthouse after his outburst in court. Looking up, Arthur is greeted by Jay, who is now donning a hairpiece. Walking up the stairs to the courthouse, Jay lifts his hairpiece as if it were a hat to greet Arthur. This comedic endnote ties the film's mood back into its darkly humorous vein. Rostron concludes that "Kirkland could not adjust to the system inside the courthouse, but his demented colleague stands a better chance" (65). Rostron's choice to use the word "adjust" here is precise, because

the system's problems cannot be resolved when potential forces for good conform to the workings of a flawed system. The film shows that only through the addition of more idealists like Arthur Kirkland would it be possible to change the system. A lone force for good has little chance of succeeding in securing justice inside the courthouse.

It is symbolically significant that the first time we see Arthur he is in a jail cell, and that the last scene of the film shows him sitting outside on its steps. In the first scene, the criminal justice system has thrust Arthur out of its fold, which foreshadows how he will leave the legal profession of his own volition at the end of the film. When Arthur is moved to reject the legal discipline, however, he has a harder time doing so because of his loyalty to and love of his grandfather, which shows the thematic importance of the several scenes where Arthur visits him at his retirement home. But in order to keep his morals and to get the best of Fleming, Arthur must become the vigilante good guy, which demonstrates *And Justice for All*'s 1970s anti-establishment point of view.

The Social Critique of Dark Comedy

Film scholar Wes Gehring argues that the 1970s saw a surge in dark comedy films (*Genre-Busting*), a genre marked by a "comic irreverence that flippantly attacks what are normally society's most sacredly serious subjects" (*American* 1), which, in the case of *And Justice for All*, is the American criminal justice system. Gehring notes that the genre's three defining themes are "the omnipresence of death, the inherent absurdity of the world, and man as beast" (*Genre-Busting* 6), which fits well with *And Justice for All*, as evidenced by Agee and McCullaugh's deaths, the absurdity of the criminal justice system, and Judge Fleming being a rapist.

Films in this genre are typically focalized through anti-establishment anti-heroes instead of "traditional admirable heroes" (Gehring, *Genre-Busting* 5). *Catch-22*'s Yossarian (Alan Arkin) is a prime example here. Dark comedies also tend to opt for nonchronological narration, portraying a "slice-of-life existence," as is seen in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, in which Billy Pilgrim (Michael Sacks) comes "unstuck in time" and thus time travels from different points in his life. Finally, these typically countercultural films, like the novels they were adapted from, reject the upbeat endings of so many American films and instead "end with a bittersweet honesty, from shattered dreams to death" (Gehring, *Genre-Busting* 5–6). Jewison's film does not feature nonchronological narration, but it fits Gehring's two other criteria. Though Arthur Kirkland is a lawyer, he is not a traditionally admirable lawyer-hero. But the fact that *And Justice for All* pits Arthur against an unconscientious and criminal judge (Fleming) and shows Judge Rayford to be unfit for his job demonstrates how *And Justice for All* embraces an anti-establishmentarian stance. Though Arthur is part of the system by virtue of being a lawyer, he is the outsider who tries to do good within a dysfunctional system. In this way, *And Justice for All* fits Gehring's definition of the dark comedy genre. Equally important is the fact that Jewison's film also rejects what Gehring calls "classic cinema's tidy upbeat conclusions" (*Genre-Busting* 6). *And Justice for All* shows that the conscientious lawyer is ultimately incompatible with the criminal justice system, a notion that hardly reassures viewers about a healthy state of affairs in American society. In this way, *And Justice for All*, like other dark comedies of its day, is antithetical to the feel-good populism of, say, a Frank Capra, whose films showed the little guy to be able to take on the system and win.

And Justice of All is thus no outlier in 1970s American cinema. The purpose of its dark-comedic aspects is to communicate how severe the problems that the criminal justice system faces are.

Laughter here is a coping mechanism in the face of transphobia, rape, and victimization. The film's mode of seriousness in terms of portraying, for instance, the deaths of Agee and McCullaugh shows that there is political anger at the core of this laughter. The film's embrace of comedy, however, makes it something of an outlier in the history of the courtroom drama. *My Cousin Vinny* (Jonathan Lynn, 1992), *Liar Liar* (Tom Shadyac, 1997), and *Legally Blonde* (Robert Luketic, 2001) are also courtroom comedies, but they are not dark comedies like *And Justice for All*. This film's dark-comedic take on the criminal justice system retains a mode of seriousness, which, as mentioned earlier, is premised on the fact that such films do not simply depict serious subjects such as homophobia and unjust imprisonment. This mode invites viewers to see the subject matter of the film in a serious way. The laughs are not included in the film to activate a distance between subject material and the viewers' perception of it.

The film extends its irreverent take on the criminal justice system especially through Judge Francis Rayford's suicidal behavior, which only becomes increasingly pronounced throughout the film. At the start of the film, he takes his lunch while sitting on a ledge outside his office window several stories up. Later on, he takes Arthur on a helicopter ride and reveals that he likes to start flying back to his starting point only when he has used up half of the fuel, which ultimately makes the helicopter crash before they get back. His darkest moment, however, comes just before the final courtroom scene, when he is in the restroom trying to fit the muzzle of a shotgun into his mouth and pull the trigger. Gehring notes that "black humor's stock in trade has always been *shock*" (*Genre-Busting* 8; italics in the original), which shines through here in Rayford's suicidal actions. Though Rayford has many appealing qualities, *And Justice of All* makes him such a darkly humorous character to signal how alone Arthur is as a sane force for good in this system. Taken together, the lack of heroic judges in the film and its dark humor add to *And Justice for All*'s pessimism and dark comedy.

The film also articulates its pessimism by failing to solve the problems it presents. At the end of the film, two of Arthur's clients are dead, the criminal justice system has lost a force for good in Arthur, and the film does not suggest to its viewers that the criminal justice system will be able to fix itself. This is why the committee that Gail serves on is impotent: *And Justice of All* wants to make sure that viewers do not believe that this system will be able to fix itself. For this reason, the film shows that it takes the downfall of a righteous lawyer to remove a crooked judge. Arthur will not be able to parade through the justice system and continue to defend underprivileged clients in the future or maybe even attend to the system's problems. This adds to the film's pessimism but should not be read as defeatism.

To Gehring, novelist Kurt Vonnegut is a central dark humorist in American literature (*American*), which is interesting to note in relation to understanding the function of laughter and dark comedy in *And Justice for All*. Heralded as "one of America's greatest humanists" (Baker), Vonnegut is famous for this dark humor and his consistent political commitment in his novels. In the eyes of media scholar Peter C. Kunze, Vonnegut represents "a blend of absurdist black humor with guarded sense of hope. A light exists at the end of the tunnel—or, at least, a belief in it exists" (42). But Vonnegut's use of dark humor in, for instance, *Cat's Cradle* (1963) and *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) created an ambiguity that meant people were not always sure what he was trying to say, which meant that his work was also sometimes seen as being defeatist (Broer 7). *And Justice for All*'s use of dark humor parallels Vonnegut's dark comedy by emphatically not offering a resigned grin in the face of sexual abuse and death, just as *Slaughterhouse-Five* did not resign to a defeatist humor in its critique of the

fire-bombing of Dresden. The historical motivation for drawing this link between Vonnegut and Jewison's drama was how large Vonnegut loomed in American letters in the 1970s. In 1973, literary critic Jerome Klinkowitz was able to unflinchingly call Vonnegut "the most talked-about American novelist since Ernest Hemingway" (57). Literary critic Peter Freese would later add that, at that point in time, Klinkowitz was "simply stat[ing] a fact" (10). Interestingly, both Vonnegut and *And Justice for All* draw on popular genres in their dark comedy. The former extends from science fiction and the latter employs the narrative template of the courtroom drama in articulating an implicitly hopeful but also very dark political critique. When Jay lifts his hairpiece to greet Arthur at the end of Jewison's film, the film ends on an absurd laugh that retains its political critique. The darkness of the film's humor, the lack of a positive, uplifting ending, and the gravity of the topics it deals with suggest that we are not to see *And Justice for All*'s laughter as defeatist. The film uses its dark humor like Vonnegut did; namely, to retain a critical edge in pointing out how severely malfunctional it sees the criminal justice system to be. In this way, its desperate humor is integral to its political critique. It is a politically indignant laughter, not a resigned grin.

And Justice for Whom?

And Justice for All embraces a mode of seriousness to give weight to the many different cases of injustice it portrays: the unjust imprisonment, abuse, rape, and murder of McCullaugh, the sexist treatment of Agee by both inmates and guards in the Baltimore jails that propels his suicide, and Fleming's rape and the very real possibility that he will go free. The film is so despondent about how to fix this system that it looks to dark-comedic interludes in order to show how absurd the situation is. These injustices are by no means a laughing matter, but *And Justice for All* has little faith in a criminal justice system that produces injustices instead of penalizing them. The fact that the criminal justice system is unable to do anything about the problems it portrays is the background for the film's indignant dark comedy. Laughing at the injustices of the world does not solve anything, but Jewison uses this laughter, as several other filmmakers did in the era, to point out and emphasize the severity of key social problems in 1970s America.

