AMERICAN STUDIES

IN SCANDINAVIA

VOLUME 56:1

AMERICAN STUDIES
IN **SCANDINAVIA**

American Studies in Scandinavia is a biannual publication supported by all members of the Nordic Association for American Studies.

American Studies in Scandinavia, Vol 56:1 (2024:1) published in 2024.

This journal is indexed by *Web of Science, Scopus, PMLA, Directory of Open Access Journals, Historical Abstracts, America: History and Life,* and *MLA International Bibliography.*

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10.22439/asca.v56i1.7167

EDITOR'S NOTE

In his 1924 essay "The Spirit of Place"—as apt a starting point for American studies as any—the English novelist and critic D. H. Lawrence identifies a paradox: the democratic personality associated with the "land of the free" issues its rallying cry: "Henceforth be masterless." Yet this directive soon encounters an opposing impulse: "Liberty is all very well, but men [*sic*] cannot live without masters. There is always a master. And men [*sic*] either live in glad obedience to the master they believe in, or they live in a frictional opposition to the master they wish to undermine" (4). These contradictory impulses, Lawrence strongly suggests, are the twin poles constituting US-American cultural identity: "In America this frictional opposition has been the vital factor" (4). So the freedom-loving Ishmael takes to the open seas only to find himself overmastered by the tyrannical Ahab.

Lawrence was thinking retrospectively, reflecting on the major US writers of the nineteenth century—who, in 1924, had yet to gain their due. Yet the paradox he identifies retains a curious explanatory ability with respect to contemporary US cultural and political life. It goes some way in explaining, for instance, why the rioters on Capitol Hill on January 6, 2021, could both identify themselves *with* power in the form of a beleaguered president who had been legitimately voted out of office but was attempting to upend the democratic process to stay in, and *in opposition to* power in the form of a cabbalistic "deep state" apparently thwarting their desires. On the one hand, authority—and the need to identify with it. On the other, the need to resist.

US-Americans claim a tradition of liberatory protest that spans from acts of civil disobedience against the British crown during the revolutionary period, through the Abolitionist and anti-expansionist movements of the nineteenth century, to the workers' and women's rights movements of the early decades of the twentieth century, to the Civil Rights, anti-war, and anti-imperialist organizing of the post-World War II period. Yet who in the present can claim the mantle of such liberatory movements? Can we call the movement taking shape around the protests against Israeli state violence in Gaza on university campuses the rightful heir of this lineage of American dissent while the Capitol Hill rioters were merely a lawless mob, or are all such expressions of collective sentiment similarly in need of disciplinary intervention? Can one be said to be genuinely liberatory while the other is misguided at best, proto-fascistic at worst? For one thing, the Capitol Hill rioters *did* in fact have a leader, and a very powerful one at that: Donald Trump. And they were not acting out of any democratic or egalitarian impulse; fueled by their anger with a perceived liberal-democratic consensus and its culture of "wokeness" and fearful of a withering of white privilege and heteromasculinity, they were identifying with a projection of highly privileged, white, male antidemocratic power in its ardent desire to overturn established democratic and legal norms. (As of late yesterday, Trump is a convicted felon—which illustrates that power and privilege *can* still be held accountable by the established legal norms affecting everyone else.)

The protests that have swept US university campuses during the months since October 7 are different.

Israel's war in Gaza and the claims made both in support of and against it are complex. Admittedly, some of those involved in protesting Israeli state violence in Gaza and its tacit US support have come dangerously close to condoning Hamas, a violent religious nationalist movement, in its killing and capturing of Israeli civilians. However, recent dismissals of the protests in the name of combatting anti-Semitism (which is admittedly on the rise) miss the point entirely. At its best, the student-led movement in the US and elsewhere has not only opposed the Israeli state's massively disproportionate use of violence against what amounts to an internally colonized population. It has also called on us to see the current situation in Gaza within the context of settler-colonial violence in the Americas, as well as a long history of racial othering *including* its anti-Jewish variant. Such forms of physical and ideological violence share a deeply entwined history: the onset of European conquest of the Americas coincided historically with an ongoing, large-scale murder and expulsion of European Muslims *and* Jews at the turn of the sixteenth century. When Europeans faced a shortage of arable land and resources in proportion to a growing population, they turned to the Americas, bringing with them portable ideologies of white-European supremacy that justified Native American genocide, as well as the seizure of Indigenous land and the violent importation of African slave labor power to farm it. To be anti-Semitic is to embrace a hateful and harmful ideology linked with other forms of racial and ethnic discrimination and dispossession. To be anti-Zionist is to oppose a settler-colonial ideology that engages in ongoing forms of displacement, oppression, and violence with strong historical links to other such ideologies.

One of the great ironies of the present moment is that US (and Canadian) universities now routinely issue land acknowledgments confirming their situatedness in what was once Indigenous territory. Additionally, some of our most prestigious universities have been pressured to acknowledge their historical complicity in the slave trade. Such acknowledgments can be seen as constituting a long-overdue reckoning with past and present forms of privilege and the violence that has tended to underwrite them and can be seen as the result of decades of activism within the academy and beyond. Yet they can also be perceived as merely performative, representing a liberal-democratic posturing that comes across as mere lip service when not accompanied by genuine action, such as divestment from the most heavily implicated sources of capital, real investments in inclusivity in the present, and the creation of space for open and sometimes difficult public debate.

The irony of acknowledging past forms of settler-colonial violence while failing to see their current manifestation in Gaza in similar terms was not lost on Brooklyn College political science professor Corey Robin, who speculated on X (the former Twitter) that "Maybe in a couple of hundred years, Israelis can open every meeting with a land acknowledgement. Like we do." We can currently see the embrace of a token wokeness such acknowledgments suggest on many university campuses. The official website of the School of the Arts at Columbia University "recognizes Manhattan as part of the ancestral and traditional homeland of the Lenni-Lenape and Wappinger people" and promises to "continue to address issues of exclusion, erasure, and systematic discrimination through ongoing education and a commitment to equitable representation." Yet such words ring hollow in the wake of Columbia University President Minouche Shafik's decision to call on the NYPD to break up a student protest encampment, which led to over 100 arrests. Other universities followed suit, leading

to widely documented instances of police brutality against students and faculty members. (In the case of UCLA, administrators opted not to call the police, instead allowing a mob of counter protesters do the violent work of dispersing the occupation.) Amid such heavy-handed impositions of authority, Lawrence's dichotomy still determines the polarities of our relationship to power: the utopian cry of "Henceforth be masterless" meets the reality principle of "Henceforth be mastered."

One of the explanations offered by Shafik and other university administrators for their decision to use police force in breaking up the demonstrations is safety. The violent, punitive, and dismissive responses with which largely peaceful student protests and encampments have been met aren't about anyone's safety. But such forms of protest do of course invoke discomfort, another frequently cited reason for dispersing them. Discomfort, however, is precisely the affect associated with effective forms of protest and the genuine public debate they aim to bring about. In a text many of us in American studies are familiar with, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (1963), King, writing at the height of the Civil Rights movement, makes it clear that the actions for which he and other movement leaders have been jailed in Birmingham, Alabama, sought precisely to bring about a "creative tension" within the community where they occurred. King goes on to identify "the white moderate who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice," as a greater "stumbling block in the stride toward freedom" than "the White citizens' 'Councilor' or the Ku Klux Klanner." Revisiting these words affords us a glimpse of King's radicalism in his own moment, as opposed to the sanitized version of King many imagine today.

It is difficult *not* to see the recent attempts to silence dissenting voices on university campuses as part of a larger agenda of limiting academic freedom and narrowing the scope of public debate. In recent months, the attack on academic freedom at US universities has resulted in the ousting of university presidents and other high-ranking administrators, who, unlike Shafik, have failed to quell dissenting voices. The highest profile resignations to occur, those of Harvard University president Claudine Gay (over an apparent case of plagiarism) and University of Pennsylvania president Elizabeth Magill (over an apparent failure to condemn protesters' calls for intifada), had much more to do with retaining the lucrative support of trustees and donors (even if there *were* good reasons for both to resign). Rather than serving a progressive agenda, such dismissals allow wealthy private interests to set the agendas at universities and are much more in line with the ideologically motivated efforts at academic censorship instigated by figures such as Florida governor Ron DeSantis (and not unrelated to the general defunding of humanities and social-sciences departments and academic majors, areas of study that actively encourage critical thinking and democratic debate). Trump, for his part, recently promised a roomful of wealthy donors that if he were elected, he would crush student protests and deport the protestors. Such heavy-handed responses confirm the ongoing existence of the underlying authoritarian current Lawrence identified: "Henceforth be mastered."

Yet despite these efforts of the wealthy and powerful to determine what can be discussed, in what terms, and by whom on US campuses, students and faculty *are* managing to make their voices heard, most recently in staged walkouts at commencement ceremonies and disruption of public speeches, attempts at sowing discomfort that resonate with King's "creative tension." Far from being anti-Semitic, groups such as Jewish Voices for Peace have reminded us that self-

determination for one people cannot justify the displacement of another. A bottom-up critique of state power in the form of the violence increasingly on display in Rafah and elsewhere is an affirmation of a shared humanity, a tacit embrace of Lawrence's dictum: "Henceforth be masterless."

In the spirit of Lawrence's paradox, the articles gathered here aptly illustrate the ongoing tension between the democratic and the authoritarian, between expressions of a desire for an open and democratic society and attempts to impose authority. Of course, one's definitions of freedom and authority, and even of truth, depend increasingly upon where one is situated on the political spectrum. Titled "Paranoia, (Para)cinema, and the Right-Wing Mindset: Making Sense of *My Son Hunter*," Joel Frykholm's contribution to this issue addresses a crowdfunded, low-budget feature film released by Breitbart News in 2022, in which the alt-right-embracing British actor Laurence Fox plays Hunter Biden. The film has mostly been dismissed in mainstream media, but Frykholm takes it seriously, as an attempt to control, and even create, an American political narrative that plays fast-and-loose with truth as it attempts to manipulate its viewers into embracing far-fetched conspiracies and bring fringe views closer to the mainstream. Frykholm's article also takes seriously alt-right media mogul Andrew Breitbart's claim that "politics is downstream from culture" as it unpacks the messy range of filmmaking techniques *My Son Hunter* exploits and situates it within an alternative media landscape that has taken shape in the age of the internet.

Maria Lindén's contribution to this issue, titled "Trump's Playbook of Electoral Manipulation: An Interplay of Manipulation Tactics in a Longstanding Democracy," offers a meticulously constructed framework that draws on existing categories of electoral manipulation (and offers two of its own), adducing nine specific manipulation tactics to explain Donald Trump's sustained and variegated effort at manipulating the 2020 US presidential election results in his favor. Lindén's article argues that the manipulation tactics it identifies need to be considered in the aggregate, as a set of overlapping strategies available to political parties and figures in the US (and elsewhere) to shift election outcomes. Donald Trump's criminal indictment in August 2023 for attempting to overturn the election results based on a bipartisan report on his role in the chaos that occurred in Washington on January 6, 2021, confirms the existence of a disconcerting turn toward authoritarianism in US politics, which is of the utmost concern heading into the 2024 US presidential elections.

In the issue's third article, titled "Crises in the Arctic: Upheavals in the Memoir of Josephine Diebitsch-Peary," Clara Juncker documents the crises facing Josephine Diebitsch-Peary as an early female Arctic explorer. Documented in her 1894 memoir of her participation in a famed 1891–92 expedition to northern Greenland alongside her husband, the explorer Robert E. Peary, Diebitsch-Peary's challenges included gender expectations related to still-prevalent True Womanhood ideals of the nineteenth century, the challenge of reconciling Western biases against the region's native Inughuit inhabitants with her own experiences among them, and the difficulties related to the Arctic landscape, which resulted in a series of mishaps during the expedition itself.

In addition, this issue contains five book reviews, testifying to the lively and widely varying research agendas currently shaping American studies. The first is Laura Castor's review of David Myer Temin's *Remapping Sovereignty: Decolonization and Self-Determination in North American Indigenous Political Thought*. The second, by Jonas Bjork, addresses Gunlög Fur's *Painting Culture, Painting Nature: Stephen Mopope, Oscar Ja-*

cobson, and the Development of Indian Art in Oklahoma. The third, by Adam Hjorthén, examines Jennifer Eastman Attebery's *As Legend Has It: History, Heritage, and the Construction of Swedish American Identity*. The fourth, by Roman Kushnir, addresses *Winter's Children: A Celebration of Nordic Skiing*, by Ryan Rodgers. And the fifth, by Shiyu Zhang, assesses Jolene Hubbs's *Class, Whiteness, and Southern Literature*.

I have appreciated the opportunity to work with the thorough, wide-ranging, and highly intellectually engaged scholars whose work is gathered here. In addition, this issue has benefitted from the insights of its external reviewers, as well as the members of the Nordic Association for American Studies board: Jørn Brøndal, Nina Öhman, Lene Johannessen, and Jenny Bonnevier. I also want to acknowledge the indispensable and highly dedicated work of the journal's editorial assistant, Aurora Eide. It is a pleasure working with such a generous and dedicated group of scholars.

Justin Parks
Tromsø, Norway
30 May 2024

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10.22439/asca.v56i1.7171

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PARANOIA, (PARA)CINEMA, AND THE RIGHT-WING MINDSET:

Making Sense of *My Son Hunter*

Abstract: This article aims to make sense of *My Son Hunter* (The Unreported Story Society and Breitbart News, 2022; dir. Robert Davi). The first part of the analysis discusses *My Son Hunter* as an example of right-wing counter-cinema that tries to simultaneously tap into the cultural prestige associated with feature filmmaking *and* provide niche audiences with "para-cinematic" pleasures. The second part of the analysis explores cinematic form and filmmaking techniques in *My Son Hunter*, demonstrating how the movie extends a promise of "truth" via an affective bombardment that draws on melodrama and paranoid fiction, as well as the flexible modes of docudramatic approximation. The overall effect is to make logic and argumentation superfluous, which is indicative of how the film can be regarded as both symptomatic and productive of a "post-truth" condition.

Keywords: *My Son Hunter*, right-wing media, Breitbart, American politics on film, "paracinema," "post-truth," paranoid fiction, conspiracy theory films, melodrama, docudrama

My Son Hunter is a crowdfunded, low-budget feature film, released by Breitbart News in 2022. It sets out to make two main points: first, that Joe Biden is a criminal and a master of political influence peddling (in which capacity he has aided and abetted genocide in Communist China and been an accomplice to all kinds of crime and corruption in Ukraine); and second, that the mainstream media, big tech, and the deep state are involved in a massive coverup of the truth about the Biden family.

My Son Hunter is in all ways imaginable a "bad object." Critics have described it as "embarrassing," "amateurish," and "wildly boring," seemingly in agreement that this is a poorly made film (Chilton; Fry; Ramirez). Many were put off by what they perceived as an irresponsible trafficking in disinformation, propaganda, and populism, and a fueling of paranoia and political polarization. One reviewer argued that *My Son Hunter* "poses little threat to the viewing public," its "foamy-mouthed partisanship" bound to alienate "the saner majority" within minutes (Bramesco). But he also noted that if "American politics has taught us anything, it's that ignoring extremism does not make it go away"—hence his choice to review the film, in spite of the sense that this film does not deserve the time and energy of "right-thinking citizens" (Bramesco).