While the film is most centrally concerned with critiquing the American justice system, it is crucial to note that all its cases center on sexual violence. The remark that Ross Levi made in 2005 about the film being ahead of its time arguably rings even truer today. Emphasizing the horrible realities of sexual violence and pointing to the possibility of sexual predators like Fleming potentially evading justice, the film today looks like a precursor to contemporary critiques of gender inequalities. This theme, however, is secondary to the film's main focus on condemning the American criminal justice system.

And Justice for All's pessimistic take on the American justice system counters the cinematic tradition of portraying with reverence, sympathy, and praise lawyers and the criminal justice system. In *And Justice for All*, Arthur is portrayed in "glowing terms" (Asimow 1132) through his time spent with his grandfather and his strong sense of justice, but the system appears to be almost beyond repair. By letting Arthur remain virtuous and giving him his last hurrah by winning over Fleming, the film reaffirms the classic idealization of the lawyer and gives viewers a sense of narrative uplift in the end. Managing 'only' to expose Fleming for what he is and what he has done, Arthur, however, does not improve or affect the system. It remains as broken as ever when the film ends. In this sense, *And Justice for All* affirms a belief in the lawyer-hero, a belief that would not be there if Jewison had let the system corrupt Arthur, and in the courtroom

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drama as a template for discussing justice in a US context. Holding onto a glimmer of optimism about the situation it depicts, the film nevertheless makes a scathing critique of the state of the American criminal justice system at the close of the 1970s.

Notes

1. I should add here that this era's liberal legislative wins started with the New Deal policies of the 1930s (Cowie), but I am here referring to the historical overlap of important liberal wins in both the federal legislature as well as in the federal judiciary.

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RALPH ELLISON TRAVELS TO DENMARK:

Invisible Man/*Usynlig Mand* and the World Location of American Literature

Abstract: This essay argues that the 1969 Danish translation of *Invisible Man* (1952), Ralph Ellison's prize-winning debut novel, offers a set of spatiotemporal coordinates with which the world location of postwar American literature can be mapped. By reconstructing how *Invisible Man* was received both in the United States and Denmark, I show that the evaluative criteria by which the novel was judged to be a valuable work of art break down the geographical delimitation of national literatures. To that effect, the construction of the author figure "Ralph Ellison" was contingent upon his fiction conforming to criteria of evaluation formalized by cultural institutions such as newspapers, universities, and literary prizes. These criteria were often derived from aesthetic principles associated with European modernism, and they come into full view in my reconstruction of *Invisible Man*'s publication and (Danish) translation history. I conclude that the residue of *Invisible Man*'s paratextual apparatus which has survived to this day, as well as the global connections this residue signifies, expose the discursive construction of a nationally specific American literature as an ideological fiction, not a material fact.

Keywords: Ralph Ellison, American literature, world literary space, economies of prestige, translation, Danish newspaper archive, cultural institutions

Introduction: Situating Ralph Ellison

In *Literary Ambition and the African American Novel* (2019), Michael Nowlin argues that twentieth-century Black writers who kept fidelity to the aesthetic doctrines of Western European modernism on occasion managed to carve out what Pierre Bourdieu calls a "dominant" position in the American literary field.[1] According to Nowlin, the formal particularities of literary modernism afforded Black writers a modicum of autonomy from the marketplace's commercial impetus, on one hand, and an ability to mobilize their racial identity in formally new ways, on the other. This relative autonomy supplied Black writers with creative license to depict lifeworlds with an aesthetic and artistic ambition that brought their full complexity into view.

In Nowlin's study, Ralph Ellison stands out as an exemplary figure who epitomizes the intricate relationship between a minoritized author identity and "the worldwide authority—even tyranny—of European high modernism by mid-century" (179). As the winner of the National Book Award for Fiction in 1953, Ellison's debut novel, *Invisible Man* (1952), was celebrated as a prophetic account of the limits and possibilities of Black life in the United States, including how these limits and possibilities are entwined with the nation's democratic horizons. According to Mark Greif, indeed, *Invisible Man* "quickly [came] to stand out as the best-regarded novel of the entire postwar period (1945-1989), a stature that has never seriously been challenged through the beginning of the twenty-first century" (145). Following an unnamed Black protagonist's picaresque journey from the American South to New York City, Ellison's novel critiques political and philosophical conundrums that affected mid-century Black American life. Most notably, the nameless protagonist's caution-inducing encounters with satirized versions of the Communist Party and Black nationalists signpost Ellison's reservations about, respectively, revolutionary class struggle and racial sedition. As an alternative to these political projects, *Invisible Man* proposes that a dialectical relationship between the white dominant social group and minoritized Black subjects historically has structured the organization of American life and culture. "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" the invisible man ponders in the novel's concluding sentence (582), thus suggesting that one part of the pair is fundamentally inseparable from the other.[2]

Revered as an insightful critic of American society and culture, Ellison was throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s able to promote a vision of literary production that tied the aesthetics of *Invisible Man*, and of American literature more broadly, to a philosophical meditation about the state of the nation. "I do happen to feel," he remarked in a 1967 lecture, "that in this country the novel . . . found a [democratic] function which it did not have in any of the nations where it was developed by artists who made it resound so effectively with their eloquence" ("The Novel" 308). Wittingly or not, Ellison attributed to the *American* novel an exceptionalist status that marked it as a different textual object than, say, the French or the English novel. His contention that "the chief significance of *Invisible Man* as a fiction" was "its experimental attitude" is paradoxical in this light ("Brave Words" 151). The concept of "American literature" can be ideologically operationalized as a monolingual and monocultural construct, to be sure, but the process of literary production, when assessed as a historically contingent practice, always connects the American writer to a deeper history of cultural production and reception that transcends territorial borders. As the "transnational turn" in American studies has highlighted, the notion of a fixed or immobile national literature is nothing more than an ideological invention.[3] In contrast to geographical borders, literary borders are always porous and symbiotic. In the case of *Invisible Man*, the novel's nationally specific content is formally figured by the "experimental attitude"

that typified Western European modernism. Even writers such as Ellison who are conceptually committed to the project of a specifically *American* literature cannot help but unintentionally reinforce the critical notion that American literature is, in both figurative and material terms, an *inter*national undertaking.[4]

Despite Ellison's proto-nationalist conception of what American literature was, or should be, the social distinction he was afforded in the United States resonated across the Atlantic. As the Danish newspaper archive reveals, Ellison's dominant position in the American literary field influenced how *Invisible Man* was received by Danish critics. By homing in on the reception of the 1969 Danish translation of *Invisible Man* (titled *Usynlig Mand*, translated by Mogens Boisen), this article unpacks the relationship between the national orientation of Ellison's novel and its circulation in what literary theorist Pascale Casanova has called "world literary space," a networked field of literary production and reception that has a global reach (82–102).

The construction of Ellison as an important author figure in the dominant American literary culture—mediated, as it was, by cultural institutions such as newspapers, universities, and the prize industry, as well as the geopolitical situation around the globe during the Cold War—necessarily affected the construction of Ellison as an author figure in the marginal Danish literary culture. Situated within this literary-historical frame, my essay tackles two interrelated problems. First, I investigate the aesthetic and political criteria that both American and Danish critics used to evaluate *Invisible Man*. In doing so, I emphasize that it does not make sense to speak of a geographically delimited American literature since the production *and* reception of novels involve ideas about art and literature that transcend national borders. With this international perspective in mind, I then explore the materiality of American literature's global presence by reconstructing from newspaper articles and other ephemera the journey *Invisible Man*/*Usynlig Mand* embarked on when it was translated into Danish. The archival evidence I have extracted from the cultural context of postwar Denmark offers a revealing perspective on the conceptual construction of "American literature." The Danish newspaper archive underscores that processes of literary production and reception are socio-institutionally mediated, certainly, but it also suggests that these processes cannot be contained by national borders. As an object of public commentary and evaluation, *Invisible Man*/*Usynlig Mand* accordingly provides a set of spatiotemporal coordinates with which it is possible to map the world location of postwar American literature.

Invisible Man in the United States

According to his biographer Arnold Rampersad, Ellison had a powerful voice in various artistic and intellectual domains. He even spoke with "unprecedented authority for a black American" in the wake of *Invisible Man*'s publication in the United States (275). This authority—fickle and elusive as that concept necessarily is—was intimately related to the institutional infrastructure according to which information and knowledge were circulated in the mid-twentieth-century United States.[5] The publication of *Invisible Man* occasioned a moment of instant institutional gratification, and the critical discourse that developed in the wake of this literary event attributed to Ellison a level of social distinction that resonated with the period's cultural elite. To that effect, it was not unusual for critics affiliated with influential cultural institutions to link *Invisible Man*'s style and symbolism to the literary tradition of high modernism. The "*Herald Tribune Book Review* dubbed Invisible [the novel's protagonist] 'the young dark Ulysses'," for example, thus wedding Ellison's debut novel with James

Joyce's celebrated tome (Rampersad 260). In another laudatory review, the writer Saul Bellow noted that a critically acclaimed excerpt published under the title "Battle Royal" in a 1947 edition of *Horizon* had "turned out to be not *the* high point [of the novel] but rather one of the many peaks of a book of the very first order, a superb book" (27). Ellison had proved, Bellow assessed, "that a truly heroic quality can exist among our contemporaries," a feat "that can only be done by those who resist the heavy influences [of institutions] and make their own synthesis out of the vast mass of phenomena, the seething, swarming body of appearances, facts, and details" (28). These praising comments notwithstanding, Bellow's attribution of aesthetic autonomy ("resist the heavy influences") to Ellison's novel failed to consider the irony that the ascription of autonomy itself relied on a media ecosystem in which various institutional sites that all exerted a significant pressure on the formation of aesthetic hierarchies were connected. It was the *appearance* of autonomy that mattered to Ellison's literary reputation, not an actual detachment from the institutions that regulated the distribution of literary value in the mid-twentieth-century United States.

The public-facing evaluation of Ellison's work was not without detractors. J. Saunders Redding complained that Ellison "has put all of his power into describing the diurnal life of gnats" (qtd. in Rampersad 262). Similarly, the communist intellectual Lloyd L. Brown was revolted by Ellison's style. In his early review of *Invisible Man*, Brown accused Ellison of conforming "exactly to the formula for literary success in today's market" (31). Ellison, Brown fulminated, belonged to a cluster of chic, anti-communist Black writers whose foremost character trait was "their servility to the masters" (32). Although it dismayed Party-affiliated intellectuals such as Brown, *Invisible Man*'s critical depiction of "the Brotherhood"'s exploitation of the protagonist as a tokenized mouthpiece for the project of communism typified the waning influence of communist thought on mainstream Black American writing in the postwar United States. Communism had been imbricated with Black American cultural production during the interwar years—Langston Hughes, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Paul Robeson all sympathized with the communist cause, for instance—but the Party's broken promise to "hurry racial capitalism to its grave" dissolved some of the bonds that bound minoritized cultural producers in the United States to ideological allies in a global commons (Maxwell 5). Novels such as *Invisible Man* transformed this broken promise into a creative source for political critique. Ellison, William J. Maxwell notes, "distinctly figure[d] the party as another pale patron holding puppet strings, one more shortsighted white projector onto the screen of blackness" (4). As depicted in *Invisible Man*, communism was yet another political movement incapable of seeing beyond the surface characteristic of skin color.

Controversy, or even scandal, is not a deathblow to a literary artifact. In a roundabout way, the sort of public disagreement that followed *Invisible Man*'s entrance into the literary marketplace—whether centered around Ellison's depiction of political movements or something else—reinforced the novel's status as a culturally legitimate object worthy of discussion. In the context of the prize industry, James English has instructively commented that "indignant commentary about [a cultural prize] is an index of its normal and proper functioning" (208). A similar logic structures public debates about books. The "indignant commentary" that decried the literary value of *Invisible Man* attributed a specific type of cultural legitimacy to this artifact that crystallized in both symbolic and material ways shortly after the novel's publication. On one hand, Ellison and his defenders could comment on the crude, unimaginative modes of conferring value upon works of fiction that informed ideologically

inclined critics, as when Ellison publicly reprimanded the literary critic Irving Howe for insisting that "unrelieved suffering is the only 'real' Negro experience" ("The World and the Jug" 159). On the other hand, Ellison could also capitalize financially on *Invisible Man*'s enhanced visibility in publicly mediated conversations about literature and across commercial markets.

The stakes of Ellison's case for literary renown had been raised when he became the first Black author to win the National Book Award for Fiction, a literary prize founded in 1949. In his own words, Ellison surmised that this prestigious award stimulated both the symbolic power and commercial success of *Invisible Man*. "Dear Herbert," he began a June 5, 1953, letter to his estranged younger brother. "I suppose you know by now that my book won the National Book Award for Fiction, which carries no money but quite a lot of prestige and what is much better an increase in sales" (*The Selected Letters* 323). Ellison was able to enjoy the financial fruits of his creative labor while also preserving the artistic integrity that distanced him from the economistic logic of commercial publishing. *Invisible Man*, he rightly recognized in the letter to Herbert, could now be distributed to a broad audience with few symbolic repercussions because cultural institutions that had an outsized influence on the criteria of aesthetic judgment sheltered Ellison and his novel from market "contamination." In the end, then, the social forces that underpinned the mid-twentieth-century American "cultural economy" protected *Invisible Man* from the aesthetic corruption typically associated with processes of commodification, even as the novel was distributed to a broad audience (English 10).

Contextualizing *Invisible Man*'s Arrival in Denmark

When books travel, unexpected obstacles almost always arise. Consequently, the relationship between a national literature and world literary space is more complex than the mere historical fact of that relationship can hope to explain. One must account for the influence of cultural institutions that mediate the circulation and reception of translated books, say, and it is also necessary to consider how an author figure is dispersed within the receiving cultural system before a book is translated. Translation theorist Susan Bassnett rightly notes that translated texts "operate in a web of interconnections," and some of this web's connective tissue is constituted by the public mediation and circulation of author figures prior to the actual translation of their books (180).

The challenge of reconstructing a novel's reception in new cultural contexts is not eased by the fact that temporal lags always accompany processes of literary institutionalization. It quite literally takes time to consecrate a nationally specific author's literary output in another part of the globe. Consecration's temporal lag is affected by communication technologies since these determine the speed and reach with which a writer's oeuvre and cultural presence can be translated and potentially recognized elsewhere. The transatlantic circulation of the author figure "Ralph Ellison" followed this media-systems formula as he initially was brought to Denmark through newspapers. In 1952, the year of *Invisible Man*'s publication, the Danish literary commentator Jytte Seidenfaden predicted in *Information* that "we probably will see translations [of *Invisible Man*] in Denmark" (2).[6] This prediction came to fruition, albeit not until 1969, at which time Ellison's renown in the United States rested not only on the publication of *Invisible Man*, but also on his vocation as a revered public intellectual, university teacher, essayist, and literary critic.

Temporal lag was not the only hurdle to the production of Ellison's status as an important writer in Denmark. Indeed, the most significant obstacle to the reception of his book had nothing to do with the form or content of *Invisible Man* as such. Rather, it was the generally dismissive (or critical) attitude that many Danish contributors to public discourses about literature shared towards the United States, as well as American literary production, that gave Ellison's delayed reception in Denmark an uneven ground to stand on.[7] In a 1959 opinion piece in *Dagens Nyheder*, for instance, a then-young literary critic by the name of Hans Hertel diagnosed several impending problems that in his view threatened to derail the production and evaluation of American fiction. In Hertel's account, the direst threat to American literary production was the institutionalization of New Criticism as a dominant paradigm for critical analysis and interpretation. "New Criticism has been of immeasurable importance to the modern conception of literature," Hertel readily acknowledged, "but its formerly heretical views [of literature] have now become stagnant aesthetic doctrines, high-school curricula, and property of the everyman, and it performs a conspicuous taste-tyranny that propels American literature towards the academic and the sterile, away from the spontaneous" (10). Innovation ("the spontaneous") is a foundational pillar of artistic creation, Hertel contended, but the rigid academic structure that American educational institutions to his mind imposed on literary practitioners and evaluators, not to mention lay readers, was detrimental to the production of a free, autonomous literature. "An increasing number of young writers," he cautioned, "are employed as university teachers and forced into standardized authorships devised in accordance with poetic formulae at creative writing-schools (10). From Hertel's youthful perspective, the advent of what Mark McGurl describes as "the program era" was characteristic of "the academic and . . . sterile" quality of postwar American literature (Hertel 10). Not quite able to appreciate how the new conditions of literary production also diversified the output of textual objects produced in the United States, Hertel failed to distinguish between the general standardization of creative paradigms and the ways in which, say, minoritized writers had transformed lived experiences of marginality into rich creative sources by connecting the particularities of their lifeworlds to new formal registers.[8] The formalization of literary production within the system of higher education did not only lead to mass-standardization, that is; it also afforded writers of less privileged backgrounds an institutional framework within which they could experiment with, and further hone, their craft.

Although he published it before the outright institutionalization of American literary production in the 1960s and 1970s, Ellison's prize-winning debut novel was in many ways a prototype of the aesthetic formation McGurl calls "high cultural pluralism"—an aesthetic formation where minoritized writers, as Nowlin also argues, mined both their own identity and the formal register of literary modernism to produce experimental accounts of life in the United States (McGurl 56–63). Even so, Ellison's status as a literary pioneer in the United States was not unconditionally recognized in Northern Europe, where his arrival on Danish shores was impeded by the delayed translation of *Invisible Man*. In an otherwise complimentary September 5, 1969, review of *Usynlig Mand* in *Information*, the cultural critic Erik Wiedemann hyperbolically remarked that Ellison had been "just about as invisible" in public discourses about literature as his novel's nameless protagonist ("Ralph Ellisons Frekvenser" 4). Ellison's cultural importance in Denmark was unquestionably insubstantial in comparison to that of Paris-based Black American authors such as Richard Wright and James Baldwin, but, as another critic pointed out, there had "in the past seventeen years been written a

good deal about the now fifty-five year-old Ralph Ellison's heretofore only novel, *Invisible Man*" (Neiiendam 4).