My Son Hunter may be an uncomfortable watch, yet I agree that there are good reasons to try to make sense of it. This article's attempt to do so proceeds in two steps: I begin by situating the movie in the larger context of American right-wing media. This contextualization is anything but exhaustive, but it will offer some explanations of why *My Son Hunter* exists, how it fits into a wider media system, and what purpose a feature-length film about Hunter Biden's laptop can possibly serve in this larger context. The second part of the analysis unpacks how the cinematic form and the political project of *My Son Hunter* converge at the same point: the destabilization of the concept of truth. Here I explore what kind of film this is and how it works in order to achieve its various functions, and I sketch a larger argument about the affective power of narrative cinema, and about the flexibility and the rhetorical force with which some movies can bend reality and truth to their will—at least for the right audience.

A detailed discussion about cinematic form will help us tease out implications about film, media, politics, and "post-truth" that go beyond this particular movie. But *My Son Hunter* also carries a political charge that is specific to the case. The Hunter Biden laptop affair—which revolves around a misplaced laptop containing sensitive, or even incriminating, information about the Biden family—is presently at the center of American politics. The moment the Republican Party regained control of the House of Representatives in January 2023, a series of investigations into Hunter Biden's business dealings were launched, with the hopes of finding conclusive evidence of President Joe Biden's involvement, and hence grounds for impeachment (Carney). There might be evidence of crime and corruption in the material amassed by the House Oversight Committee (Committee on Oversight). But when the impeachment investigation was launched on December 13, 2023, fact checkers were quick to note that it was based on misleading claims (Farley). On March 21, 2024, the *AP* reported that the impeachment inquiry was winding down, having produced "no hard evidence of presidential wrongdoing" (Mascaro).

Hunter Biden, for his part, has already faced criminal charges related to tax crimes and gun law violations. These cases have taken various twists and turns, which voices on the right have seized upon as an opportunity to accuse the Justice Department of applying double standards. In their view, the Biden Justice Department has made former President Donald J. Trump a target

of politically motivated investigations while simultaneously doing its best to let Hunter off the hook—perhaps even intervening to protect the President's wayward son (Amiri; Lauer et al.). Trump, meanwhile, faces multiple indictments on state and federal levels for his efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election and for his role in the events that led up to the storming of the Capitol on January 6, 2021, all while simultaneously running for President again (Richer and Tucker; "Trump Indicted"; Tucker et al.; "What We Know").

Congressional hearings and legal proceedings are tied in with the ways in which Hunter Biden's laptop feeds into the construction of a right-wing political imaginary. American politics has increasingly become a question of narrative—of conjuring certain political realities into existence by means of storytelling—rather than rational deliberation and fact-based discourse.[1] Movies are important in that context. With regard to *My Son Hunter* specifically, its apparent weaponization of paranoia and conspiracy theory seems extremely current, while also resonating with traditions in American politics and popular culture that run long, deep, and across the political spectrum.

Issues of paranoia, culture, and politics have been addressed in Frida Beckman's recent book *The Paranoid Chronotope*. Beckman's focus is on postmodern literary fiction and the "post-critique" debates within academia, but the questions regarding power, truth, and identity that she explores are highly relevant with respect to *My Son Hunter*, too, and can be illuminated from a different angle via an analysis of this film. Indeed, it is an *expressive* movie in the sense suggested by Steven Shaviro; that is, it is both symptomatic and productive of a set of social relations (2). It speaks explicitly about a "post-truth" condition, but through its form, it also helps produce this very condition. This is what the analysis that follows will demonstrate.

The Hunter Biden Laptop Affair—Now a Not-So-Major Feature Film. But Why?

There is a long tradition of leftist Hollywood critique, from Horkheimer and Adorno's "The Culture Industry" to Marxist re-readings of classical Hollywood cinema in *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Screen* in the 1960s and 1970s, and onward to later critiques of the economic and ideological operations of "global Hollywood" (Fairfax; Horkheimer and Adorno; Kleinhans; Miller et al.; Rosen). From that perspective, the mere existence of Hollywood is a testament to a fundamentally undemocratic subsumption of cinema under global capital and a neoliberal world order (Grieveson 4). Meanwhile, other scholars have been more interested in the political practices and partisan leanings of stars, studios, and Hollywood moguls. This winding history includes as much conservative as liberal activity, and studies of it have debunked the myth that Hollywood has always been a bastion of liberal values, leftist causes, and political correctness (Ross 3–4). Yet, even so, and in spite of the fact that Hollywood's right might have had the most concrete political impact, it could be argued that the Hollywood left won a "cultural war" and that a "liberal political culture [has] prevailed" throughout much of film history (Critchlow 6, 213; see also Critchlow and Raymond 233–35). This is certainly what many conservatives today would argue. As one columnist in the conservative news and opinion outlet *The Daily Wire* argued, "Hollywood's gatekeepers will never allow the Right to enter its gilded gates to tell our stories" (Courrielche). However, in the current media landscape, Hollywood studios no longer have the same kind of control over the means of production as was once the case. The production and distribution of feature films can now be set up as a right-wing enterprise, with a promise to generate an independent, conservative, counter-cinema. And this is exactly what has recently begun to happen, as is evident in investments in feature film production by right-leaning media

platforms such as Fox Nation and *The Daily Wire*. *My Son Hunter*, which was financed through crowdfunding, produced by the independent production company The Unreported Story Society, and distributed by Breitbart News, is one manifestation of this trend.

Breitbart News is what media scholars might refer to as an "alternative news site" or as "hyperpartisan media" (Heft et al. 21; Holt). Another term is "junk news," since sites like these give the impression of presenting the news, but without bothering to adhere to professional journalistic standards (Schroeder 2; see also Hedman et al. 2–3). There is an invocation here of non-partisan institutional media and objective journalism as self-evident norms. But these can be seen as anomalies in the history of American news, manifestations of a specific phase of the twentieth century during which political polarization was low and media competition limited. Arguably, a reversion to a predominantly partisan news landscape was underway already in the 1960s, when American politics began to repolarize, and media markets started to break apart (Ladd 6, ch. 2–4). A slightly longer history of Breitbart, then, goes back to the conservative use of direct mail in the 1960s, and continues with Rupert Murdoch's acquisition of the *Post* in the 1970s, the breakthrough of Rush Limbaugh and conservative talk radio in the 1980s, the establishing of Fox News, the launch of the Drudge Report in 1994, and the subsequent explosion of partisan political communication all over the internet (Martin 126–29).

Scholars across the political spectrum have argued that the impact of partisan right-wing media is partly explained by the shortcomings of institutional, or mainstream, media. One account suggests that it is logical that platforms for alternative viewpoints would emerge, considering the widespread liberal bias of the established news media (Kuypers 148).[2] Another account suggests that conservative media fill a gap that opened up when mainstream media abandoned the working classes (Martin 6–7, 126–31). It is also common to describe right-wing outlets as a separate sphere in the media landscape, as indicated in terms such as "conservative media empire," "conservative media establishment," and—especially—conservative "echo chamber" (Jamieson and Cappella; Rosenwald 171). Analogously, in the current moment of 24/7 digital connectivity, in which political polarization and competition and fragmentation in media markets have reached new heights, it is often argued that a key function of conservative digital outlets such as Breitbart is to "bypass" the large, institutional, gate-keeping media organizations, and to get "direct access" to masses of people (Kuypers 148; Martin 129).

Ultimately, however, partisan internet-based media and institutional media coexist in the same "hybrid media system," and the political use of social media, for example, is oftentimes designed not so much to "bypass" as to influence professional media (Chadwick 262–63). The struggle over agenda-setting seems key here. Indeed, one function that alternative news sites fill within the hybrid media system is to provide a tool for populist movements to try to set the agenda in a contested public sphere—they represent a kind of counter-public (Herkman and Matikainen 151; Schroeder 3). In some instances, the legacy media gradually adjust their agenda. Alternatively, the mainstream media's disregard and disdain can be donned as a badge of honor, and the alternative media can position themselves as a voice that speaks truth to a powerful elite. In both scenarios, the relationship between "junk" news and legacy media is best described as simultaneously symbiotic *and* antagonistic (Herkman and Matikainen 150–52; Schroeder 8–9).

Visitors to the Breitbart website in June 2023 would quickly have discovered that one of the

trending topics was "Biden Crime Family."[3] Against the wider background just described, we can think of this as a part of a concerted effort to push the notion of the "Biden Crime Family" onto and upward in the public agenda. And as of 2022, there is also a feature film. What role does a movie play in this context of agenda-setting within a hybrid media system? The obvious answer is that digital media afford many opportunities for the monetization of (political) engagement. There was simply a market for a film like *My Son Hunter*. But what about the political logic? I stress the question because it seems reasonable to assume that within the larger machinery of American conservative media, a single movie has limited impact on the furthering of a conservative political agenda compared to juggernauts such as cable news and talk radio. So, what is going on?

One possible answer can be traced to the spirit of the late founder of Breitbart News, Andrew Breitbart, and his oft-cited slogan that "politics is downstream from culture."[4] The idea is that ultimately, and in the long run, it is "culture"—through its ability to shape worldviews—that sets the conditions of political discourse and action. Breitbart attributed particular importance to the movies. Consider his plea in a 2009 speech for a redirection of political campaign donations to moviemaking:

> The people who have money, every four years at the last possible second, are told, "You need to give millions of dollars, because these four counties in Ohio are going to determine the election." I am saying, why didn't we invest 20 years ago in a movie studio in Hollywood, why didn't we invest in creating television shows, why didn't we create institutions that would reflect and affirm that which is good about America? (Breitbart, qtd. in York)

Figure 1. Andrew Breitbart.

A lifelong Angelino, Breitbart developed a public persona as the conservative who dared to voice the truth about Hollywood from the inside. A key source of insight into his views on Hollywood is *Hollywood Interrupted*, co-written with Mark Ebner. This book is a masterclass in umbrage-taking at the excesses of Hollywood celebrity culture. It merits attention in the context of this article for several reasons, first among them its (perhaps disproportional) ascription of cultural power to the movies. "Pop culture matters. It infects everything," the authors argue (Breitbart and Ebner xx). Reading *Hollywood Interrupted*, and hearing Breitbart talk about it in interviews, one gets the impression that he had internalized a twisted version of Hollywood's myth about itself as the dream factory and the most important purveyor of the American way of life (e.g., Hoover Institution). In a later book, Breitbart offered this reason for writing *Hollywood Interrupted*: "The biggest point that I wanted to make was one I'm still making: *Hollywood is more important than Washington*" (Breitbart 97; emphasis in original). From that perspective, feature films—the trademark commodity of Hollywood cinema since the 1910s—stand out as the gold standard of pop culture, and hence, based on the Breitbart doctrine of culture and politics, of major political significance.

Hollywood Interrupted also merits attention for its discourse on the media writ large. The book

is not so much a takedown of Hollywood as such, as a media critique. More specifically, it is a damning condemnation of legacy media's fawning attitude toward Hollywood royalty and its uncritical coverage of a celebrity culture. As the authors see it, the "politically correct entertainment media" has failed to hold Hollywood celebrities accountable for their immoral behavior and political hypocrisy (Breitbart and Ebner 219). This line of critique is coupled with a techno-utopianism that was relatively new when the book appeared in 2004. For example, the book suggests that "noncorporate news media outlets on the Web" (together with AM talk radio and Fox News) present a major challenge to the "ideological monopoly of the celebrity soapbox"; it expresses hopes that blogs and "e-zines" might help boost engagement among a public that has grown sick of "the mainstream media monopoly"; and it posits that the Internet is "ground zero for America's revenge on the Hollywood beast" (Breitbart and Ebner 216, 325, 330). We see here how media critique is mobilized in a larger political struggle. In fact, the book's fifth part, titled "The Left Wing," reads like a roadmap to today's "culture wars," peppered with talking points about "political correctness," "self-censorship" and "the mainstream media" that have lingered long and well into the present.

None of this is meant to suggest a direct causal relationship between *Hollywood Interrupted* and *My Son Hunter*. But there is a kinship of political sentiment, and many of the key ideas of *Hollywood Interrupted*—the reverence for cinema as a cultural form, the critique of the "mainstream media," the investment in a "culture war," and the faith in "alternative," internet-based media to set America back on the right course—coalesce in *My Son Hunter*. Additionally, the film's very existence can be said to make a Breitbartian claim—however anachronistically—for the special prestige and cultural power of narrative feature films. Otherwise, the right-wing media platforms that are investing in feature film projects would have directed their resources elsewhere.

There is a glaring weakness to this explanation: *My Son Hunter* is emphatically a niche product—any prestige would be felt only within small pockets of society. But for these audiences, a feature film can offer a particularly intense, vivid, and memorable visualization of things they already believe to be true. And for them, *My Son Hunter* is the kind of film that might bring events and characters to life in a way that will shape how they make sense of future mediated encounters with the same events, people, and places—be it through popular culture or more firmly fact-based discourses. The cinematic images may even take a certain precedence over reality—whatever "reality" means in this context. From a broadly postmodernist viewpoint, the "real" events and characters that *My Son Hunter* references must be recognized as already mediated through and through. As Fredric Jameson has suggested, when JFK features in audio-visual representations, the point of reference is not Kennedy, the actual person, but "Kennedy," a purely televisual, or mediated, figure (49–51). Similarly (although on a miniscule historical scale in comparison), we know only of "Hunter Biden." This means that making sense of *My Son Hunter*'s configuration of "Hunter Biden" requires an analysis of cinematic form.

***My Son Hunter*: Cinematic Form and Filmmaking Techniques**

What kind of film is *My Son Hunter*? Some reviewers noted similarities to *The Big Short* (Adam McKay, 2015), especially its similar use of a presentational and postmodern style that relies on direct address and a mixture of filmmaking techniques and visual elements (Fry; Stevens). This is not far off the mark, and terms that scholars have deployed in discussions about *The Big*

Short—e.g., hybridity and multi-levelled incoherence—apply to *My Son Hunter*, too (e.g., Clayton). The latter can be approached as, in turn, political satire, conspiracy theory thriller, paranoid propaganda film, docudrama/biopic, and melodrama, and it features a mixture of formal elements and filmmaking techniques associated with all these modes of representation. To see how this works, however, we first need an overview of the film's structure and narrative.