Once it was published, the reception of the Danish translation of *Invisible Man* was predominantly positive. The slew of favorable reviews was in part anchored by the laudatory discourse that the Danish literary commentariat had constructed around Ellison's novel even before the publication of the 1969 translation. In a 1964 opinion piece in *Berlingske Aftentidende*, for example, the critic Leonard Malone noted that "*Invisible Man* is narrated with a freedom which no other Negro writers have achieved." The pathbreaking narrative mode championed by Ellison freed *Invisible Man* "from the fetters of protest literature, which makes it possible . . . to provide an illuminating description of the duality and irony of Negro life" ("Fra 'Søn Af De Sorte'" 5).[9] Gesturing toward Ellison's imagined artistic autonomy, Malone stressed that *Invisible Man* transcended the explicit politics which usually inhibited Black American novels from having the status of a valuable work of art conferred upon them. Only a few Danish critics rejected claims made on behalf of Ellison's literary renown. "Clothed in too much palaver and nonsense," John Carlsen dismissively commented, "this banal experience [invisibility] is imagined to be a philosophical revelation and partially explaining the Negro neurosis in America" (19). Unimpressed with Ellison's formal and philosophical experimentation, Carlsen *did* acknowledge that the novel contained certain worthwhile, authentic elements, but his final verdict remained negative: "A medley of themes and a mixture of styles makes *Invisible Man* an original and failed book. Original and moving in its realism and rich, human sensitivity—and failed and dull in its abstract and philosophical passages" (19).

Danish Literary Criticism in World Literary Space

If nothing else, the discrepancy between the positive and negative Danish reception of *Invisible Man*/*Usynlig Mand* underscored the novel's status as a work of world literature. In David Damrosch's formulation, the "variability of a work of world literature is one of its constitutive features—one of its greatest strengths when the work is well presented and read well, and its greatest vulnerability when it is mishandled or misappropriated by its newfound foreign friends" (5). In the context of Ellison, this duality may have had little to do with the state of American fiction as such, and more to do with Danish critics' perception of the United States. As Damrosch puts it, "even a single work of world literature is the locus of a negotiation between two different cultures" (283). Whether in its original or translated edition, Ellison's novel formed a site through which the organizing tenets of American literature, culture, and politics were refracted by the Danish reading public's own literary, cultural, and political biases.

A strict juxtaposition of the Danish and American literary fields insufficiently explains the social forces that operated on Ellison's translated novel, however. World literary space is a tumultuous, networked field where sites and actors always are related to each other in both more and less meaningful ways. Opining in *Berlingske Tidende* on May 18, 1966, Erik Wiedemann implicitly suggested that the practice of literary criticism in Denmark was blinded by its submissive relation to Western European modernism. The inclusion of American modernists in two anthologies about modernist painting and music (edited by, respectively, Ole Schwalbe and Jan Maegaard) had not been replicated in anthologies about literature, Wiedemann complained, and so "Professor Billeskov Jansen's" anthology of literary modernism "has the limiting subtitle 'European modernism after the war.'" While one could "assume" that the American art scene was

"impossible to elude" in the anthologies about modernist painting and music, "Billeskov Jansen has determined that the new American literature is sufficiently peripheral that it *could* pass unmentioned." Literary commentators, Wiedemann lamented, were myopically invested in the evolution of literary production in the "oldest" locations in world literary space. Public-facing critics of "English, French, and German literature" were on average "far more aware of the new developments in their fields than those who review American literature" (Wiedemann, "USAs Modernister" 20). In Wiedemann's view, that is, Danish literary critics were oblivious to the American literary landscape's postwar transformation. Paris, London, and Berlin dominated the production of public literary knowledge in Denmark, and these circumstances ultimately stripped both Danish readers and writers of the opportunity to encounter and experience modernist prose produced across the Atlantic.

Despite his public endorsement of American modernism, Wiedemann's critique failed to properly situate American works of fiction within the complex of social forces that structured the production and circulation of literary knowledge in the postwar period. The paucity of public commentary and literary criticism devoted to American literature Wiedemann identified did not outright disqualify American literary artifacts such as *Invisible Man* from acquiring a certain kind of social distinction in Denmark, nor was his 1966 public call for a re-evaluation of aesthetic hierarchies completely in line with the ways in which US-based cultural institutions had begun to impose themselves on European and Danish systems of literary knowledge production after World War II.[10] Indeed, the burgeoning presence in Denmark of scholars and critics who had been raised and/or educated in the United States gradually rectified what literary commentators such as Wiedemann considered an inadequate exploration of American literature. Paul Levine, for example, was a credentialed expert on American literature who was already working on a book about modern literary criticism and innovative American writers such as "J. D. Salinger, Saul Bellow, Ralph Ellison, Truman Capote, Flannery O'Connor, and William Faulkner" when he arrived in Denmark in 1960 (Malone, "De Kommer" 6).

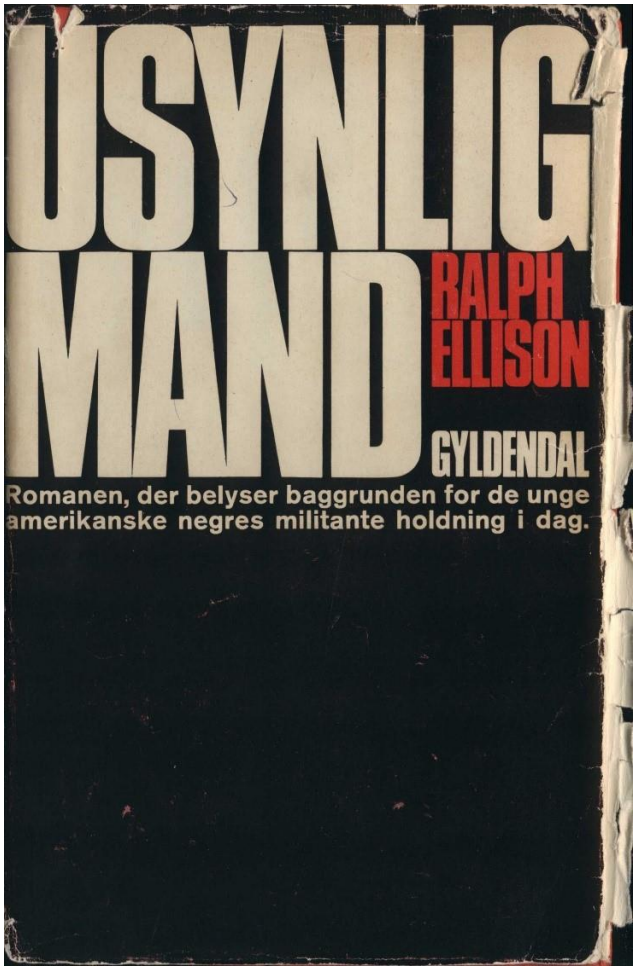
Levine turned his initial visit to Denmark into a career as a professor of literature at the University of Copenhagen. In 1999, when he reviewed Ellison's posthumously published *Juneteenth* (1999), Levine situated *Invisible Man* at the advent of a revitalization of American literary production. "*Invisible Man* was published at the beginning of what proved to be a golden era in American fiction," he wrote. "Just think of Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March*, Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*, William Gaddis' *The Recognitions*, Malamud's *The Assistant*, and Nabokov's *Lolita*" (15). With the exception of Ellison, Black writers are conspicuously absent from Levine's indexation of American literature's postwar revival. This was not an unusual distinction to make. Danish literary commentators had already distinguished Ellison from other Black novelists following the original publication of *Invisible Man* in 1952. Aspiring to a high degree of literariness, Ellison's debut novel epitomized from the initial moment of its international lifecycle the modernist aesthetic principles that exerted dominance over world literary space. In a February 28, 1953, article surveying the depiction of Black characters throughout American literary history, Niels Kaas Johansen praised the modernist thrust of Ellison's literary enterprise, in turn associating him with the upper echelon of Anglophone artistic autonomy. "It is characteristic [of Ellison] that *Invisible Man* is prefaced by an epigraph from the literary mandarin T. S. Eliot," he commended. While he held the view that Ellison's technique needed improvement, Johansen still conferred the status of an important

work of art upon *Invisible Man*. The novel "is not prone to sacrifice anything for the sake of exciting effects," he judged, and Ellison had accordingly managed to "induce awareness among the public about the hopelessness of the social condition of the black race" by raising his "debut novel above . . . documentarian portrayals of society" (2). In Johansen's view, *Invisible Man* transcended the political orientation of Black American protest novels whose ethnographic descriptions of socio-political demise failed to appease the literary tastemakers' aesthetic cravings. Although it is difficult to assess its impact, Johansen's review entrenched Ellison in an economy of socio-cultural distinction, which on one hand attached him to what Casanova calls the "Greenwich meridian" of literary modernity, and on the other set him apart from Black writers whose literary outputs were assessed to be of a more provincial character.[11]

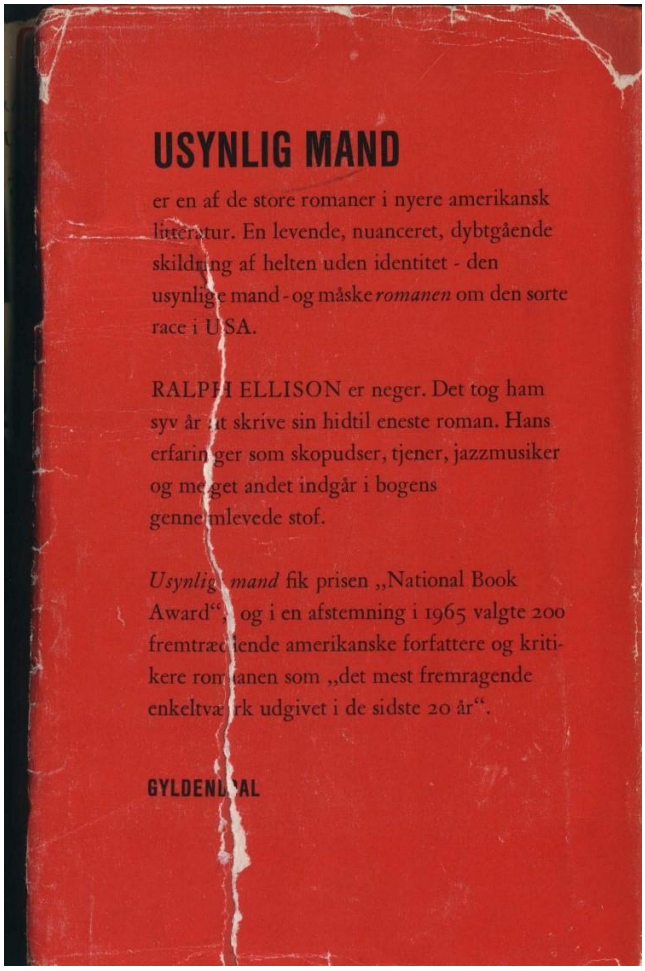
If *Invisible Man* in some ways operates as a work of world literature, then evaluations of Ellison's literary reputation in Denmark are "always as much about the host culture's values and needs as [they are] about a work's source culture" (Damrosch 283). More than that, however, these evaluations are also a product of Denmark's relatively marginal position within world literary space. Danish literary critics' evaluation of textual objects in the immediate postwar period often imitated the ways in which aesthetic judgment was conferred in the "literary capitals" of the world republic of letters. The modes of literary expression that were in vogue in these locations exerted a kind of symbolic dominance upon many, if not all, Danish critics so that the process of aesthetic evaluation in Denmark resembled the process of aesthetic evaluation in more "modern" sites. Considered from this vantage point, Johansen's 1953 commentary is in part an expression of the high regard he had for Ellison's novel, yet it is also an indication of how the formal and aesthetic particulars that buttressed Western European modernism diminished the literary value of nonconforming genres such as the social protest novel. Simply put, in the early 1950s, the main currents in world literary space led through the literary capitals of Western Europe, and the Danish literati unsurprisingly addressed themselves to the locations where they imagined that pure and autonomous literature was produced.

The Materiality of *Usynlig Mand*: Mapping the World Location of American Literature

In the seventeen years spanning the publications of *Invisible Man* and *Usynlig Mand*, American literature came to inhabit a more influential position in world literary space.[12] The reconfiguration of world literary space was inscribed on *Usynlig Mand*'s materiality. Published by Gyldendal, the largest and most storied publishing house in Denmark, *Usynlig Mand* was marketed as a prophetic work of literature. In addition to carrying the title of the novel, the front of the dust jacket offers an intriguing blurb: "The novel that explains the young Negroes' militant attitudes today." As an influential institution in the literary marketplace, Gyldendal's endorsement of the book was intended to maximize its commercial potential. However, the commodification of Ellison's art, not to mention the Black Power movement, encountered resistance among literary commentators. Henrik Neiiendam celebrated the artistic qualities of *Invisible Man*/*Usynlig Mand*, noting as well that "Ellison can refer to the fact that his *Invisible Man* is the only Negro novel whose protagonist suffers from a universal problem" (4). Imposing a "color blind"—that is, white—standard of evaluation on the book, Neiiendam rehearsed a typical line of praise: Ellison had managed to transcend the literary idiom of Black American literature, and as a result his novel had something profound to say about the human condition as such.



Front cover of *Usynlig Mand*, the 1969 Danish translation of *Invisible Man.*



Back cover of *Usynlig Mand*, the 1969 Danish translation of *Invisible Man*.

In Neiiendam's view, it was therefore "false advertising when the seventeen-year-old book now is being launched as 'the novel that explains the young Negroes' militant attitudes today'" since the protagonist "exactly" is "not tricked into thinking that he should react militantly towards the surrounding world's blindness" (4). Neiiendam's observations bespeak how Gyldendal, in his view, misled the reading public by construing *Invisible Man* as a text that could not just illuminate but also explain contemporary social and political conflicts. In an unapologetic attempt to enhance sales numbers, the publishing house promoted an alternative portrayal of Ellison's novel that accorded with the broader reading public's practical uses of literature (as a source of entertainment, self-enlightenment, etc.).

Gyldendal's marketing campaign, one might even say, resembled propaganda. Contrary to Neiiendam's critique of Gyldendal's advertising strategy, however, the conceptual properties of "propaganda" do not only carry connotations of deception and misinformation. As Russ Castronovo explains, "propaganda may be defined as publicly disseminated knowledge that serves to influence others in belief or action" (10). Undoubtedly, Gyldendal sought to enhance the commercial value of *Usynlig Mand*, but the historical conditions that underpinned the publication of the translated text might also have affected, even if unintentionally so, the Danish reading public in other ways. After all, Ellison's novel *had* anticipated many of the social and political developments of the explosive 1960s (race

riots, police brutality, etc.). Gyldendal undoubtedly propagated an ahistorical representation of Ellison's novel, but this representation also sought to optimize its circulation across printscapes and in networks of cultural consumption. Perhaps, given the narrative authenticity Neiiendam attributed to *Usynlig Mand*, the propagation of Ellison's thesis about the American nation-state's dialectical constitution to a Danish audience could even be conceptualized as a form of public good. "Texts," Castronovo points out, "are certainly written and imprinted, but propaganda makes them mobile," and this mobility can potentially bring their political visions to life in the social world (10).

Notwithstanding disagreements about Gyldendal's propagandistic presentation of *Usynlig Mand*, the translation of Ellison's celebrated novel had been a highly anticipated literary event. The fact that the novel was translated by Mogens Boisen, a prolific and highly regarded translator whose impressive oeuvre includes translations of Joyce's *Ulysses* (1920) into Danish, suggests as much. According to Ida Klitgård, Boisen was "Denmark's most remarkable translator," and he "allegedly translated around 800 books from English, German, Swedish and French into Danish" (16). *Invisible Man*/*Usynlig Mand*, it seems, was marked as a potentially important book even before its publication. This hypothesis is further substantiated by the Danish literary commentariat's fabrication of the author figure "Ralph Ellison" prior to Boisen's translation. As noted above, Leonard Malone praised Ellison for his unwillingness to conform to the political doctrine of protest, and he was consequently befuddled that *Invisible Man* had yet to be translated into Danish at his time of writing in 1964:

> But when you consider the lively Scandinavian interest in the American race problem, as well as all the literature concerned with this topic that in recent times has been translated into Scandinavian languages, it is rather curious that *Invisible Man*—the only novel that describes how it *really* is to be an American Negro—still is not translated. ("Fra 'Søn af de Sorte'" 5)[13]

Newspaper ephemera such as Malone's opinion piece validated the narrative authenticity of *Invisible Man* while also imbuing the novel with the power to explore the social ills of a minoritized lifeworld. Even then, it is perhaps Malone's recognition of the "lively Scandinavian interest in the American race problem" that should occasion further investigation since it points toward a general transformation of the Danish perception of the United States in the mid to late 1960s. As a postscript to Malone's immersive article, *Berlingske Aftenavis* wrote: "Seven years in the making, *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison's first novel, was awarded the American literature prize 'National Book Award.'" Despite also including a wildly misleading factoid about Ellison's next book project, the postscript concluded by noting that "Ellison . . . recently" had "been elected to 'The American Academy of Arts and Letters.'"[14] The public's proliferating interest in American culture and politics had seemingly engendered a reaction in the Danish literary field. In this historical moment, indeed, American cultural institutions had enough symbolic sway to warrant inclusion in public discourses about American books in Denmark.