My Son Hunter opens with a six-minute tri-partite prologue. The first scene introduces Joe Biden (played by John James) and a Secret Service agent played by alt-right heroine and "cancel culture" martyr Gina Carano (see Parker and Crouch). When Carano's character explains that "this is not a true story . . . except for all the facts," she addresses the camera straight on, breaking the fourth wall—the first of many instances of direct address in the movie. Part two of the prologue consists of a faux news segment (anchored by a Rachel Maddow lookalike), which introduces the main character of Grace Anderson (played by Emma Gojkovic), whom we meet here as a participant in a Black Lives Matter rally. We see looting, fire, violence, mayhem—American carnage—covered by the news as "peaceful protest"; we understand that the theme of the mainstream media's hypocrisy is front and center. Next up, Hunter Biden (played by Laurence Fox) arrives at a nightclub in Los Angeles. A tracking shot follows him through the premises. He snorts cocaine and enters a backroom. Strippers abound. "Time to fucking party!" he shouts. Freeze frame and cue the title credit. Now the movie properly begins. Hunter takes the party to the Chateau Marmont. He becomes infatuated with the exotic dancer "Kitty"—we know her as Grace Anderson the protestor. Hunter and Grace/Kitty engage in intimate conversation about Hunter's family background, the tragic loss of his mother and brother, and his troubled relationship to his father. Eventually Joe Biden arrives on the scene. A lengthy conversation between father and son takes place in the backseat of a black SUV. Joe berates Hunter for the misplacement of not just one, but two laptops, both of which contain highly sensitive information. We learn about Hunter's past immoralities (substance abuse, fathering children out of wedlock, having an affair with his dead brother's widow), and, more importantly, of various acts of crime and corruption that the movie implies have been carried out at the behest of and for the benefit of Vice President Joe Biden—the bad guy in this film. The Bidens' backseat conversation is intercut with scenes of Grace/Kitty conducting her own research into the Hunter Biden laptop affair. She cannot find anything but "positive stuff" about the Bidens. Hunter's body man Tyrone (played by Franklin Ayodele) explains: "that's because you're using Google and the mainstream media. You need to use the alternative search engines." The fact that Tyrone is African American is meant to dispel Grace's/Kitty's notion that only "alt-right white supremacists" dwell in such areas of the internet. Similarly, the movie needs to insist that Grace/Kitty is *not* a Trump supporter. She is just interested in the "truth" about the Bidens. This "truth" is revealed in rough outline through Hunter's confessions, the SUV backseat exchange, and Grace's/Kitty's investigations, but the specific details are presented in an extended two-part sequence that makes up the centerpiece of the movie. Part one starts with Gina Carano's Secret Service agent directly addressing the camera; her voice is then carried over a montage of images that visualize how the Bidens engage in the trading of political influence for cash and other forms of crime, corruption, and conspiracy in Ukraine. The movie also explains how the mainstream media has been complicit in a massive cover-up, dismissing any accusations against the Bidens as "Russian disinformation." Part two takes us back to Chateau Marmont and another Hunter Biden confes-

sional. Here the attention shifts to China, and alleged connections between the Bidens' business dealings here and the Chinese Communist Party's repression of its own population, a catalog of crimes that the movie suggests ranges from mass surveillance and politically motivated mass imprisonment to systematic raping and "live organ harvesting." Grace/Kitty is appalled but wants to help Hunter—he is an innocent victim, and Joe Biden is the real criminal, in her view. At this point, however, news of the (first) impeachment of Donald Trump breaks. "It's going to be wall to wall 'Orange Man Bad!'" Hunter giddily exclaims. With public attention fully deflected, the Bidens are safe. But there is a twist: the entire conversation between Hunter and Grace/Kitty has been taped, and she is in possession of the recording. It's a moral conundrum, but she decides to go public. Legacy media is unwilling to touch the recording, and the SoMe companies "and their algorithms" help bury the story. But not entirely. Grace's/Kitty's scoop is making the rounds in some faraway corners of the internet, where it is finally discovered by one brave truth seeker: Rudy Giuliani. "Rudy releases recording of Bidens!" a Fox News headline announces. Hunter is arrested, Joe Biden busted, and Donald J. Trump wins reelection in a landslide. Of course, this is the movie's counterfactual happy ending. Its "real" ending is on a more somber note: "truth itself has become a fairytale." Cue the end credits and a final montage of archival footage of Joe Biden and selected news coverage of Hunter Biden.

This lengthy summary might indicate why one reviewer described her viewing experience as "an attempted red-pilling in real time" (Stevens). It might also indicate how—especially (but not exclusively) for an audience more favorably inclined—this movie offers an abundance of paracinematic pleasures through its unapologetic allegiance to oppositional taste (political and cinematic), its ceaseless winking and nodding, and its general commitment to collapsing the boundaries between text and context.[5] Consider this straight-to-the-camera remark by Gina Carano's character about two thirds into the film: "oh, and one more thing: it's a little off topic, but . . . Epstein didn't kill himself." Off-topic, indeed, but not so strange after all, if we imagine that the filmmakers might have had a certain type of paracinematic viewer in mind.

Paracinematic elements make up one dimension of *My Son Hunter*'s hybridity and multi-levelled incoherence. Another one is based on its generic multiplicity. The film moves quite quickly between different modes, registers, and genres, but I would suggest that it starts out in the vein of political satire with absurdist elements. Key here is the representation of Joe Biden. He is introduced in the opening shots as a hair sniffer—an allusion to the (ultimately non-substantiated) accusations levelled against Biden during his run for President in 2020 concerning a long history of interacting with women in ways that were at best awkward, at worst tantamount to sexual harassment. Biden's hair sniffing thus has serious implications, but is, I believe, part of a cluster of motifs that are designed to work primarily in a comic register and with the purpose of making a silly figure of Biden. He walks into doors, he holds his phone upside down, and he does not understand that emails are retained by both sender and receiver.

Simultaneously, the movie depicts Joe Biden as corrupt to the core—as the kind of man who seeks political power purely to "get his cut" (an oft-repeated phrase in the film). This attempt to recast the public persona of Joe Biden involves a reversal of the political narrative: the seeking of political office purely for the purpose of personal gain is exactly what many people on the left would pin on former US President Donald J. Trump. There is an analogy here between the movie's political rhetoric and the Trump administration's fondness for throwing accusations

against Trump back at the accuser. The "Putin's puppet" moment in the final presidential debate between Trump and Hillary Rodham Clinton in 2016—Trump: "no puppet. No puppet. You're the puppet!"—seemed ridiculous at the time, but foreshadowed things to come. In the movie, one analogous example occurs when Joe and Hunter Biden get into an argument about sexual misconduct. Joe is not one to judge, Hunter suggests, citing accusations from numerous women, of whom Tara Reade received significant media attention. The Vice President shrugs it all off: "oh, come on, I could be out in the middle of Fifth Avenue with Tara Reade and the media would still be talking about Trump's 'grabbing pussy.'" Here, then, the movie alludes to two notorious statements by Donald Trump, but rejigs them to support the movie's case against Biden: *he* is the sexual predator, not Trump, and *he* is the one who can act with total impunity, thanks to "the media," not Trump. An even more remarkably meta variation on the same theme occurs in the movie's mid-section, in the part narrated by Gina Carano's character, when she explains what the Bidens have been up to: "quid pro quo with Ukraine. Brilliant strategy. Then accuse Trump of making a phone call doing the exact same thing they were doing." Here the movie (inadvertently) divulges its own strategy of turning the tables, but through a projection onto the Bidens and the mainstream media. Whether intended by the filmmakers or not, any conventional sense of logic, reason, and truth slips away as we are sucked into this mise-en-abyme of *tu quoque* "arguments."[6]

As indicated, the movie's takedown of Joe Biden hinges on a conflicting depiction of him as at once a bumbling fool *and* the criminal mastermind behind a conspiracy of global dimensions. Correspondingly, *My Son Hunter* slides back and forth between (attempts at) humorous political satire and sequences that work in the modality of the conspiracy theory thriller. Again, the use of characters is key, most crucially Grace/Kitty, the stripper with a heart of gold. Much of the film's forward momentum relies on Grace's/Kitty's discoveries about the Biden family's influence peddling, the contents of the misplaced laptop, and the massive media cover-up. Grace/Kitty is clearly the hero of the film, and, true to the genre of paranoid fiction, she embodies the restoration of individual agency in the face of large and sinister social forces (Beckman 44; see also Arnold 171–72; Pratt 1). We could say that *My Son Hunter* works—narratively as well as epistemologically—in an "investigative-deconstructive" mode (Pratt 55). Similar to the detective in film noir, it is Grace's/Kitty's role to deconstruct and defictionalize a fabricated reality served up by the powers that be. For her, and for audience members who are on the same wavelength, this results in a radical reconfiguration of what she/they know about the world (Pratt 55–58).[7]

There are several additional points of connection between *My Son Hunter* and the larger category of paranoid fiction. One is the deployment of filmmaking techniques that will strike some audiences as unabashed cinematic propaganda, but that audiences that align themselves with the intentions of the filmmakers might experience as a forceful indictment of the "Biden crime family."[8] The darkly paranoid mid-section of the movie is particularly telling—there is a twisting of facts and a use of innuendo and a one-sidedness that seem to be designed to manipulate the viewer's perception of what the Bidens were really up to. And there is a calculated montage of sound and image that permits the film to make a series of wild accusations against the Bidens without stating them outright. One example is the ninety-second sequence that speaks about the Bidens' alleged connections to Russian organized crime, which does not explicitly state that the Bidens are murderers—but it does not have to, thanks to a highly suggestive use of sound and image allusions. The structuring of intra-character and character-viewer address here

and elsewhere in *My Son Hunter* illustrates the movie's lack of interest in creating a classically realist illusion. The same can be said for how the characters move freely in time and space, as in the example above, as well as a later sequence in which Hunter and Grace/Kitty appear in the scenes they narrate in conversation. In this way, there is a collapsing of time and space, a sometimes dizzying pace of movement through these dimensions, and a disavowal of realistically motivated spatial and temporal relations. The exact coordinates of the conspiratorial totality remain murky, yet we sense that "everything is connected."

Whether one regards the film as propaganda or as something else, the techniques described here increase the movie's power of persuasion. Crucially, the approach to time-space and sound-image relations, and the reliance on innuendo, allusion, and implication to forward the argument, allow *My Son Hunter* to have it both ways. All honest attempts at fact checking are conveniently nullified. Unsurprisingly, when faced with questions about the film's factual base, producer and co-writer Phelim McAleer suggested that "it's a movie, right, it's not a documentary" ("Hunter's Laptop"). This is a misapprehension of the concept of documentary, but leaving that aside, it also contradicts his statement later in the same interview that "our background is in journalism" and that *My Son Hunter* presents "a great untold story" that is important to get out to "millions of people" ("Hunter's Laptop"). Also, declaring that the film is a fictionalized version of events does not negate the fact that its entire raison d'être is based on the movie's opening statement that "this is not a true story . . . except for all the facts."

The problems raised here are well known to anyone who has studied the genres of the biopic and the docudrama—labels that fit *My Son Hunter* in some parts. There is a debate to be had about whether *My Son Hunter* twists its factual base into disinformation, but that aside, we can recognize that this film, similar to all docudrama, draws on an arsenal of techniques that implore viewers to think that what they see is not an unmediated view of reality, but reality much as it essentially happened (Lipkin 4–5). And as with all docudramas, it is important to pay attention to how the film works as an act of persuasion about its own status of veracity. References to previous texts are usually key. Indeed, *My Son Hunter* draws *implicitly* on the audience's awareness of previous accounts of the Hunter Biden laptop affair, both to warrant its own approximation of reality, and to motivate the choice of docudrama as a mode of representation. The implication is that these people exist, that these events happened, and that they are important enough for reportage, yet previous texts are not enough to get at the truth—we also need re-enactment in the form of a fictionalized drama (Lipkin 4–5). *My Son Hunter* also draws *explicitly* on archival footage, as a more straightforward way of convincing viewers that what we see in the film represents reality much as it happened. The clearest instance is the montage of images that appears alongside the end credits. We first see television news snippets that are meant to attest to the mainstream media's framing of the Hunter Biden laptop story as a "Russian disinformation campaign"—these are interspersed with textual inserts that further reinforce the movie's case for a media cover-up. This is followed by additional news segments, this time to verify a story about Hunter Biden's out-of-wedlock child. Finally, we see ("the real") Joe Biden recounting a Ukraine-related anecdote—a highly incriminating one, the movie suggests—during a panel discussion. We have seen this scene re-enacted in almost exact visual detail and with verbatim dialog earlier in the film (this is analogous to how the film combines actual news footage with faux news reportage). Throughout the film, then, there is an oscillation between archive and re-enactment, and a mixture of indexicality and

iconicity that is typical of docudrama (and documentaries proper, too).[9]

This form of doublespeak sets a trap for critics and scholars, who might be tempted to assess a docudramatic truth claim based on their own political sympathies. For example, one reading of *JFK* (Oliver Stone, 1991) concedes that this film is not "pure history" or an "actual documentary," yet insists that its case regarding the Kennedy assassination is based on "meticulous research" (Pratt 227). It is not unlikely that the people behind *My Son Hunter* see their film in much the same way. And they might argue that critics apply a double standard in assessing its reality value simply because the movie's politics make them uncomfortable. The problem, as documentary scholarship tells us, is that all representations of reality are ultimately performative (Bruzzi, *Approximation* 6; see also Bruzzi, *New Documentary*). Stella Bruzzi suggests that in documentary "approximations" of reality, fictionalizations are potentially an equally legitimate key to "unlocking reality" as the use of actual footage (*Approximation* 5, 8). But she also notes that there is only a small step between fictionalized higher truths and flat-out fake news (Bruzzi, *Approximation* 9). Usually, the same cinematic techniques are involved. This is the problem with these kinds of films, and this is why they are so interesting to study in the context of a so-called "post-truth" situation. And the question that *My Son Hunter* seems to pose is how and when the movie crosses the line from valid approximation to a fully-fledged fabricated reality, a paranoid construction of "systematized delusional structures" (Beckman 11). I have no conclusive answer, but my analysis suggests that the film is designed to make that assessment maximally difficult.[10]

I would also argue that whether the cinematic approximation of truth ultimately resonates is predicated more than anything else on its affective force. *My Son Hunter*'s mid-section especially—the film's exposé of the "Biden crime family"—is paced, edited, and soundtracked in ways that seem designed to produce an affective overpowering of rational discourse. It is a sequence that does not have to rely on the force of logic and argumentation if it can speak to audiences' sense of confusion and powerlessness in the face of a complex reality. As Beckman notes, paranoia is inversely related to the messiness of the world (11–12). This is the point where we need to pay attention to the ways in which *My Son Hunter* works in the modality of melodrama as a way of ramping up the affective frequency. The character of Hunter Biden is the main conduit. In an early scene Hunter and Grace/Kitty drive to Los Angeles's Skid Row to score drugs, which presents an opportunity to establish Hunter as a tragic, suffering figure. "I am a royal fuckup," he explains. "No one can fuck up the way that I fuck up." Moreover: "I don't deserve help." The scenes that immediately follow show Hunter talk about the tragic death of his mother and sister in a car accident and the special bond hereby forged between Hunter, his brother Beau, and their father Joe. Beau's illness and premature death sends Hunter off on a downward spiral of substance abuse and ill-advised sexual escapades. Later, Hunter breaks down in tears, crying out that he should have been the one to go, not Beau. This takes place in front of Joe Biden, indicative of how the movie places a strong emphasis on the ambivalent father-son relationship. "I love my dad," says Hunter, and he expresses guilt about his reckless behavior, which runs the risk of destroying everything his father has built. Grace/Kitty is not convinced. In a pseudo-Freudian take, she suggests that Hunter has (unconsciously?) misplaced the laptops in order to take down his dad: "you don't love him, Hunter, you hate him." The movie also includes an underdeveloped doubling of the motif of problematic fathers: Grace/Kitty, too, has a troubled relationship with

her dad. We learn little about their story but cannot fail to notice that the resolution for Grace's/Kitty's character includes the discovery of truth and doing the right thing (in the context of the movie's moral universe), but also—and coincidentally—the reconciliation with her father, which completely lacks narrative significance and logic, but which further emphasizes the movie's investment in the mode of family melodrama. A similar doubling and division in the melodramatic register is the attachment of suffering to Hunter and virtue to Grace/Kitty—two attributes that might otherwise conventionally be combined in one melodramatic main character.

Beckman notes that melodrama and paranoia are corresponding modes—both rely on a simplified moral universe, in which everything and everyone is easily slotted into good or evil (173). Elisabeth Anker makes a similar point in her definition of melodrama as a mode that

> portrays dramatic events through moral polarities of good and evil, overwhelmed victims, heightened affects of pain and suffering, grand gestures, astonishing feats of heroism, and the redemption of virtue. Melodramas convey stories about the suffering of virtuous people overcome by nefarious forces, and they examine political and social conflict through outsized representations of unjust persecution. (2)

The last sentence points to another shared feature of melodrama and paranoia: the narrativization of the world as a life-and-death struggle between individuals and larger social forces. The same narrative is vital in the populist universe, with its notion of a virtuous people under constant threat—either from outside others such as immigrants, or from enemies within, such as the woke mafia. The key context here is a perceived lack or loss of individual agency and autonomy that informs cultural forms and formations and political discourse alike. Beckman talks about the tendency in paranoid postmodern fiction to construct a troubled relationship between the self and the chronotope in which he/she searches for his/her agency and identity, and she suggests that paranoid fiction speaks to the desire of "retaining a subject position endowed with knowledge and agency" (14, 44). Similarly, Pratt's book about conspiracy movies identifies the larger cultural and social phenomenon of "agency panic" as an important context for the genre (1). And Anker's discussion about melodramatic political language suggests that the form of melodrama in that domain resonates with people's daily experience of powerlessness and "devitalized agency" (15). Against this background, it should follow that much of the appeal of the paranoid, melodramatic, and populist modes rests in the ability to imagine convincingly and compellingly a restoration of order—moral, social, and epistemological. And this is the larger context for making sense of the promise of truth that *My Son Hunter* extends.

Conclusion

This article has tried to make sense of why *My Son Hunter* exists and what kind of film it is. The first part discussed how the movie fits into the larger context of right-wing media, arguing that we can think of *My Son Hunter* as a piece of right-wing counter-cinema that tries to simultaneously tap into the cultural prestige associated with feature filmmaking *and* provide niche audiences with paracinematic pleasures. I also suggested that this film feeds a right-wing political mindset not by telling a new story, but by endowing a familiar story with the affective force and rhetorical flexibility that a certain type of hybrid, incoherent cinema can offer. Specifically, my analysis of the cinematic form of *My Son Hunter* suggested that the movie forwards a promise of truth via an affective bombardment that draws on melodrama as well as the flexible

filmmaking techniques of docudramatic approximation, and that makes logic and argumentation superfluous. The analysis indicates that my initial idea about the destabilization of the concept of truth needs to be slightly revised: this is a movie that simultaneously plays fast and loose with the truth *and* extends a promise of truth; it is a movie that is simultaneously wildly incoherent *and* designed to appease the longing for simplicity that lies at the core of the paranoid as well as the melodramatic imagination.

A flaw in my line of reasoning is that it does not take audience reception into account. Arguably, *My Son Hunter* is exactly the kind of movie that will only work properly for audiences who are already hell-bent on making it work. This is a fair point. We should not overestimate this movie's impact. But neither should we—all too conveniently, in my view—discard it as an attempted "red-pilling" that no person of a sane mind can take seriously. As Arnold suggests in his survey of the conspiracy theme in American cinema, conspiracy theories are in the mainstream not because a majority of people actually believe in all the details, but because such theories are an "emblem of a stance" vis-a-vis the world (4). Facts are ultimately immaterial. What matters is the increasingly widespread sense of powerlessness in the face of larger social forces—sometimes seen, but more often unseen and nonagentic; a nebulous, non-knowable, globalized totality (Anker 15–16).[11] This feeds what Beckman refers to as the "paranoid mindset," the "sense that everyday existence is shadowed by something menacing," and that a powerful enemy is lurking somewhere out there in the darkness (3). There is a case to be made that the American white male is presently the social and political agent most acutely attuned to this affective frequency, or most tightly wrapped up in this structure of feeling (Beckman 166–77). Even so, and to reconnect with the case of *My Son Hunter*, the problems raised by this movie go some way beyond a few right-wing blowhards who want to take down the Bidens. Otherwise, scholars and critics who would most certainly reject *My Son Hunter* as right-wing propaganda might not so readily embrace the projection of paranoia in other cases—as, for example, in Pratt's suggestion that the "visionary paranoia" of certain conspiracy theory films offers a "radical critique" of politics and society (2–5, 8–9, 28). The challenge is where to draw the line between legitimate critique and delusional conspiracy theorizing; between well-founded critical thinking and "critiquiness"; between "reasonable doubt and downright paranoia" (Beckman 3). *My Son Hunter* mobilizes an incoherent mixture of filmmaking techniques for the purpose of blurring this line. In this way, as I have argued, this movie is expressive of our so-called "post-truth" condition, and as such, it is an object—however irredeemably bad—that we should want to try to make sense of.

Notes

1. Beckman, drawing on Timothy Melley, connects the narrativization of politics to the institutionalization of public deception in the form of the CIA, and the rise of the "covert sphere" in postwar-era America, a sphere that can only be partly known via facts, leaving it to popular imagination to fill in the gaps (42–44).

2. Kuypers offers plenty of evidence of a liberal bias of much news reporting. Yet the force of his argument is tempered by occasional disingenuous use of sources and rhetorical slippages. For example, the intimation in his introduction that Fox News is the "most ideologically balanced of the major news outlets" (6) is not supported by the source referenced (12n. 15), unless it is deliberately misinterpreted. Also, while Kuypers's point about the value of a multiplicity of viewpoints in the media is well taken, his book tends to imply (or state outright) that conservative viewpoints are not merely "alternative," but also somehow more accurate, which is a much more debatable point.

3. When House Republicans launched impeachment inquiries in September 2023, the label for Breitbart's Hunter Biden-related content changed to "Biden Impeachment."

4. I have been unable to trace an exact moment of coining of the phrase. In 2011 Breitbart himself noted that "it is getting to be a cliché that I'd say in my speeches . . . that 'politics is downstream from culture'" ("Righteous Indignation").

5. The notion of "paracinematic" taste that I am drawing on is from Sconce.

6. *Tu quoque* refers to a logical fallacy rather than an argument.

7. We could also think of Grace/Kitty as a non-intellectual version of Jameson's "social detective," a protagonist in conspiracy films who serves the purpose of discovering hidden truths about society (39).

8. I use the notion of "propaganda" with caution. As the editors of *The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda Studies* note, propaganda is often used as a "dismissive term, especially by one enemy against another," serving political rather than analytical purposes (Auerbach and Castronovo 2). Also, while scholars are in the process of rethinking propaganda for a diverse media landscape, the term may still connote communicative modalities linked to State-based governmental control or deployed by powerful corporate interests to "manufacture consent" (Boler and Nemorin). None of these ideas seem useful for an understanding of a film such as *My Son Hunter*. However, loosely understood as a form of persuasion that aims to shape cognition and manipulate opinions and behaviors through a one-sided presentation that serves the propagandist's intentions, the term may still capture some aspects of the rhetoric of *My Son Hunter* (Elsaesser 239).

9. The notion of an interplay between archive and re-enactment draws on Bruzzi (*Approximation* 1–11). The point about a mixture of indexicality and iconicity draws on Lipkin (4).

10. In this sense, *My Son Hunter* can indeed be considered "propaganda," if broadly understood as a mode of strategic communication that can include a range of techniques of manipulation and disinformation, including the "[deliberate] blending [of] true and false information" (see Ekman and Widholm 117).

11. See also Jameson's discussion about conspiracy films as symptomatic of late capitalism—an unrepresentable and "unimaginable decentered global network" (13).

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10.22439/asca.v56i1.7173

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TRUMP'S PLAYBOOK OF ELECTORAL MANIPULATION:

An Interplay of Manipulation Tactics in a Longstanding Democracy

Abstract: The attempt by former President Donald Trump to manipulate the United States' 2020 presidential elections is a salient example of how electoral manipulation has changed to adapt to the new political and societal context that marks present-day elections. This highlights the need for a novel approach to help us better understand electoral manipulation, which is becoming increasingly common all over the world. This article addresses this need by presenting a novel framework for examining electoral manipulation in the United States in the 2020s. A novel feature of the framework is a focus on the interplay between different manipulation tactics. It identifies nine electoral manipulation tactics that interact with and reinforce each other: breaking democratic norms, disinformation, gerrymandering, voter suppression, hacking and leaking, collusion with foreign states, intraparty pressure, intimidation and violence, and corrupting state and government institutions.

Keywords: autocratization, elections, electoral manipulation, political parties, United States

Introduction

On August 1, 2023, Donald Trump became the first former president in the history of the United States to be criminally indicted for an attempt to overturn a presidential election. His attack on American democracy was in some ways unique, and yet in other ways it was a continuation of a long tradition of electoral manipulation in the United States, which has several well-documented issues with electoral integrity (Norris, *Why American* 23–24) and the worst Electoral Integrity Index ranking of all liberal democracies (Garnett et al. 4). Both major political parties in the United States engage in some forms of electoral manipulation such as gerrymandering (Chen and Cottrell 335–36), and the country lacks uniform professional standards of electoral management and independent, nonpartisan election authorities (Norris, *Why American* 56–58). The Constitution is insufficient as a safeguard against electoral manipulation, and the overall electoral regulation landscape allows ample possibilities for making small changes that gradually tilt the electoral playing field in favor of those in power (Huq and Ginsburg 158). State legislatures are the predominant source of electoral legislation and administration, making each state unique in its laws and regulations (Norris, *Why American* 62–63). In 2000, an exceptionally tight presidential contest highlighted some of the issues and sowed serious doubt in the electoral system, but improving electoral integrity has become an extremely polarized issue, with the Republican and Democratic parties in profound disagreement over crucial vulnerabilities and potential remedies (Norris, *Why American* 27–41).

The 2020 elections took place under the unique circumstances created by the Covid-19 pandemic. The desire to keep voters safe from the virus resulted in changes in electoral rules in numerous states, such as expanding the opportunities to vote by mail and organizing drive-in or drop-box voting. This resulted in partisan feuds over the rules, litigation, and confusion, and provided ample opportunity for Trump to denigrate the integrity of the election Almost half of voters voted by mail or absentee ballot, but, since Trump had been casting vote-by-mail in a negative light, it was mostly Biden voters who chose this voting method, whereas the votes cast in person on Election Day were disproportionally cast to Trump (Pew Research Center 4). Since many states count election day votes first, this voting pattern created a so-called red mirage, which made some of the first preliminary results appear as though Trump was performing much better than he actually was—a phenomenon Trump appears to have consciously taken advantage of as part of his disinformation campaign, as explained in more detail in a later section of this article.

While much has been written regarding Trump's actions surrounding the 2020 elections, little attention has been paid to the multitude of manipulation tactics he used and the interplay between different tactics, a central feature of Trump's attempt to overturn the election. This article addresses the gap by presenting a new framework that offers a comprehensive account of Trump's tactics with a special focus on their interplay. The article seeks to answer the following questions: 1) Which electoral manipulation tactics did Trump use in connection with the 2020 United States presidential elections? and 2) How did the manipulation tactics interact?

The framework this article presents has been constructed inductively from a case study of Trump's 2020 manipulation attempt while also relying on existing research insofar as previous frameworks were applicable. The novel framework was created via qualitative content analysis, a common method in studies that aim to examine social reality in a subjective but scientific manner. This method also produces descriptions or typologies, thus making it well suited for theory building (Zhang and Wildemuth 1–2).

The research data used in this study consists of news reporting and the final report of The Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol (later referred to as "the Select Committee"). The newspaper material used in this case study is comprised of news articles from the *Washington Post* print newspaper between March 30, 2020, when Trump began spreading disinformation about the upcoming election (Benkler et al., "Mail-In" 6), and January 20, 2021, when Trump's term in office came to an end. Potentially relevant articles were retrieved from the paper's archive using the search parameters "Trump" and "election" or "voting." In total, the search yielded 3751 results, of which 853 articles were chosen for a closer examination based on their headlines.

The *Washington Post* was chosen as a source of research material due to its status as the dominant newspaper in the nation's capital, its detailed coverage of American politics, and its long history of unearthing political scandals ("The Washington," Britannica). The paper leans somewhat to the political left ("The Washington," AllSides), but this does not compromise the integrity of the study because the left-leaning newspapers in the United States have been shown to adhere to professional journalistic norms and to belong to a network of politically and ideologically diverse media outlets that fact check each other, correct their mistakes, and build their reputations on truthseeking (Benkler et al., *Network Propaganda* 73–74). The Select Committee report (2022), in turn, is unique in its thorough examination of the events that are this case study's focus. The report can be considered reliable despite the partisan fighting that complicated the founding of the committee and the criticism towards the committee by some prominent Republicans. Although most committee members were Democrats, two were Republicans, and most of the committee's witnesses were Republicans (Select Committee xvi). Televised hearings of key witnesses added transparency to the work of the committee.

In my analysis of the data, I relied upon both inductive and deductive reasoning, which is in keeping with the tradition of qualitative content analysis. In inductive reasoning, "themes and categories emerge from the data through the researcher's careful examination and constant comparison" (Zhang and Wildemuth 2). In this study, I relied upon inductive reasoning for condensing the research data into categories, whereas I applied a deductive approach when I consulted previous research as a guide for formulating some of the categories in the novel framework. This ensured that new categories were created only when necessary and all other categories were in keeping with previous studies. Of the existing frameworks, the work of Cheeseman and Klaas depicted the case better than most, and therefore it had the biggest impact on the novel framework.

Subjectivity can be both a strength and a limitation of qualitative content analysis. In this article, subjectivity plays an important role because of the way the notion of electoral manipulation is conceptualized; when a conceptualization of electoral manipulation relies upon international conventions or national laws, electoral manipulation is perceived as a *social fact*, that is, a fact whose existence derives from human agreement and relies on human institutions (Ruggie 856; Searle 2). However, when democratic norms and principles form the foundation of the study, as in this article, the conceptualization becomes more subjective. In the present-day United States, electoral integrity is a heavily polarized concept that can mean very different things to different people depending on their political leanings (Norris, *Why American* 27–41), which makes the social fact approach unfeasible. Hence, this article adopts a constructivist approach and contributes to knowledge creation

by defining, classifying, and modelling the object of the study (”Konstruktivismi”).

The novel framework I present in this article addresses gaps in previous research by highlighting electoral manipulation tactics that have risen to salience or taken on new forms in recent years. In addition, it contributes to scholarship on electoral manipulation by highlighting the interplay between different manipulation tactics and the emergence of a whole that is larger than the sum of its parts, whereas previous studies have considered each tactic separately instead of considering how they might impact one another. The framework I present in this article does not seek to be a comprehensive account of all electoral manipulation tactics used in all democracies. Instead, it focuses on the specific context of the United States in the 2020s. However, it also highlights present-day phenomena that have larger implications outside of this context and seeks to raise the question of whether such phenomena are sufficiently accounted for in existing frameworks and codebooks that are used to compile large databases such as V-Dem, a prominent dataset designed to conceptualize and measure democracy. Scrutiny of the latter is especially significant, as these databases are frequently relied upon in quantitative studies on autocratization, which means that the conceptualizations behind them have a substantial influence over the field of democracy studies. In the first section of this article, I conceptualize electoral manipulation and electoral integrity. In the next section, I discuss the need for a new electoral manipulation framework, and subsequently I present the novel framework. Finally, I offer concluding remarks. The research I present in this paper shows that Trump used nine different electoral manipulation tactics, some of which are not accounted for in previous frameworks, and many of which have novel aspects to them. I also find that interplay between tactics is crucial in that manipulation tactics that may seem harmless on their own but take on new meaning because they lay the groundwork for the use of more serious tactics. This article highlights that Trump’s electoral manipulation attempt exemplifies many interesting phenomena that are characteristic of the age we live in, such as social media providing a megaphone for spreading misinformation and affective polarization, which makes citizens more inclined to believe political lies.