The prestige associated with the American literary scene was incrementally transformed into a valuable symbolic asset during the 1960s. That, at least, is the conclusion which the back of *Usynlig Mand*'s dust jacket gestures toward. "*Invisible Man* received the prize 'National Book Award,'" a blurb on the dust jacket reads, "and in a 1965 survey 200 prominent authors and critics selected the novel as 'the most outstanding work of fiction published in the past 20 years.'" As an integral part of its marketing strategy, the publishing house attempted to negotiate the literary

value of *Usynlig Mand* by having recourse to *Book Week*'s 1965 survey, where two hundred credentialed authors and critics selected *Invisible Man* to be the work of literature that best represented the preceding twenty years in the United States. Of course, one should not uncritically project Gyldendal's marketization of *Usynlig Mand* onto a broader discussion about literary trends across the globe; doing so risks overstating the significance of a single instance of cultural valuation. Even so, as Michael Maguire remarks, the literary blurb is a paratextual "instrument of distinction and affiliation, hierarchization and classification." So, while *Usynlig Mand*'s dustjacket offers no conclusive insights about the actual reception of Ellison's translated novel, it does provide specific cultural-aesthetic and institutional coordinates with which a provisional map of the Danish literary field in the late 1960s can be sketched. According to this map, American literary criticism and US-based literary prizes had reached a level of cultural resonance in Denmark that allowed Gyldendal to convert the symbolic power associated with Ellison in the United States into a commercial asset in Denmark. Cultural actors and institutions that nominally belonged to different domains in the global field of cultural production thus worked symbiotically together to construct in the imagination of the Danish literary public the author figure "Ralph Ellison" and the book *Usynlig Mand*.

Conclusion

My reconstructive analysis of the 1969 publication and reception of *Usynlig Mand* points to the world location of American literature. The residue of the novel's paratextual apparatus that has survived to this day exposes the construction of a geographically delimited American literature as an ideological fiction, not a material fact. For one thing, the translation of novels into other languages makes these books available to new reading publics, and thus new systems of reception and evaluation. More importantly, though, criteria of evaluation that have been imported from the most dominant locations in world literary space shape the backdrop against which a literary artifact such as *Invisible Man* can be comprehended as a valuable work of art in the first place—in the United States, in Denmark, or elsewhere.

Aesthetic principles are not confined by geographical borders in the same way that political subjects are, and they can in fact exert their own kind of symbolic dominance over the global field of cultural production. This was certainly the case in the mid-twentieth-century transatlantic world where, as Richard Jean So has demonstrated, a carefully curated selection of Black American writers were—and have continuously been—tokenized to represent a supposed transformation of twentieth-century American literary production. The institutionalization of American literature's supposed postwar diversification hinged on the embrace of minoritized authors—especially Black authors—who incorporated a modernist, and later on a *post*modernist, aesthetic into their writing. Accordingly, as the case of Ralph Ellison suggests, this institutionalization process was not delimited by territorial borders. Literary cultures outside the United States are affected by the evaluation and reception of texts performed by US-based critics and institutions, but these texts are in turn legitimized as artifacts worthy of critical engagement when they are received well in new cultural contexts. This was certainly the case in the postwar transatlantic sphere, an historical moment during which the major nodes of world literary space were in flux, gradually shifting from the literary capitals of Western Europe to locations in the United States such as New York City.

The seventeen years of literary history explored in this article—1952 to 1969—reflect the reorganization of postwar world literary space. More than that, however, the article's immersion in

this historical period also breaks down neat, nationally specific divisions of literary production, reception, and institutionalization. The discursive construction of the author figure "Ralph Ellison" in the American literary field can be *distinguished* from the construction of "Ralph Ellison" in the Danish literary field, for example, but these two processes are still fundamentally inseparable. The power structure that underpins relations in world literary space turns on an uneven formation of aesthetic dominance and submission, to be sure, but it still pinpoints an inevitable form of literary relationality that transcends the nation-state. Taking seriously the proposition that literary borders are porous and symbiotic, and that literary production and reception always occur as part of a networked global field, thus affords a strategy for specifying the world location of American literature.

Notes

1. For more on Bourdieu's writings about the literary field, see *The Field of Cultural Production* and *The Rules of Art*.

2. For more on Ellison's political and philosophical visions, see Morel, ed. *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope.*

3. For a critical assessment of "the transnational turn," see Fluck, Pease, and Rowe, eds., *Re-Framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies.*

4. Ellison scholars have too frequently been blinded by the author's own insistence on theorizing a relationship between his novel and the American nation-state. See for example Conner and Morel, eds., *The New Territory: Ralph Ellison and the Twenty-First Century* and Muyumba, *The Shadow and the Act: Black Intellectual Practice, Jazz Improvisation, and Philosophical Pragmatism*. In recent years, critics have started to unpack the global complexity of Ellison's authorship. For more on Ellison's international author location, see Devlin, ed., *Ralph Ellison in Context.*

5. For a rich and theoretically dense definition of "authority," see Leypoldt, "Introduction: Authority and Trust in the United States."

6. I am responsible for this translation, as well as all other translations included in this article.

7. For an historical account of the Danish public's many-sided and not always affirmative views on the United States, as well as the Cold War more generally, see for example Petersen and Sørensen, eds., *Den Kolde Krig På Hjemmefronten.*

8. For more on the transformation of institutional conditions of literary production in twentieth-century United States, see McGurl, *The Program Era.*

9. Born and raised in the United States, Malone, a Black man, had settled in Denmark in the early 1960s. He was an important contributor to public debates about Black American culture and politics.

10. The American-Scandinavian Foundation's Fellowships and Grants program, founded in 1912, tangibly influenced the production of literary knowledge at the University of Copenhagen in the latter half of the twentieth century, for instance. Moreover, cultural diplomatic initiatives such as the Fulbright Program allowed American critics and scholars to involve themselves with Western European publics and institutions. For more on how the Danish media landscape was affected by "Americanization processes," see Rasmussen, "Educational Exchange as a Cold War Weapon" and "The Americanization of Danish Journalism."

11. For more on the Greenwich meridian of literary modernity, see Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters,* 82–102.

12. This development was not unlike the changes that manifested in the transatlantic cultural sphere more generally. Variously described as processes of "Americanization" and "cultural imperialism," all things American saturated Western Europe in the 1960s. For an exhaustive account of how the American state apparatus recruited and economically subsidized writers, intellectuals, and artists so they would produce works of art and thought that aligned with the ideological outlook of the United States, see Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War.*

13. Similar to other Danish literary commentators, Leonard Malone was apparently unaware of Torsten Blomkvist's Swedish translation from 1953.

14. *Berlingske Aftenavis* incorrectly stated that Ellison was at work on a new book entitled "The Nobel Savage [sic]," a chapter of which had been published in *The American Literary Quarterly.*

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Book Review
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BOOK REVIEW:

Anders Bo Rasmussen. *Civil War Settlers: Scandinavians, Citizenship, and American Empire, 1848–1870.* Cambridge University Press, 2022. 292 pages. ISBN: 978-1108845564. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108980135.

Sometimes it takes an outsider's perspective to tell a familiar story in a new way. Like every American child, I learned about the US Civil War in school, even though the people and scenes we studied were remote in time, space, and context from the Hawaiian island where I grew up. When I later moved to the midwestern United States and studied the experiences of Scandinavian immigrants, I became aware of Colonel Hans Christian Heg and his Scandinavian regiment's contributions to the Union cause, but I didn't initially think to connect them with the deeper ideological and political underpinnings of the war. It wasn't until reading Anders Bo Rasmussen's new, meticulously documented history, *Civil War Settlers: Scandinavians, Citizenship, and American Empire, 1848–1870*, that all the pieces fell into place for me, giving me an entirely new view of the well-worn story of internecine American warfare in the mid-nineteenth century and how Scandinavian immigrants interacted with other players in that conflict.

Not only does Rasmussen succeed in telling the American story of the Civil War form a new angle in this book, he also challenges cherished myths about Scandinavian Americans' unqualified commitment to abolition and the unity of their new nation. His stated goal is to illuminate the lived experience of Scandinavian immigrant communities in the US during the third quarter of the nineteenth century and to examine the factors that informed their worldview, particularly regarding slavery, military service, and the duties of American citizenship. His research confirms that Scandinavian immigrants, like their neighbors of various ethnicities, differed in their views on slavery and racial difference and made individual decisions about what to believe and how to act based on many more considerations than just ideology or skin color. Rasmussen situates nineteenth-century Scandinavian settler colonists within a larger discourse about racial hierarchies and political power and connects them both to other foreign-born communities in the US and to the Native American peoples whose displacement made the settler colonization of the American West possible.

Civil War Settlers is structured around three central questions: first, how did Old World ideology, not least related to territory and population, inform Scandinavian immigrants' attempts to navigate life in the New World? Second, why did Scandinavian immigrants overwhelmingly support the Republican Party between 1860 and 1868, when Irish and German immigrants, among other ethnic groups, did not? Third and finally, how did implicit and explicit American definitions of citizenship impact perceptions of ethnic identity and belonging among Scandinavian immigrants? (10). To answer these questions, Rasmussen takes a microhistorical approach that foregrounds thick description of a

single Scandinavian immigrant community in New Denmark, Wisconsin. Rasmussen focuses on ordinary people such as the farmer Fritz William Rasmussen and the pastor Claus Clausen in his own exploratory process of "narrowing the interpretive range based on the available information while weighing the impact of structural factors in relation to individual agency" (11). In this way, Rasmussen is able to tell several different, intertwined stories about individual Scandinavian immigrants and their ethno-national affinities, American exceptionalism and its blind spots, and the making of meaning out of disconnected and often fragmentary sources.