Defining Electoral Manipulation

There is no universally accepted conceptualization or definition of *electoral manipulation*. Several starting points for conceptualization have been proposed, such as international conventions, national laws, citizens’ perceptions, administrative effectiveness, and democratic norms, values, and principles (Birch 11–13; Norris, *Why Electoral* 21, 35). This article takes democratic norms as the starting point and defines electoral manipulation as both legal and illegal actions that a candidate or a political party undertakes before, during, or after an election to manipulate the elections in their favor that undermine electoral integrity. Meanwhile, I conceptualize *electoral integrity* following James and Garnett, who also take a normative approach based on democratic theory (13–15). As they point out, a normative approach provides a moral compass, allows recommendations for improvements, and enables timeless comparative yardsticks for research purposes. They define democracy as “a political system in which power resides equally with members of the population of a polity rather than a narrow political or sectional elite” and conclude that the “role of elections is therefore to *provide a mechanism to ensure that power is evenly distributed across a polity*” (James and Garnett 14; emphasis in original).

James and Garnett define electoral integrity as consisting of five key principles or pillars: equality of contestation, equality of participation, meaningful deliberation, electoral management delivery, and electoral governance (15–19). Equality of contestation refers to all parties and candidates being able to meaningfully contest the election and to a level playing field. Equality of participation entails universal suffrage, accessible mechanisms of registration and voting, high turnout, equal levels of participation across different groups in a society, all votes having equal weight, and votes actually representing the will of the voters. Meaningful deliberation is accomplished when voters have all the fundamental freedoms necessary for formulating an informed opinion and the society at large engages in high-quality debates based on truthful information, a diversity of viewpoints, and a rational and equal consideration of the arguments. Electoral management fulfills its function when electoral officials are impartial and do their work professionally and transparently while upholding the security and accuracy of the process. Electoral governance encompasses certainty over electoral rules, a fair process for changing the rules, obedience to the rules, an effective system of accountability, and acceptance of results. Later in this article, I reflect upon this conceptualization of electoral integrity in light of the novel electoral manipulation framework presented in this article.

Electoral manipulation can take place at any point in the *electoral cycle*, which, following Norris, is understood in this article as comprising all aspects relevant to a particular election, for example drafting and passing electoral laws, candidate and voter registration, and vote count (*Why Electoral* 33–34). When election results are certified, one electoral cycle ends and another one begins. Electoral manipulation is generally done in secret, making it a difficult field of study (Lehoucq 233–34). However, the United States has very strong diagonal accountability mechanisms, making it an ideal subject for an electoral manipulation case study. Large newsrooms and non-governmental organizations have the resources to unearth undemocratic behavior, and the First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees them the freedom to publish their findings.

The Need for a New Electoral Manipulation Framework

Present-day elections are taking place in a context that differs substantially from that of previous decades, one that James and Garnett call the age of uncertainty (10–13). Many of the phenomena characteristic of the age of uncertainty that have piqued the interest of electoral integrity researchers in recent years have originated or are otherwise clearly visible in the United States: democracy is eroding, and social media has changed the use and impact potential of disinformation. Mistrust in election management has been on the rise since the United States presidential election of 2000 brought management issues such as butterfly ballots and hanging chads to the world's attention. Advances in voting and electoral management technology have intertwined cybersecurity issues with electoral integrity while affective polarization has made citizens dehumanize each other based on political disagreement and appreciation of democracy and trust in elections have been declining. Donald Trump's electoral manipulation attempt in connection with the 2020 presidential elections in the United States exemplifies electoral manipulation taking place in this new context. The empirical analysis of this attempt that I present later in this article highlights the need for a new framework on electoral manipulation.

Previous research on electoral manipulation has often focused on only one manipulation tactic

instead of considering the whole range of available tactics (Cheeseman and Klaas 7). Some authors, however, have constructed comprehensive manipulation frameworks. The frameworks of Schedler (39–45), Calingaert (139–49), Birch (28–39), Cheeseman and Klaas (31–207), and Morgenbesser (1056) each introduce three to seven broad categories, which encompass several different manipulation tactics. Birch and Morgenbesser name several subcategories for each category, while Schedler and Calingaert do not. Schedler (38–41) and Birch (16–26) arrive at their frameworks deductively, by theorizing a framework of electoral integrity that then functions as a foundation for their electoral manipulation frameworks. Calingaert, Cheeseman and Klaas, and Morgenbesser, in contrast, take an inductive approach and categorize and analyze real-world examples of electoral manipulation.

The electoral manipulation attempt of former President Trump is also interesting because it took place in a longstanding democracy. Previous electoral manipulation frameworks have typically focused on authoritarian regimes (e.g., Calingaert; Morgenbesser), so-called hybrid regimes that are neither fully democratic nor fully autocratic (e.g., Schedler), or both (Cheeseman and Klaas 12–13).[1] Some of the key components of Trump's manipulation attempt were specific to the democratic context or manifest themselves differently due to this context, which is another testament to the need for a new framework specific to the United States.

Since the Cold War, incumbent-driven subversions of democracy have been the leading cause of democratic death (Svolik 20–21). Since a growing number of democracies are undergoing autocratization (Wiebrecht et al. 770), it is important to pay scholarly attention to electoral manipulation tactics that seek to corrupt democratic institutions to help an incumbent stay in power. As I will show in the empirical analysis presented later in this article, such tactics were an important part of Trump's 2020 manipulation attempt. However, since many previous electoral manipulation frameworks have described autocracies (e.g., Calingaert; Morgenbesser) or hybrid regimes (e.g., Schedler), they have not included corruption of government institutions. The issue is also not identified as a separate manipulation tactic in Cheeseman and Klaas's or Birch's comprehensive electoral manipulation frameworks. The risk of corruption of democratic institutions is also often not included in conceptualizations of electoral integrity, such as Elklit and Reynolds's election quality framework, or codebooks designed for the purpose of data collection for compiling large electoral integrity-related datasets, which are used in quantitative research, such as the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) codebook, the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity (PEI) index core questions, and the National Elections across Democracy and Autocracy (NELDA) codebook (Coppedge et al.; Electoral Integrity Project; Hyde and Marinov).

Disinformation is an example of a topical electoral manipulation tactic that featured prominently in Trump's manipulation attempt but has not always received attention from scholars. There is no mention of disinformation in Schedler's, Calingaert's, or Morgenbesser's electoral manipulation frameworks. Similarly, the concepts of truthful information and disinformation have often been absent from conceptualizations of electoral integrity such as Elklit and Reynolds's framework and the V-Dem, PEI, and NELDA codebooks (Coppedge et al.; Electoral Integrity Project; Hyde and Marinov).

Yet another electoral manipulation tool that has been salient in public discussion in recent years but has often been overlooked in electoral manipulation frameworks is co-operation between a political candidate and a foreign power seeking to influence an election, often referred to as collusion in the American context. There is evidence to suggest that non-democratic states

such as Russia have attempted collusion to meddle in elections abroad (Cheeseman and Klaas 129; Mueller 110–14), which prompts an interest in political candidates' potential use of collusion as an electoral manipulation tool, such as Trump's 2019 collusion attempt, which is discussed in more detail in the following section. However, collusion is not considered in Schedler's or Calingaert's frameworks. Morgenbesser mentions transnational alliances between ruling parties to uphold autocratic rule (1057), but since his focus is on autocracies, the phenomenon is somewhat different from the one described in this article. The possibility of foreign influence is also absent from Elklit and Reynolds and the V-Dem, PEI, and NELDA codebooks (Coppedge et al.; Electoral Integrity Project; Hyde and Marinov).

A Novel Electoral Manipulation Framework

The framework presented in this article consists of nine electoral manipulation tactics, which act in concert to build upon each other and reinforce each other. The tactics are as follows, described in more detail below:

(1) Breaking democratic norms
(2) Disinformation
(3) Gerrymandering
(4) Voter suppression
(5) Hacking and leaking
(6) Collusion with one or more foreign states
(7) Intraparty pressure
(8) Intimidation and violence
(9) Corrupting state and government institutions

The tactics at the beginning of the list may seem minor in comparison to the ones towards the end, and some of the tactics, such as gerrymandering, are regularly used by both parties. Nevertheless, all are relevant to the framework because of how Trump used them to create a whole that was larger than the sum of its parts.

The framework contains a) old but still common tactics (2, 3, 4, and 8) (Cheeseman and Klaas 26, 35–49, 93–114); b) tactics popular with present-day authoritarians (2, 7, and 9) (Bermeo 10–11; Boese et al. 984; Svolik 21); and c) foreign election meddling tactics (2, 5, and 6) (Aaltola 133–36). Many, but not all, of the tactics discussed by Cheeseman and Klaas are present. Two tactics are unique to the framework presented in this paper: breaking democratic norms and intraparty pressure.

Breaking democratic norms is understood as a breach of societal soft norms that contributes the groundwork for the use of more serious electoral manipulation tactics. Breaking democratic norms is not generally considered an electoral manipulation tool, perhaps because it requires the existence of strong democratic norms, and thus does not apply to autocracies or hybrid regimes. In 2020, notable breeches of democratic norms were Trump's noncommitment to a peaceful transition of power and his refusal to attend his successor's inauguration (Gearan; Select Committee 202). In James and Garnett's framework, such behavior shakes the pillar of electoral governance, as it creates uncertainty over electoral rules, obedience to the rules, and acceptance of results.

Disinformation is defined as false information that is spread deliberately to deceive people. It undermines meaningful deliberation by making it harder, if not impossible, for a given society to debate issues based on truthful information (James and Garnett 17). It is a common tool used by politicians to improve their chances of winning an election (Cheeseman and Klaas 26, 127–28, 134–41). Autocratic governments are increasingly using disinformation to shape both domestic and international opinion (Boese et al.

984), and it has become an essential part of foreign election meddling (Aaltola 133–34). In the United States, it has been in use since the early days of American democracy (Mansky). Trump began spreading disinformation eight months before Election Day, baselessly sowing distrust in electoral integrity and eroding his supporters' confidence in elections (Clayton et al. 5). After the election, he insisted on having won, even though his own cabinet and advisors had refuted the claim (Select Committee 204–07, 214–15, 376–79). It appears he had a premeditated plan to claim victory on Election Night regardless of the election results and followed through with his plan (Select Committee 8–26, 196–97, 195–203).

Gerrymandering refers to drawing voting district maps unfairly to gain partisan advantage or to suppress the votes of some subgroup of voters. It sabotages equal participation by diluting the power of some voters or amplifying the power of others (James and Garnett 16). Partisan gerrymandering originated in the United States in the early nineteenth century (Cheeseman and Klaas 34–46), and at present both Republicans and Democrats gerrymander to make the races for the House and the state legislatures less competitive to their own advantage (Chen and Cottrell 335–36). There is no universally accepted way to draw voting districts (Simpser 174), but in recent years political scientists have developed robust methods to assess whether gerrymandering has taken place (e.g., Magleby et al. 87–89; McCartan et al.). On the state level, gerrymandering can have a substantial impact on the composition of state legislatures (Krasno et al. 1190).

In the contest for the White House, gerrymandering has very limited direct impact, since—with the sole exceptions of Maine and Nebraska—each state comprises one electoral district. However, in the 2020 presidential elections, the use of some of the other manipulation tactics built upon state-level gerrymandering. Trump tried to exert intraparty pressure on state legislatures and to corrupt state institutions, targeting, among others, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Michigan (Select Committee 266–67), all of which were in Republican control due to gerrymandering (Grose et al. 2).

Voter suppression is understood as a legal or illegal measure whose purpose or practical effect is to reduce voting by members of a targeted subgroup of voters. It threatens to undermine equal participation, which encompasses equal levels of participation across different groups in society (James and Garnett 16). It is a tactic both the Democratic and Republican parties have resorted to over the course of history (Epperly et al. 758–64). In the present-day United States, the Republican Party stands to benefit from disenfranchising minority voters, and in the twenty-first century, the party has been increasingly passing laws that restrict voting in a suppressive way (Hasen 57–59). In 2020, the Trump campaign and Republican entities were engaged in more than forty pre-electoral lawsuits related to voting amidst the pandemic, attempting to restrict access to the ballot box (Ginsberg).

The act of *hacking and leaking* is understood as stealing potentially damaging information about a political opponent and publicizing it anonymously via a third party such as a newspaper or a website. It can jeopardize equal contestation by tilting the playing field unfairly (James and Garnett 16). Usually done via digital tools, hacking and leaking is the modern-day version of the attempt by President Richard Nixon's campaign staff to steal damaging information about political rivals that resulted in the Watergate scandal in the United States in the 1970s (Cheeseman and Klaas 127). A well-known example of hacking and leaking is the publication of emails related to Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign in the 2016 United States presidential elections

(Cheeseman and Klaas 141–43). This particular operation was conducted by Russia, but hacking and leaking can also be commissioned or conducted by a candidate or their campaign (Cheeseman and Klaas 126, 142). In 2020, the Trump campaign obtained and leaked emails allegedly belonging to Trump's opponent Joe Biden's son Hunter Biden.

Attempted collusion is understood as attempting to make a secret pact with a foreign entity to manipulate an election. Similarly to hacking and leaking, it undermines equal contestation (James and Garnett 16). Early in the 2020 electoral cycle, Trump pressured Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to help him denigrate Joe Biden, who was campaigning to be the Democratic presidential candidate in the 2020 elections ("President Donald Trump Impeached"; White House).[2] In addition, Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani defamed Biden in collaboration with a Ukrainian politician who was later declared a Russian intelligence asset (Lucas).

Intraparty pressure, a term coined by this author for the purposes of the framework, refers to pressuring members of one's own political party to break democratic norms or the law to help manipulate an election. If successful, it prevents equal contestation (James and Garnett 16). When the pressure is directed at election officials, the tactic can also erode electoral management delivery, which relies upon impartiality, professionalism, and transparency of electoral management (James and Garnett 17). Present-day autocrats often rely on the complicity of their parties to corrupt governmental institutions to consolidate their power (Svolik 21). Trump and his allies attempted to convince numerous Republicans to help overturn the 2020 election (Select Committee 264–66, 270–75, 282–93). For example, Trump pressured Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensberger to "find" him enough votes to change the result in Georgia (Select Committee 263–64). When all else failed, he tried to convince his Vice President Mike Pence not to certify the election results (Select Committee 4, 32–41, 233, 428–67).

Intimidation and violence are defined, respectively, as the action of frightening or threatening someone to persuade them to do something, and as the use of physical force to injure, abuse, damage, or destroy. These electoral manipulation tactics can shake several pillars of electoral integrity: threatening or being violent towards voters can undermine equal participation, whereas targeting election officials can have an impact on electoral management delivery. If a candidate or their supporters choose violence instead of acceptance of an unfavorable outcome, it also undercuts electoral governance, which entails, amongst other things, obedience to electoral rules and acceptance of results (James and Garnett 16–18). Intimidation and violence are used in many countries all over the world (Cheeseman and Klaas 93–114), and their use has a long history in the United States (Epperly et al. 758–64). In 2020, Trump publicly verbally attacked election officials and elected officials who had refused to help him overturn the election. These attacks prompted some of his supporters to threaten the officials and their families with physical violence, but the president did not condemn the threats or attempt to quell them (Select Committee 300–17). Instead, he urged his supporters to protest in Washington, DC, on the day Congress was to certify the election results. Leading up to the protest, Trump's staff received reports warning of potential violence, but the White House made no effort to mitigate the risk (Select Committee 63–75, 591). Knowing many protesters were armed, Trump told his supporters to "fight like hell" and march to the Capitol, apparently intending to join them (Select Committee 69–71, 72–73, 75, 585, 587–92). The crowd attacked the Capitol violently. Aware of the violence, Trump allowed three hours to pass before making any attempt to end

	Breaking norms	Disinfor-mation	Gerryman-dering	Voter suppression	Hacking and leaking	Collusion	Intraparty pressure	Intimida-tion and violence	Corrupting institutions
Breaking norms		Reinforces						Helps justify	Helps justify
Disinforma-tion	Reinforces		Helps justify	Helps justify, is reinforced by	Reinforces	Is reinforced by	Helps justify	Helps justify	Helps justify, is reinforced by
Gerryman-dering		Is justified with, reinforces		Helps execute			Helps execute	Helps execute	Helps execute
Voter suppression		Is justified with, reinforces	Relies upon			Relies upon		Can rely upon	Helps execute
Hacking and leaking		Reinforces				Relies upon			
Collusion		Reinforces		Helps execute	Helps execute				
Intraparty pressure		Is justified with	Relies upon					Relies upon	Helps execute
Intimidation and violence	Is justified with	Is justified with	Relies upon	Helps execute			Helps execute		Helps execute
Corrupting institutions	Is justified with	Is justified with, reinforces	Relies upon	Relies upon			Relies upon	Relies upon	

Table 1: Interplay between manipulation tactics.

the attack (Select Committee 5, 76–98, 577–79, 592–606).

Corrupting state or government institutions is defined in this framework as a deliberate act to undermine, alter, or abuse political or judicial institutions for political gain. It sabotages electoral governance, which entails certainty over electoral rules and a fair process for changing them (James and Garnett 18). For decades, such corruption of institutions has been the leading cause of democratic death (Svolik 20–22), making it the most dangerous tactic in the framework. Before the 2020 election, the Trump campaign appears to have sought Supreme Court validation for a legal theory known as the Independent State Legislature Theory, which could have given state legislatures the power to overturn election results (Luttig). After the election, Trump and his supporters filed sixty-one baseless lawsuits in state and federal courts to challenge the election results (Select Committee 210). When the lawsuits were rejected by courts, Trump instructed the Justice Department to declare the election as corrupt even though Justice Department investigations had only produced evidence to the contrary, and when the acting Attorney General refused, Trump attempted to replace him with someone willing to do his bidding (Select Committee 49–54, 386, 389–93, 397–

401). Trump and his allies also organized slates of fake electors to meet and to submit false certifications of Trump victories to give Vice President Pence a pretext not to certify Biden's victory (Select Committee 41–48, 341–54).

As displayed in table 1, interplay between the tactics is crucial. When Trump refused to concede and claimed the election had been rigged, he was using the mutually reinforcing power of breeches of democratic norms and disinformation to create, sustain, and amplify a backstory that played a crucial role in his manipulation attempt. With this backstory, he justified intraparty pressure, intimidation and violence, and corruption of institutions, and provided his party a useful tool for justifying gerrymandering and voter suppression in the future. When he ordered the Justice Department to declare the election corrupt without evidence, he was attempting to use corruption of institutions in turn to reinforce his most crucial piece of disinformation about the elections. In addition, when his campaign collaborated with a Russian asset to denigrate Biden, they were using collusion to reinforce disinformation about Trump's political opponent.

Gerrymandering had given Republicans control in several swing states, and this helped Trump find useful partisans to exert intraparty pressure on. Control of swing states was also crucial in the fake electors scheme, which was one of Trump's attempts to corrupt institutions. Events in the United States since 2020 have shown that gerrymandering can also pave the way to passing laws that suppress the vote and laws that help intimidate election workers, and helps elect candidates that campaign on disinformation, thus reinforcing said disinformation.

Voter suppression has a two-way relationship with disinformation: it is often justified with disinformation, but it can also tighten the competition between candidates and lessen winning margins, making disinformation spread by the losing party seem more credible. It can help authoritarian-minded candidates rise to power, enabling them to corrupt institutions.

Hacking and leaking can also reinforce disinformation, as mixing misleading slivers of truth with counterfactual claims is often the best recipe for creating impactful disinformation, and hacking can provide useful material for doing so. Collusion, in turn, can be an intrinsic enabler of hacking and leaking, as foreign actors have shown their interest in hacking operations, as witnessed in the United States in connection with the 2016 presidential election. The colluding foreign power can also help spread disinformation, or even suppress the vote, as Russia did in connection with the 2016 presidential election, even though it appears Russia acted alone that time and did not collude with any political campaign (Senate Committee on Intelligence 35).

Intraparty pressure usually requires some form of intimidation. It can also rely upon gerrymandering, and even outright violence, as was the case on January 6, when a crowd of Trump supporters chanted, "Hang Mike Pence." The goal of intraparty pressure is to corrupt state and government institutions. Intimidation and violence can also be tools of voter suppression or corruption of institutions, such as when Trump suggested that Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensberger might face criminal charges if he did not "find" Trump the votes he needed to win. Corrupting state and government institutions relies on all other manipulation tactics except for hacking and leaking and collusion.

Conclusion

This article has introduced a novel framework for analyzing present-day electoral manipulation tactics and their interplay in the context of

the United States. The framework was constructed inductively, based on a case study of the United States 2020 presidential election, while also relying on deductive reasoning and consulting previous studies. The framework consists of nine electoral manipulation tactics: 1. Breaking democratic norms; 2. Disinformation; 3. Gerrymandering; 4. Voter suppression; 5. Hacking and leaking; 6. Collusion with one or more foreign states; 7. Intraparty pressure; 8. Intimidation and violence; and 9. Corrupting state and government institutions. The framework is a combination of old and familiar manipulation tactics, tactics that are popular with present-day authoritarians, and tactics used in foreign election meddling. The tactics build upon and amplify one another, creating a whole that is larger than the sum of its parts.

Trump's attempt to overturn the 2020 election tested the American electoral system in an unprecedented way, and there has been concern that similar scenarios will play out in connection with the 2024 presidential election or other future elections. From following the news, it is clear that Trump has continued to use many of his 2020 tactics, and that many prominent Republicans are following in his footsteps, which does not bode well for the 2024 election. Trump and many of his fellow partisans continue to spread disinformation about the integrity and results of the 2020 election, and in the 2022 midterm elections, numerous key Republican candidates appeared uncommitted to accepting a potential electoral loss. In the latest redistricting, gerrymandering gave Republicans control of Georgia and Wisconsin, two 2024 swing states. In Republican-controlled states, legislatures have used disinformation as a pretext to pass an exceptional number of new laws that restrict voting, prompting accusations of voter suppression from those opposed to the laws. The Republican party no longer seems to have any room for Trump opponents, and those who dare criticize him face severe pressure to change their stance or leave the party. Prominent Republicans have downplayed the violence that took place on January 6, been silent instead of condemning other violent acts, or discussed political violence in a joking manner that can be interpreted to signal acceptance. Republican-controlled state legislatures have passed laws that transfer power over electoral responsibilities from electoral administrators to partisan legislators. The framework presented in this paper provides an avenue to scrutinize these and other actions that signal danger to the integrity of future elections, and to analyze actions by prominent Democrats to see if they are engaging in similar behavior. It can also be utilized to identify and assess actions taken to strengthen the American electoral system and to protect it from manipulation.

Notes

1. In Cheeseman and Klaas, the focus is not absolute, and their examples include phenomena taking place in democratic contexts.

2. A transcript of Trump's telephone conversation with President Zelensky was originally published on the White House website, and this original transcript is part of the research material utilized in this study. However, it has since been removed. Therefore, the list of references contains instead a link to the *New York Times* website, where the transcript is still available.

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Crises in the Arctic
10.22439/asca.v56i1.7172

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CRISES IN THE ARCTIC:

Upheavals in the Memoir of Josephine Diebitsch-Peary

Abstract: In *My Arctic Journey: A Year among Ice-Fields and Eskimos* (1894), Josephine Diebitsch-Peary documents her experiences during the North Greenland Expedition of 1891–92, which began ominously when her husband, the famed Arctic explorer Robert E. Peary, broke his leg aboard the *Kite* and was carried to the expedition headquarters near the mouth of MacCormick Fjord. As the first white woman in the Arctic, Diebitsch-Peary faced numerous crises, torn as she was between True Womanhood ideals and desires for hunting and exploration. She navigated internal and external upheavals, depicting the Arctic landscape and native disputes, and vacillating between biased descriptions and identification with Inughuit women. Additional crises included the disappearance of mineralogist and meteorologist John M. Verhoeff and the pressures of her husband's ambitions. Despite these challenges, she actively participated in the expedition, grappling with traditional role expectations and the demands of polar exploration. Her memoir reflects the personal, national, and international costs of a contested icescape, revealing the struggles she overcame and those she did not.

Keywords: Josephine Diebitsch-Peary, Robert E. Peary, Arctic exploration, *My Arctic Journal*, crises

Introduction

The arrival of Josephine Diebitsch-Peary in the Arctic as a participant in the North Greenland Expedition of 1891–92, headed by her husband Robert E. Peary, caused consternation, if not an actual crisis, among the native inhabitants, who had never seen a white woman on their shores. She includes in her memoir of this expedition, *My Arctic Journal: A Year among Ice-fields and Eskimos* (1894) a photograph taken in 1891, which she captions "A Summer Day. Ikwa and Family." Dressed in a long, late-nineteenth-century dress, Diebitsch-Peary towers over the native family, her face partly shadowed by the umbrella she holds to protect her white skin from the sun. Ikwa and his unnamed family look away to the left—reserved, amused, or unmoved—while Diebitsch-Peary looks down at the family with a protective smile. Her presence in the Arctic triggered bewilderment and upheaval. Upon seeing Robert Peary and his wife, Ikwa asked which of the two was a woman (Diebitsch-Peary 44). During a sledge journey into Inglefield Gulf, an old woman residing in the "snow village" at Northumberland Island scrutinized Diebitsch-Peary's face and figure up close and exclaimed, "I have lived a great many suns, but have never seen anything like you" (Diebitsch-Peary 130). Another old woman in the settlement had heard from her son, Tawanah, "what a large koona Peary's koona was, and how white her skin was, and that her hair was as long as she could stretch with her arms" (Diebitsch-Peary 134). Mrs. Peary herself faced new understandings as she traveled through uncharted terrain. Her account of a year with an Arctic expedition unveils a multifaceted narrative of personal and societal challenges as she navigates conflicting ideals of womanhood amidst the perils of exploration. Her interactions with the Arctic landscape, the native populations, and the tragedies within the expedition underscore her internal struggles and accentuate her role beyond mere support of her husband, revealing a nuanced portrayal of resilience and agency often overlooked in Arctic scholarship. Taken together, the crises she overcame, and those she did not, reveal the impatience and frustrations Mrs. Peary hid underneath her wifely domestic demeanor but could not suppress in her memoir.

Figure 1. A Summer Day. Ikwa and Family.

Who is Josephine Diebitsch-Peary?

Josephine Diebitsch began her life in 1863 on a Maryland farm. Both her parents had immigrated from present-day Germany; her mother came from Saxony and her father from a military career in the Prussian Army. The Civil War ended his stint as an unsuccessful farmer and the family relocated to Washington, DC, where Hermann Diebitsch found employment at the Smithsonian Museum, presumably due to his linguistic skills. Josephine graduated from Spencerian Business College as a valedictorian in 1880 and subsequently worked at the Smithsonian and at the US Department of the Interior in functions such as copyist, tallyist, and clerk. She met Robert E. Peary in 1885 and the two became engaged in 1886, which prompted her resignation from the museum. She married him on August 11, 1888, and, as Patricia Pierce Erikson notes, provided her husband with an influential social circle and home base in Washington, DC ("Josephine" 102).

10.22439/asca.v56i1.7172

Three years later, she boarded the *Kite* with her husband and his crew, despite warnings that women should not venture into such dangerous pursuits. Mrs. Peary was not the first energetic explorer's wife. Lady Jane Franklin had actively participated in the efforts to locate her missing husband, Sir John Franklin, who had headed for the Arctic in 1845 with two ships and their crews to complete the Northwest Passage. She had appealed directly to President Zachary Taylor and helped generate American interest in her husband's disappearance. Her many activities included efforts to collect relics and records from the ill-fated Franklin expedition and to control their circulation, to edit publications, and to plan a "Franklin Museum" in Lincolnshire, his birthplace (Craciun 50). But she had not herself participated in any Arctic expeditions.[1]

In 1893, Diebitsch-Peary again traveled to the Arctic, where she gave birth to the Pearys' firstborn, Marie Ahnighito, better known as "the Snow Baby." Her adventures motivated her writing career, which began with the memoir *My Arctic Journal* in 1894, followed by *The Snow Baby* (1901) and *Children of the Arctic* (1903). After Peary returned from the Pole in 1909 and officially retired in 1911, he and Josephine spent summers with their two children, Marie and Robert Jr., on Eagle Island; during winter months, they stayed in the house they bought in 1914 in Adams Morgan, Washington, DC. After her husband's death in 1920, Josephine Diebitsch-Peary moved to Portland, Maine, where she died in 1955. She had participated in six Arctic expeditions and won a reputation as "First Lady of the Arctic" (Peary-Macmillan Arctic Museum; Erikson, "Josephine" 103).

Figure 2. Josephine Diebitsch-Peary.

Where is Josephine Diebitsch-Peary?

Despite her renown, the First Lady of the Arctic makes only brief appearances in the extensive literature on Robert E. Peary. In Donald B. MacMillan's *How Peary Reached the Pole: The Personal Story of His Assistant* (1934), she appears in indexes with a few page references, and in Dennis Rawlins's *Peary at the North Pole: Fact or Fiction?* (1973), she is completely absent. She makes a shadowy appearance in Robert E. Peary's *The North Pole* (1910), in which he spends considerable narrative energy on his crew and his financial and political benefactors, including Theodore Roosevelt. Mrs. Peary and the two children follow the expedition ship the *Roosevelt* as far as North Sydney, where a chartered tug waits to return them to Sydney. "With reluctant eye," Peary writes, "I watched the little tug grow smaller and smaller in the blue distance. Another farewell—and there had been so many! Brave, noble little woman!" (Peary 20). She also shows up briefly in Matthew A. Henson's memoir, *A Negro Explorer at the North Pole* (1912), in which race and hier-

archy determine their distant relationship, despite the year they both spent in Redcliffe House in 1891–92 (Henson, ch. I, XXI; Juncker 71–72). In her article in *Arctic*, Erikson writes: "[w]omen have either been absent from or powerless on the landscape of Arctic adventure" ("Josephine" 103). She calls for more attention to women such as Josephine Diebitsch-Peary, who significantly influenced economic, political, and cultural processes of Arctic exploration ("Josephine" 104).