Part I: Settlers offers important context for the book's larger argument by exploring the impact of the 1848 revolutions in Europe on Scandinavian settlers' ideas about liberty, equality, and ethnic hierarchies, particularly in relation to the new Republican Party's positions. While the desire for political liberty and social equality were certainly motivating factors for Scandinavian immigration, he emphasizes repeatedly that Scandinavians came to the US primarily in search of (free) land, which made them in general indifferent or actively unsympathetic to the attempts of Native Americans and African Americans to retain or acquire the same thing. He notes, "Scandinavian immigrants, not least the Scandinavian elite, perceiving themselves as superior to other ethnic groups, directly and indirectly supported an American imperial project defined by territorial expansion and conflict with nonwhite and, to an extent, non-Protestant peoples" (13).

According to the primary source documents Rasmussen excerpts, Scandinavian immigrants generally did not apply their own desire for freedom and equality to the government's treatment of Native Americans, nor to the opportunities available to freed slaves. He cites Jon Gjerde's assessment that Scandinavian immigrants "transferred the despotism of Europe to the unfreedom of the nonwhite as a vehicle to juxtapose their freedom in the United States" (146), claiming their own freedom at the expense of others'.

Part II: Citizens homes in on the Scandinavian immigrant experience with regard to pan-Scandinavian trends, racial hierarchies, religious and political divisions within the Scandinavian American community, and the duties of citizenship. The outbreak of the Civil War tested Scandinavians' beliefs in the promises of America and their willingness to bleed and die for them. Rasmussen notes that the frequency with which Scandinavian-born immigrants resisted military service during the war confirms that "Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish immigrants entered the military based on a complex set of motivations that was often as much about economic and political opportunity (and social perceptions of honor) as it was about love for the adopted country or anti-slavery sentiment" (105). While Scandinavian American newspapers defended different positions on abolition and enlistment, leaders within the Scandinavian American community pushed for the creation of a Scandinavian military regiment in order to correct Scandinavians' marginal position relative to the American political and economic establishment. Meanwhile, his detailed reconstruction of Danish-American negotiations over the possibility of resettling freed African Americans in the Danish Virgin Islands instead of Liberia in order to address the labor shortage there serves as a reminder of Denmark's own entanglement in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and Caribbean colonization.

In *Part III: Colonialists*, Rasmussen returns to the topic of the Danish West Indies, this time with regard to the Lincoln administration's interest in purchasing them (which was thwarted by Lincoln's assassination), a discussion that brackets his treatment of the postwar negotiations of Scandinavian immigrants and freedpeople for social, political, and economic advancement in

the post-Civil War United States. Some Scandinavian soldiers, such as Christian Christensen and Fritz Rasmussen, gained a more inclusive racial perspective from their military service, but the same cannot be said of all their countrymen, most of whom felt at best ambivalent about freedpeople's civil rights. Rasmussen explains that although "Scandinavian-born soldiers often abhorred violence against freedpeople, few examples exist of them pro-actively fighting for Black citizenship, voting rights, and equality in the Civil War's immediate aftermath" (267). Citizenship and land (re)distribution were central concerns for both Scandinavian immigrants and freed slaves, but Scandinavian Americans generally saw little commonality between the groups and believed themselves superior to Black freedpeople. In the Reconstruction era, Scandinavian American leaders were preoccupied with securing their own political influence, most often through ardent support for the Republican Party, and had little interest in extending citizenship, suffrage, or economic opportunities to the formerly enslaved, Native Americans, or, for that matter, women of all races.

Civil War Settlers is a tour de force that makes a timely and eloquent contribution to both American Studies and Scandinavian Studies. Rasmussen does a brilliant job of bringing this tumultuous time period to life, infusing it with the kind of vivid historical detail that reminds us how complicated and precarious people's lives have always been. He efficiently sketches out the larger patterns of Scandinavian immigration, settlement, military service, religious beliefs, and political activism in the mid to late nineteenth century, then fills in this framework with compelling individual stories, such as that of Fritz Rasmussen's wife Sidsel in New Denmark, Wisconsin, who struggled to raise her children alone during her husband's military service, worried (with justification, as it turned out) about the dangers of repeated childbirth, and her attempts to grasp moments of autonomy within a patriarchal system that constrained her choices.

Throughout the book, Rasmussen drives home his main points very effectively, if a little repetitively at times, namely that Scandinavian immigrants were attracted by the vision of "America as a place with opportunities for land-ownership, social mobility, and central citizenship rights" (328), but were not overly concerned with sharing these benefits with Native Americans, African Americans, or women. The Civil War brought some of these areas of concern into alignment, but also highlighted, through resistance to military service, the limits of what Scandinavian immigrants were willing to do in exchange for the citizenship, liberty, and equality that they sought in the US. In the postwar era, progressive midwestern politics largely ignored people of color, supporting American imperial expansion over universal equality. As evidence of how successful Rasmussen's insightful new analysis of this contentious period of American history is, particularly thanks to the trove of primary sources he has uncovered and brought together, *Civil War Settlers* won the Danish American Heritage Society's inaugural book prize in 2023.

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Book Review
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BOOK REVIEW:

Rani-Henrik Andersson and Janne Lahti, editors. *Finnish Settler Colonialism in North America: Rethinking Finnish Experiences in Transnational Spaces*. Helsinki University Press, 2022. 316 pages. ISBN: 978-9523690790. DOI: https://doi.org/10.33134/AHEAD-2.

What was the Finnish experience in the context of European powers' global expansion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? What was Finland's role in the settler colonialism leading to the deracination of North America's Indigenous peoples? Not wielding the might of the British, French, Spanish, or German empires, Nordic countries have long dismissed their participation in displacement activity. *Finnish Settler Colonialism in North America: Rethinking Finnish Experiences in Transnational Spaces* addresses those questions, "challenging traditional histories of Finnish migration" (2). These had previously been viewed "almost in isolation from the broader American context . . . and colonialism" (2). Adopting a multidisciplinary approach, editors Rani-Henrik Andersson and Janne Lahti enlisted twelve scholars whose studies cover race, identity issues, gender, migration, immigration, and history.

"Taking the Land," the first of the book's three parts, situates Finns in the colonial historic land acquisition process that includes knowledge production and community building. Also noted is Finnish participation in systematically repressing and displacing Indigenous peoples. The middle section, "Contested Identities," realigns the discussion toward settler encounters and self-deceptions, thereby exposing shifting, multi-layered identities and racialist thinking. In "Settler Narratives and Legacies," the concluding chapters examine settler narratives and legacies reflected in settler writing, memories, myths, and exploration.

Beginning with Finns immigrating to New Sweden in Delaware in 1638, later waves of immigrants settled all over the North American map with such a dense population in the region around the Great Lakes in Canada and the United States that the region was dubbed the "sauna belt." Finns settled in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, and Russian Alaska. Sámis settled in Michigan and Minnesota.

In the first chapter, "Claims for Space," Joanna Spurnik analyzes the writing of Akseli Rauaheimo, whose work establishes the presence of Finns in America, as well as popularizes the continent for a Finnish audience. Additionally, she examines maps from the early 1900s, confirming the presence of Finns in the seventeenth-century colony of New Sweden in Delaware. Based on this dual approach, she questions Finns' constructing geohistorical knowledge of North American space and how using that information validated Finnish presence there. Finns were there in various roles as American society was developing. Their writings revealed the marginalization of Native Americans, whose ontologies of place and space, as well as ideas about their territorial sovereignty, were threatened.

For thousands of years Michigan's Sugar Island had been home to Anishinaabe Ojibwe (Chippewa) people. Their land was usurped by Finnish Americans. Frank Aaltonen, who developed Sugar Island, Michigan, in 1903, maintained that the Anishinaabe hadn't been using the land properly. Justin Gage reasons that by *civilizing* the island's wilderness, Aaltonen drastically perverted the Anishinaabe way of life, impoverishing them.

One settler, Eero Erkko, wondered why Finnish emigrants elected to settle in areas resembling Finland that were cold and arid. Touting a climate suitable for raising fruit trees, his plan prompted a short-lived settlement in Cuba, "Some Kind of Eldorado" (79). Immigrants needed enough capital to bear expenses during the five years required for trees to mature. Author Aleksi Huhta also cites Erkko's colonizing effort as a way of preserving and storing Finnish language and culture.

Recent focus on Finnish migration has overlooked utopian communities. Johanna Leinonen writes that these settlements also contributed to the notion that Finland was blameless in colonizing. Writing about Finnish utopian communities, Leinonen argues that scholars framing utopias as "expressions of humans' desire for improvement," wresting "greater meaning in life," leads to the "establishment of utopian settlements . . . being depoliticized and detached" from settler colonial history (105). Such thinking would exonerate these settlements from the stain of conquest and replacement. These short-lived colonial settlements were established beyond North America, stretching across the globe to South America, Australia, Israel, Russia/the USSR, and Sierra Leone in Africa, revealing the reach of the Finnish diaspora.

In "Contested Identities," the second part of the book, Sirpa Salenius deconstructs James Kirke Spaulding's novel, *Koningsmarke: The Long Finne,* published in 1823*.* The novel anchors Finns in early American society. Quintessentially Aryan, Koningsmarke embodies white innocence and benevolence. Written at a time when America's nationally sanctioned "exceptionalism" and literary identity were emerging, Koningsmarke is "tall, straight, light-complexioned, and blue-eyed" (144). The Indigenous Lenape and enslaved African Americans are stereotypically portrayed as savage and unintelligent, respectively.