In her short biographical account, Erikson does not allude to academic scholarship such as Lisa Bloom's *Gender on Ice* (1993), which devotes four pages to the woman absent from the final journey to the Arctic aboard the *Roosevelt.* Bloom argues that Diebitsch-Peary "exercises a certain discursive force as part of the hero's persona" (38), and that Peary's marginal references to his wife situate her firmly within the domestic sphere, with its feminine responsibilities. Bloom notes that Peary never mentions her memoir, and she also ascribes considerable self-censorship to Diebitsch-Peary herself, grounded in her awareness of "femininity's class-specific forms" (40). In *Cold Matters* (2009), Heidi Hansson focuses on Diebitsch-Peary's departure from the heroic quest structure typical of Arctic expedition narratives and on the context of late-nineteenth-century gender anxieties. Hansson finds that Diebitsch-Peary "constructs herself as a lady" and sees herself as a civilizing and domestic presence in the Arctic ("Feminine Poles" 112). She ascribes to Diebitsch-Peary a radical intent, located in her genre revision and her presence in a men-only region, where, in Hansson's analysis, "she remains a model of genteel femininity" ("Feminine Poles" 112).

Silke Reeploeg finds that "Josephine Diebitsch-Peary's memory and, ultimately, her legacy as a historical figure, seems quite limited, remaining primarily attached to her husband's value as one of the national heroes of American polar exploration" ("Gendering" 1064). She points out that the Macmillan-Peary Arctic Museum at Bowdoin College in New Brunswick displays a photograph of Diebitsch-Peary and her adult daughter, Marie, holding the Stars and Stripes, with no reference to their own participation in Arctic expeditions (Reeploeg 1065).[2] Using archival sources such as photographs, objects, and manuscripts deposited at the Maine Women Writers Collection at the University of New England, Portland, Reeploeg genders Arctic historiography by challenging the masculine emphasis of polar research and practice. Her article complements the earlier work by Erikson, who stresses the significance of material objects in creating Diebitsch-Peary's public persona, as well as the national history of Arctic exploration ("Homemaking"). *My Arctic Journal* turns up in both Reeploeg's and Erikson's articles, but these scholars do not analyze Diebitsch-Peary's written text about the 1891–92 stay at Redcliffe. They focus on her domesticating rather than her emancipatory efforts and pay little attention to the crises she caused or survived. In line with this scholarship, the present article reveals, with a close reading of Diebitsch-Peary's *My Arctic Journal*, the self-censorship and the efforts it took to display the feminine virtues expected of Victorian women, and it also analyzes the memoir with an emphasis on Diebitsch-Peary's emancipatory efforts and her experience of crises. By uncovering the fault lines of Diebitsch-Peary's legacy through her published memoir, my analysis differs from previous readings of Mr. Peary's wife that have tended to focus on the domestic and conformist aspects of her stay in the Arctic.

Disaster, Crisis, Cracks

"John Franklin's 1845 expedition in search of the Northwest Passage remains the worst polar disaster in history," Adriana Craciun writes in the

first line of her introduction to *Writing Arctic Disaster* (2016). She demonstrates in her monograph the "gravitational pull" of this famous tragedy (2), which would establish a conjunction of the Arctic with disaster. Arctic exploration in a dangerous and unpredictable environment meant loss and frequent catastrophes, which attracted and stimulated explorers and fascinated their audiences, then as now. As Craciun puts it, "inhabiting a modernity in which 'we think through disasters,' we might recognize this Arctic disaster culture as affiliated with our own" (32). Not surprisingly, then, a mapping of Diebitsch-Peary's journal through a lens, and a structure, of adversity and crisis stresses the relevance of her somewhat forgotten *Arctic Journal.* On the disaster-crisis-misfortune continuum, her various upheavals do not come close to Franklinian disasters, but she does go through a series of crises as OED defines them: "[o]riginally: a state of affairs in which a decisive change for better or worse is imminent; a turning point. Now usually: a situation or period characterized by intense difficulty, insecurity, or danger, either in the public sphere or in one's personal life; a sudden emergency situation."[3] Arnold M. Howitt and Herman B. Leonard define a crisis as a situation characterized by both novelty and subjectivity. Novelty refers to the unforeseen and complex nature of crises, often involving exceptional events (4-6). Subjectivity highlights how individual perspectives, values, and interests influence the definition and experience of crises, thus contributing to the challenge of managing them effectively (5). This nuanced understanding underscores the dynamic, multifaceted nature of crises, necessitating flexible and adaptive responses. According to Merriam-Webster, which scholars such as Robert R. Ulmer, Timothy L. Sellnow, and Matthew W. Seeger employ in *Effective Crisis Communication* (2010) (8), the word "'crisis'" has undergone (and is a prime example of) "'semantic drift'" (8): "[o]riginally, crisis denoted 'the turning point for better or worse in an acute disease or fever.' Now it most commonly means 'a difficult or dangerous situation that needs serious attention'" ("Crisis," Merriam-Webster). Diebitsch-Peary had every reason to maintain a smooth, even icy surface as Robert E. Peary's wife in accompanying him on his North Greenland expedition, but, as in the Arctic icescape, cracks in the surface hide dangers underneath. The crises in Diebitsch-Peary's record of a year in the Arctic reveal her inconsistencies, but also her frozen resolve to challenge inhibiting roles and restrictions.

The North Greenland Expedition of 1891–92

On June 6, 1891, the steam-whaler *Kite* sailed from the port of New York with both Robert E. Peary and Josephine Diebitsch-Peary on board, headed for Whale Sound on the Northwest Greenland coast. A crew of five accompanied the couple: Dr. Frederick A. Cook (who would later claim to have reached the North Pole one year ahead of Peary), Langdon Gibson, Eivind Astrup, John T. Verhoeff, and Matthew A. Henson. Fifteen months later, the party returned—except for Verhoeff—to the US, aided by a relief expedition headed by Professor Angelo Heilbrun, sponsored by the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences. In an introductory note to Diebitsch-Peary's account, the publishers list the results of "Mr. Peary's journey." They credit him with the demarcation of the Northern part of Greenland's icecap, the discovery of ice-free land masses north of Greenland, and what they call the "practical demonstration of the insularity" of Greenland (Diebitsch-Peary 1). The word "practical" stands out since Peary had not yet mapped the land south of Independence Bay. This task would fall to the unfortunate Denmark Expedition (1906–08), led by Ludvig Mylius-Erichsen, who set out to explore the then-unknown coast between Cape Bismarck (now Danmarkshavn) and Cape Bridgman. The expedition lost Mylius-

Erichsen, the cartographer Niels Peter Hög-Hagen, and the Greenlandic polar explorer Jørgen Brønlund, who secured the expedition notes before he also died from cold and starvation.

Vouching for Mrs. Peary and True Womanhood

Following the publishers' list of results from the 1891–92 expedition, Peary's preface to his wife's Arctic journal secures his own accomplishments and authenticates her project. He presents her initially as an anxious author, who shrinks from publicity and publication. He stresses that his wife wrote her "plain and simple narrative" only after "persistent and urgent pressure from friends," and that she doubted her experiences would generate interest outside a circle of close friends (Diebitsch-Peary 3). He also emphasizes her class (and his own) by calling her "a refined woman" (Diebitsch-Peary 3) and "a tenderly nurtured woman [who] lived for a year in safety and comfort" (5). He underlines her feminine skills and commends her for designing and supervising the details of his and Eivind Astrup's polar outfits "through the long, dark winter night, with her nimble fingers and ready woman's insight" (5). Despite his efforts to contain his wife within the ideals of bourgeois femininity, her presence in the Arctic problematizes this domestic role. Peary admits to her courage when she spends the first night ashore alone with him amidst a furious storm and the threat of a bear attack. He also credits her with calmly reloading empty firearms when a herd of walruses attacked the expedition boat, with "savage heads with gleaming tusks and bloodshot eyes out of the water close to the muzzles of our rifles, so that she could have touched them with her hand" (4). In both cases, he praises her for being the unselfish wife who protects her family against all odds, and he credits her with "pluck" (5). He admires her courage: "[s]he has been where no white woman has ever been, and where many a man has hesitated to go" (3).

Ultimately, Peary cannot quite contain his wife within the tradition of True Womanhood, which Barbara Welter discusses in her seminal article on Victorian feminine ideals. She identifies four crucial virtues of respectable (bourgeois) womanhood: piety, purity, chastity, and submission (150). Submission especially marks women as feminine, as this role requirement categorizes men as "movers" and "doers," women as the "passive, submissive responders" (Welter 154). Welter stresses the importance of this pervasive ideology: "[i]f anyone, male or female, dared to tamper with the complex of virtues which made up True Womanhood, he was damned immediately as an enemy of God, of civilization, and of the Republic" (151). Accordingly, Peary scrambles at the end of his preface, written in 1893 from Falcon Harbor, Bowdoin Bay, to reinscribe his wife within ideals of nineteenth-century domesticity. He writes that his wife is once again at his side and, with his postscript, further encloses Diebitsch-Peary's words within his own. Peary ends his wife's publication with an account of his and Eivind Astrup's travel from McCormick Bay to the Northern shore of Greenland. He refers repeatedly to "the little house" in which his wife resides and takes pleasure in an unexpected birthday gift consisting of "a little box from the hands of the dear one left behind" (79). With his fondness for the term "little" and his constant contrasting of his own dangerous activities and surroundings with the home left behind, he sets up the hierarchies of nineteenth-century gender arrangements. At the end of his journey, he reunites with "the woman who had been waiting for me for three months" and rushes from the ship coming to meet him back to "the little house which had sheltered us through a year of Arctic vicissitudes" (81). Peary, as a Victorian husband, is back with his virtuous, homebound wife. Innes M. Keighren et al. add nuance to travel writing traditions by distinguishing between "modest

authors," who profess an amateur's humility in publishing their accounts (100), and "immodest authors" (107), who dispense with writerly reluctance. In Diebitsch-Peary's text, the modest author's work is delegated to Peary in his preface, while his wife constructs herself as "immodest" through silence—she dispenses with the formulaic excuses, apparently secure in her own authority and credibility. And the crises she lived through crack open the mask of cheer and support Peary prefers in his wife.

The First Crisis

In the late afternoon of July 11, 1891, Peary broke his leg aboard the *Kite* in a dramatic accident. The expedition ship was pounding through surface ice, a passage necessitating constant reversals. A detached cake of ice hit the rudder, crowding the iron tiller against the wheelhouse, where Peary was standing after a visit to the cabin. He heard both bones between the knee and the ankle snap and was carried to his bed, where he remained until the *Kite* reached its destination at the mouth of MacCormick Fjord at the Northwest end of Inglefield Gulf. He was unloaded along with the baggage and forced to recuperate for months in the cabin the crew (mostly Matthew A. Henson) built, named Redcliffe House.[4] His wife writes in a November 5 entry in *My Arctic Journal*: "Mr. Peary's leg is improving steadily, and he seems more like himself. The strain has told on both of us, and I am glad it is over" (76).

Her husband's accident calls upon Diebitsch-Peary to perform her wifely duties, such as nursing and encouraging the patient, "Poor Bert," as she calls him, and "my poor sufferer" (24). Yet she seems unaccustomed, or slightly unwilling, to carry out her work. She notes on July 29 how busy she has been for three days, packing and unpacking, "besides waiting on Mr. Peary" (33). The following day, she excuses herself for sleeping during the *Kite* departure from Redcliffe with her "not being accustomed to the duties of housekeeper and nurse" (35), an entry among others in which she stresses her own labor and exhaustion. She has not previously performed this work due to her own class privilege, but the accident nonetheless gives her a power of sorts. Mr. Peary, as she calls him throughout, remains domesticated or even feminized during his recovery. While Matthew Henson works outside on a protective wall of rocks and turf, the disabled Peary sits inside taking photographs and pressing flowers his wife has gathered for him (40). He supervises home decorations, while his wife roams the hills outside and sets up fox traps. She wins, in short, a temporary victory against a formidable enemy: the "cult of manliness," to borrow Lyle Dick's phrase ("The Men" 7). Dick explains that "this ideological strain idealized heightened notions of masculinity, which the polar explorers, themselves exclusively male, readily appropriated" ("The Men" 7). A sewing, flower-decorating Peary merged the nineteenth-century separate spheres and opened new vistas in the Arctic for his wife (Welter). Peary's domestic activities might satisfy his zest for control, but would not have thrilled his financiers back home, who also feared a growing feminization of old-stock Americans that would or could not stem with sufficient aggression the waves of new immigrant groups that arrived on their turf (Dick, "The Men" 8, 12). Michael Robinson argues that Peary's later collaboration with poet Elsa Barker—the ghostwriter of his "The Discovery of the North Pole," serialized in *Harper's Magazine* in 1910—enhanced the interest of the female readers and lecture audiences he courted ("Manliness" 109). The collaboration also exposed a gap between feminine and masculine poles, in Robinson's words "no easier to secure than their geographical counterparts" ("Manliness" 109). The women writers in Robinson's article, along with Diebitsch-Peary, all

faced restrictions as authors and travelers, but they enjoyed—or seized—the freedom to explore a broader range of ideas about the Arctic and the robust ideals of manly explorers.[5]

Wrestling the Arctic Angel

Much of Diebitsch-Peary's memoir documents her efforts to become "the Angel in the House," the specter of Victorian respectability that haunted women writers both before and after Virginia Woolf coined the term in "Professions for Women" (1931; see also Showalter, "Killing" 207). One of Diebitsch-Peary's illustrations depicts a neat interior arrangement, "A Corner of My Room" (158), and she records in multiple instances her efforts to convert the house into a "home," not least to offer her disabled husband the comforts he needed. As Irina Overeem notes, "Mrs. Peary made perhaps a bold move to join, but then successfully carved out a more traditionally feminine role for herself" (401). Already at a dinner with an official at Godhavn, she thoroughly enjoys having the gentlemen go upstairs to inspect a geological and zoological collection there, while the ladies drink coffee in the parlor. "Were it not for the outer surroundings," she writes, "it would have been difficult to realize that we were in the distant Arctic realm, so truly homelike were the scenes of the little household, and so cheerful the little that was necessary to make living here not only comfortable, but pleasant" (14). Once Redcliffe begins to look "finished," she arranges a birthday dinner for Matthew Henson, though his version of the party is less enthusiastic (Henson 15). She records the dishes, from "mock-turtle soup" to apricot pie, plum-duff with brandy sauce, sliced peaches and coffee, as in an elegant menu, and three days later they celebrate the Pearys' three-year anniversary with equal domestic pride (40). She observes social custom by leaving directions in her absence for visitors nailed to the door at Redcliffe: "visitors will please leave their cards" (55). In this way, as Erikson argues, Diebitsch-Peary "made the Arctic accessible to the American public by appearing to domesticate it, that is, by collapsing the distance that separated 'the home' from the diametrically opposed 'wilderness'" ("Homemaking" 269).

Diebitsch-Peary longs intensely for her husband during his expedition across the icecap and finds it hard to conform to Victorian notions of cheer and domesticity in his absence: "[o]ur routine continues unchanged, except in unimportant details, and the monotony of our life, together with certain vexations that arise, makes me at times cross and despondent" (160). Earlier, her dissatisfaction with domesticity had been brewing, as on November 25, when Peary is recovering: "[t]he days are rather unsatisfactory, although I keep busy all day sewing, mending, rearranging my room, etc. When I sum up at bedtime what I have accomplished, it is very little. Mr. Peary and the boys are busily at work on some test sledges" (82).