In "Socialist Visions of American Dreams," Rani-Henrik Andersson and Rainer Smedman present the parallel experiences of Frank Aaltonen and Oskari Tokoi as examples of "white innocence" and "colonial complicity" in Finnish settler colonial history (174). The two first met in Sault Ste. Marie in 1921 and undertook roles in social activism while maintaining a self-image of benevolence that belied their indifference to the Indigenous plight. In 1891 Tokoi first immigrated to America, arriving in Lead, North Dakota, a year after the US Army killed more than 250 Lakotas at the Battle of Wounded Knee. The Lakotas were routed, and reservation land was available for mining. Tokoi joined the Western Miners' Union. He returned to Finland in 1900 and joined the Social Democratic Party, served in the Finnish parliament, and was elected prime minister in 1917. Sentenced to death by the Communist Party of Finland in exile in Moscow, he escaped to England and re-entered the US through Canada in 1921. Aaltonen joined the Western Federation Miners in Michigan. His attitude toward the Indigenous on Sugar Island exemplified the behavior of European imperial powers. Both Finns had traveled extensively in the US. Both were viewed as anarchists because of their activism. Later in life the two men held romanticized views of Indigenous people and still believed that Finns, among all the other immigrants, were "special."

Erik Hieta explores the North American Sámi movement. Sámis immigrating to America wrestled with double consciousness: they were settler and Indigenous in a new land. He posits that "close connections between North American Sámis and Native American communities offer a vision of cultural differences at once shaped by global corporate capital and media and yet communicated as local sites of empowerment and protest" (181). Acknowledging that selectively reconnecting with the past as a way forward to a decolonized future is complex, Hieta further suggests that the shared cultural practices and relationships to the land of the Indigenous Americans and Sámis weigh more than strict timelines.

Samira Saramo looks at settlers' written work to understand the "strategies and practices Finns have employed in establishing their North American migrant settlerhood" (211). As a tool enabling migrant settlers to claim place, life writing engendered belonging. She analyzes narrative strategies in twelve Finnish migrant settler works to more fully understand the "subtle, everyday shaping of settler histories and futurities" and how such narratives are tied to "broader notions of Finnish (settler) colonial complicity" (212). These life stories reflect work in the fur trade, travel, memoir, and autobiography. The authors share something of "their sense of self, and situate themselves in time, place, and belonging" (217). She also pays obeisance to *sisu*, that untranslatable Finnish "essentialist characteristic . . . as a way to voice Finnish migrant settler exceptionalism" (219). She concludes by saying that the way "micro-level views of settler colonialism's culture is built and upheld might also offer tools for its dismantling" (228).

Roman Kushnir explores Finnish migration mythology in twentieth- and early twenty-first-century American literature to "shed light on the ways in which these texts create, spread, and perpetuate colonial myths" (236). Kushnir suggests that in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, by living in the safe bubble of Suomi homeland colonies, in log cabins on farmlands with saunas, Finns could turn to the land and "struggle among tree stumps and stones as their fathers and forefathers had done" (247). Although the Indigenous population was not the focus of these works, he maintains, the Indigenous population was not "missing entirely from Finnish American literature" (253).

Janne Lahti's chapter, "Gustaf Nordenskiöld and the Mesa Verde," provides a stunning example of "Settler Colonial Disconnects and Finnish Colonial Legacies," the chapter's subtitle (256). Pursuing a world tour thought to be palliative for tuberculosis, Gustaf Nordenskiöld was enroute to San Francisco and the Far East. Nordenskiöld embarked on a 370-mile detour from Denver to "Cliff Palace" for a "tourist look-see" at Mesa Verde, the ancestral Puebloan cliff dwellings. There Nordenskiöld saw a "void in the scientific and exploratory record and sought to fill it" (261). He studied and excavated the site. Nordenskiöld's work is white exceptionalism writ large through his pillage of artefacts, disregard for the ancient culture, and disdain for the Indigenous peoples then contemporary. As worldwide issues of repatriation and reconciliation are debated today, former colonized peoples demand the return of their heritage. A portion of Indigenous ancestral remains and artefacts from the Mesa Verde Collection at the National Museum of Finland were returned to the United States in 2019.

In her "Afterword," Gunlög Fur fulsomely endorses the multi-disciplinary approach in *Finnish Settler Colonialism in North America* that disproves claims that Nordics were not involved in the dispossession of Indigenous peoples that plagued the making of the United States and Canada. Clearly the editors have proved their point. Clearly this work on settler colonialism

could spawn all manner of future research projects and further study, possibly meting out justice on both sides of the Atlantic. Fur believes that scholarship could then "illuminate the entanglement of the histories of progress," along with those of violence, contributing to "a more honest, just, and factual understanding of our joint and concurrent past" (290).

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CALL FOR PAPERS:

"Teaching American Studies in the Nordic Countries"

Special Issue of *American Studies in Scandinavia*
Editors, Jenny Bonnevier and Adam Hjorthén

This special issue will survey and explore the teaching of American Studies in the Nordic countries, with the aim of developing a cross-national conversation about teaching, pedagogy, and curriculum in the field. We are seeking short (1,500-3,000 word) texts and thought pieces in a wide variety of styles and genres, to be part of the first published volume devoted specifically to teaching American Studies in the Nordic context.

American Studies as a subject in higher education differs depending on the national context. In Europe, there are substantial national differences in what, where, and how courses in American Studies are taught. On the one hand, some countries—such as Germany and England—have several American Studies institutes that teach BA, MA, and PhD programs. On the other, in many countries American Studies is either a minor subject area, or not a recognized subject at all. This variation is also present in the Nordic countries. Although broad and interdisciplinary American Studies courses are offered in, for example, Helsinki, Odense, Oslo, and Uppsala, much teaching about North American history, politics, society, and culture today take place in other fields and disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Together, the teaching both within and outside the subject proper make up the current landscape of American Studies teaching in the Nordic countries. It is a landscape where we as teachers navigate the expectations of a heterogenous body of students through our own diverse education, personal background, and relation to evolving American Studies scholarship.

This special issue will extend the conversations that we have as *scholars* of international American Studies to the realm of education. As a *teacher*, what is your relation to the field of American Studies? What role does "(North) America" play in your teaching? What do you consider to be important facets of North American history, society, and culture when teaching "America" to your students, and how do you and your home institution work with that in developing courses and curricula? What changes, challenges, or developments do you currently find particularly significant?

The special issue seeks to explore these questions, and more, through a variety of shorter, free-form contributions from American Studies teachers from Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. Authors may address the following areas:

- Curriculum development (*How have you worked with curriculum development? What do you see as necessary for your own teaching, and the development of the subject?*)
- Perspectives on student groups (*What do students want, need, or look for?)*
- Didactic questions (*What teaching methods, designs, and materials do you use, and why? What have you found to be effective? What are central challenges?*)
- Historical reflections (*How has American Studies teaching changed over time?*)
- Institutional contexts (*What factors affect American Studies teaching at your specific department/university?*)
- Inter-disciplinary perspectives (*What role does disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity play in your American Studies teaching?*)
- International perspectives (*How are ideas about American Studies teaching affected by educational and national backgrounds?*)
- Personal reflections (*Why are <u>you</u> a teacher of American Studies?*)

Texts may be written in all styles and genres—reflective, essayistic, or analytical. They may take the form of traditional academic articles (footnoted and referenced, following the style of the journal, which is MLA), or offer personal reflections based on individual experiences. We invite authors with experience of teaching American Studies/North America, broadly defined, at an institution of higher education in Denmark, Finland, Norway, or Sweden.

If you are interested in contributing to the specially issue, please send an abstract of 200–300 words to both editors at adam.hjorthen@engelska.uu.se and jenny.bonnevier@oru.se. Provide a title and specify what kind of text that you wish to write. **The deadline for abstracts is January 15, 2024.** Contributors will be notified of acceptance by February 15, 2024.

Final manuscripts should be 1,500–3,000 words long, to be submitted to the editors by May 15, 2024.

AMERICAN STUDIES IN **SCANDINAVIA**

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American Studies in Scandinavia publishes articles by scholars from all over the world on American literature, popular culture, film, history, politics, foreign policy, sociology, geography, the methods of American studies, and related subjects.

The recommended article length is 6,000-8,000 words (including footnotes), but not exceeding 9,000 words. Also add an abstract, keywords, ORCID, a suitable copyright-free illustration, and an author bio. Sending a proposal indicates that it has not yet been published elsewhere and is not currently under consideration by another journal.

Regarding references, please use either MLA citations or Chicago-style footnotes and include a bibliography at the end of your text. Submit your article proposal to editor Justin Parks at justin.parks@uit.no and include a short CV. Your proposal will initially be assessed by our editorial team and a decision on the manuscript reached within a month. If your article is sent out for peer review, you can expect a double-blind review process lasting approximately three months. Should your article be accepted, our editorial team will work with you throughout the last stages of the publication process. The final proofreading responsibility rests with the author.

Book Reviews

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AMERICAN STUDIES
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