Depression and illness crack open the Arctic Angel's masked performances. "I was disabled by a sick-headache," she writes on October 7, when expedition members went on their first sledge trip up McCormick Bay (68). She stays at home on February 13 rather than witnessing the return of the sun from a snow hut, again due to a bad headache, and while she waits for her husband to return from the icecap, she falls prey to homesickness and gloom (111). "I am utterly powerless in my position," she writes, also because, without a husband at home, she cannot find satisfaction in wifely excellence (157). She continues: "[n]ever in my life have I felt so utterly alone and forsaken, with no possible chance of knowing how and where my dear ones are. It surely must end some time" (158–59). In late June, she begins an entry with an exclamation: "[w]hat a horrible day it has been!" (161) and then excuses herself for not being able to sit still. Her darker mood and restlessness suggest her

anxiety and dissatisfaction. In fact, Diebitsch-Peary's condition, with her headaches, fatigue, and occasional irritability, resembles the neurasthenia of Freud's late-nineteenth-century patients.

Åsa Jansson traces "disordered emotions" as a medical term into the modern "mood disorder" and depression diagnosis (50). She pays special attention to the British psychiatrist Henry Maudsley (1835–1918), whose materialist perspective emphasized the biological groundwork of mental diseases such as melancholia. As Sneha Krishnan comments, "the materiality of emotions, especially their embodiment" has become central to the histories of emotion, which have undergone a "fleshly" turn (282–83). She notes that New Materialist scholarship on embodied emotional history not only focuses on the body as a site for social inscription, but also as a site for resistance to traditional scripts (282). In Elaine Showalter's analysis, women's emotional disturbances across a broad spectrum resisted cultural notions of female propriety and domesticity. In a countermove, this "female malady" generated therapeutic practices, the rest cure among them, to bring women back into established roles (Showalter, "Killing" 210).[6] Because Diebitsch-Peary carried with her the ideals of white bourgeois femininity, she suffered in the Arctic, outside the realm of most women. Nevertheless, she also devised therapeutic measures of her own, such as writing and walking, as did other women writers of her time. As Showalter explains, "they struggle to keep in touch with 'taboo' but significant psychic levels of feeling and energy, and simultaneously search for covert, risk-free ways to present these feelings" ("Killing" 210). But in the Arctic, not all such efforts were risk-free.

Crystal McKinnon and Claire McLisky argue that feelings in colonial contexts function as a means of solidifying an ideological idea of difference and settler superiority (475; see also Krishnan 287). If settlers were to succeed in their endeavors, they were to appear worthy of short-term or long-term possession of the land they did not originally inhabit, a goal that also prompted their "anxiety of dispossession" (McKinnon and McLisky 475). This anxiety draws on the knowledge that Indigenous people will remain "constituted and embodied" by the land in ways that settler attachment will never match or overcome (McKinnon and McLisky 476). Accordingly, Diebitsch-Peary had to regain her composure and tranquility to legitimize her presence in the Arctic. As McKinnon and McLisky state, "coeval with settler-colonial anxiety of dispossession is the desire to move away from this emotion toward comfort and belonging" (476). In the case of Diebitsch-Peary, this desire brought her back into domestic realms, back to Redcliffe, but it also helped distance her from the Indigenous community of women around her. To maintain her racial superiority, she could not let her emotions loose, like the Inughuit women with *pibloktoq* or Arctic hysteria, a general term for various anxiety-induced illnesses caused by the strain of contact between Euro-American explorers and the Inughuit between 1890 and 1920 (Dick, "Pibloktoq" 1). According to LeMoine et al., Diebitsch-Peary was the first to report this condition among Inughuit women (and a few men) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

> The mistress of a remaining igloo was making an awful noise and trying to come out of her habitation, while a man was holding her back and talking to her, but she screamed and struggled so long as we remained where she could see us. I asked Mané [Ikwa's wife] what was the nature of the trouble, and she told me that the woman was pi-blocto (mad). (Diebitsch-Peary 125)

Immediately afterwards, Diebitsch-Peary enters an igloo, which she describes as a vermin-infested, odorous site she can barely endure. She distances herself from the occupants by placing Mr. Peary between herself and the "half-naked women," and by drawing up her knees at the edge of the bed to reduce any contact with the floor. The following day she pretends to her husband "that it was quite a lark" (125). Her mask serves to mark the boundary between herself and the Inughuit 'other,' and she does not throw a fit herself, since as a woman, she remains on the edge of political rights discourses, which delegated the ability to transcend bodily concerns to white males (Krishnan 287). But she still has to find an outlet for her embodied emotions.

Action in the Arctic: Guns and Game

Increasingly, Diebitsch-Peary chose to trespass into masculine terrain. She called the expedition staff "the boys," and she began to include herself in their activities: "[w]e measured some of the floes" (20), she writes on her way North, and she takes a keen interest in "the boys" climbing over the sides of the *Kite* with guns, though the bear they chase turns out to be a seal (19). She describes the seals the hunting parties bring in, one weighing twenty-six and the other, thirty-three pounds (19). She softens her observations with comments on the splendor of the sunshine and her own grey spring jacket (18–19). In another instance, again involving a bear, she balances femininity and masculinity by focusing on the beauty of the bear: "[a] very, very pretty sight he was, with black snout, black eyes, and black toes. Against the white snow and ice, he seemed to be of a cream color" (26). Once the crew has shot "the poor beast," a process she describes in detail, she becomes one of the boys, taking a keen interest in their prey: "we estimated his weight at from eight to ten hundred pounds" (26–27).

Later, she feels no pity when a beached walrus is killed—she wishes only that she might have photographed the incident. On an outing on September 3, she makes sure her readers know that Mr. Peary has asked her to leave their camp and get warm by running across rocks and down a valley. Here she is fully armed herself, like the men who accompany her: "Dr. Cook had his rifle loaded with twelve cartridges, Ikwa had a muzzle-loader charged, and an extra load for it besides, and I had on my cartridge-belt and revolver (a 38-caliber Colt)" (49). Not only is she knowledgeable about the weapons, but she is also thrilled when the party chases a deer: "we were so excited—a case of buck-fever, I believe the hunters call it" (50). She distances herself a bit with this phrase, and she also has Cook carry her across a deep stream. She seems moved when a fawn tries to support the wounded deer in the water, and she retreats from the final shot: "[t]hen I was asked to kill it, but I could not force myself to do it" (52). But her room at Redcliffe sometimes looks like a gun shop, and in Mr. Peary's absence, she "indulges" in target-shooting with her revolver. She begins to spend more time outdoors and to take watches at Redcliffe along with the men. Routinely, she takes her revolver on daily walks outside, where her mood is always lifted, and, now an experienced hunter, she shoots two deer for the Peary anniversary (193). Up Inglefield Gulf, she puts a bullet through the head of a narwhal. The next morning, she takes great pride in her "prize," now "a great mottled, misshapen mass of flesh" (194). "It was a wonderful sight to me," she concludes. "I could not gaze at it sufficiently" (194). The Arctic Angel has merged with the Great Hunter.

Her public image supports this duality. Diebitsch-Peary represents herself, gun in hand, as a phallic woman, or an early figure of female masculinity (Gardiner), while also appearing in photographs in traditional feminine attire (Reeploeg, "Gendering" 1064). Reeploeg notes that Marie Peary chose to "re-memorialize" her

mother by donating both her pistol and a silver vanity set to the Josephine Diebitsch-Peary archive, and she comments that "[b]oth were clearly deposited with a view to adding value to Josephine Diebitsch-Peary's legacy in her dual role—as a woman that both hunts expertly and looks after her hair" ("Gendering" 1074). As a female participant in an Arctic expedition, she might also have been attempting to present herself as androgenous, a fusion of masculinity and femininity that in Virginia Woolf's view "had the effect of neutralizing her own conflict between the desire to present a woman's whole experience, and the fear of such revelation" (Showalter, "Killing" 208).

The notion of the Arctic as a new American frontier legitimizes Diebitsch-Peary's efforts. At a time when Americans feared what Michael F. Robinson calls "the threat of overcivilization" due to urbanization and a diminished engagement with the natural world, even a woman's presence in a frontier environment, with firearms, might help rejuvenate American energies (*Coldest Crucible* 122–24). As an Arctic pioneer woman, she could use a gun for her own protection and to help feed herself and her family of Arctic explorers at Redcliffe. But her activities remained masculine in this and other Inughuit settlements. Geneviève LeMoine et al. find that the native women in Northern Greenland contributed crucially to the safety and upkeep of their husbands and Euro-American men with sewing, lamp maintenance, the chewing of skins, setting traps, fishing and other activities, but hunting with guns or other tools remained a masculine pursuit (1, 3).

If Diebitsch-Peary with her gun usurped a measure of manly power, she stayed within the borders of her class. Though she drew on the image of the American frontierswoman, she remained a trophy hunter. Also motivated—or funded—by ideas of masculine softness in urbanized America, bourgeois male tourists in the Arctic performed a "specific trophy-hunting masculinity," as Lena Aarekol argues (124). Not only did the trophy hunters—and Diebitsch Peary with them—enter an "already masculinized arena" simply by going to the Arctic, but they also performed a bourgeois masculinity by shooting, while leaving the groundwork—the transportation, the cleaning of tools, the dirty work involved—to others. The efforts to help her husband collect Arctic material objects also place Diebitsch-Peary in the trophy-hunting community. In Aarekol's analysis, the goal of educating themselves and others added an element of prestige and mentorship to the wealthy trophy hunters' masculine accomplishments.

Murder, Death, and Destruction

In early July, a murder scare involving a display of guns poisons the atmosphere at Redcliffe. Henson had overheard a conversation between Kyo and Kulutingwah, both native assistants, that they were planning to do away with one of the explorers. Henson felt himself to be a possible target, due to a coffee and bread dispute, while Diebitsch-Peary disagrees. There had been enough coffee for Kyo as well, but Cook might be in danger: "[t]he doctor, more than anyone else, has reason to fear Kyo, as Kyo makes no secret of his dislike for him" (Diebitsch-Peary 166). After a conversation with Cook a few days later, Kyo admits he was scared of the doctor, and especially of his revolver, lent to him by Diebitsch-Peary. His fright had increased, she writes, when "we" had opened a window, possibly to shoot the natives from this advantageous position. "It is certain," she continues, that "all the Eskimos are badly frightened by the display of firearms" (169). They had a plan, nonetheless, that Kyo might order the "kokoyah," or evil spirit, to destroy the expedition vessel, and then all the white visitors would die. "I am sorry for this episode," Diebitsch-Peary writes, "which has

brought about an unpleasantness with the natives" (169).

This toxic situation predates the later death of Ross Marvin, which Matthew Henson covers at some length in his own 1912 memoir. Professor Marvin had accompanied Peary to 86° 38' north on the 1908–09 North Pole expedition, before the Commander ordered his return to Cape Columbia. The circumstances of Marvin's death remain unclear, but Kenn Harper argues that after "Qilluttooq" had been converted to Christianity, he confessed to the missionary in Thule that he had shot Marvin, whose behavior had grown increasingly irrational ("Taissumani"). Henson goes out of his way to excuse the two Greenlanders who accompanied Marvin by claiming their innocence (Juncker 77–78). At the close of the 1891–92 expedition, Diebitsch-Peary records a death that stains her husband's success in a similar manner. Mineralogist and meteorologist John M. Verhoeff goes missing as the *Kite* is on the verge of departure, and Peary and a group of native men, experts at following a trail, take off on a search up McCormick Bay to Five-Glacier Valley, while Dr. Cook in the *Kite* sails round to Robertson Bay. The search parties return on August 24 with the sad news that Verhoeff's footprints had been traced across a glacier with numerous "wicked-looking crevasses." Diebitsch-Peary concludes: "[t]here was no doubt left that poor Verhoeff had lost his life in an effort to cross the ice-stream" (204). Peary leaves provisions for a year at Cairn Point, just in case, but the *Kite* returns to the US without the missing professor. The death of an expedition member causes doubt among his friends at home, but the Pearys feel certain that Verhoeff lost his life crossing the glacier at Robertson Bay: "[t]hese natives say that nothing has been seen or heard of him, and they hesitate to speak of him, as they never speak of their dead" (215–16). Diebitsch-Peary closes the topic by stating that both Redcliffe House and the provisions cached at Cairn Point for Verhoeff had been destroyed by Kyoahpadu, a famous shaman. In short, murder, death and destruction linger over this early Arctic expedition, crises set off by a troubled relationship between white adventurers and native inhabitants in the Arctic.

Crises in the Icescape

The Arctic climate and landscape trigger the crises scattered across Diebitsch-Peary's pages like ice floes, and her presence in the Arctic accounts for most of them. She inscribes her various upheavals in her icy surroundings, which she meets with emotions ranging from pleasure to horror. At times, she domesticates the harsh landscape:

> The clouds hung low, and gave a soft gray background for the blue bergs which gleamed on every side of a long black strip of water—the open sea—in the far distance. The light that fell on Northumberland Island decked it in a bright yellow, while the cliffs across the bay were black in the dark shadow. (64)

She paints the Arctic on a canvas of words and thus makes more familiar the stormy, icy Arctic that often presents itself as an anti-landscape, an environment which does not nurture—or makes impossible—human survival (Nye and Elkind 11). Her own split between Angel and Hunter results in a double vision of the Arctic terrain, as in the chapter heading "Sunshine and Storm" (112). Walruses, to her part of the setting, surround her like "monsters" (58, 219). The ice causes a series of crises, as when loose ice and thick fog prevent the *Kite's* forward movement, or when she must cross a glacial stream with water above her kamik-tops and a strong current threatening her balance (172). A major storm strikes when the expedition party tries to reach Redcliffe, having first whirled past Cape Cleveland. Diebitsch-Peary devotes several pages to

the furious wind sending the fragile boat toward an ice shelf, with screaming Inughuit women, broken oars, white-faced men rowing, and everyone crouched low in the boat when possible. She aims here at "cold heroism," which Heidi Hansson and Cathrine Norberg describe as a character-building option available in a cold climate, where defeating this challenging enemy shows strength and fortitude (67–68).

The Arctic often reflects her moods, as during the Verhoeff crisis on August 19: "[t]he day is not a promising one; dark clouds are gathering and the air seems oppressive. I trust that the search-parties will find Mr. Verhoeff today, for he must be running short of provisions at this time" (Diebitsch-Peary 72). After a fall astride a sharp ridge of ice on the ice foot, she loses consciousness, and, undiscovered, she eventually has to crawl back to Redcliffe on hands and knees. This crisis results in both physical and psychological damage: "[o]n examination it was found that I was cut and bruised all over, but the doctor declared that I was not seriously hurt; but even now I have not entirely recovered from the effects of the fall" (93). The Arctic icescape reveals her own conflicts, as she fluctuates between its aesthetic delights and its terrors. Her nature sketches intersect with discourses of imperialism and colonialism, in that seeing Arcticality as both hostile, exotic and "howling," as well as a "semi-domestic space," characterizes most writing on Arctic expeditions (Reeploeg, "Gendering" 1066). As she travels across the Arctic, Diebitsch-Peary uses this colonial terrain to achieve both emancipation from and compliance with the social demands of being a "lady" (Reeploeg, "Women" 184, 198).

Throughout her descriptions of the Arctic, Diebitsch-Peary adopts a colonial perspective. Literally, she shares her gaze with her bed-ridden husband, confined to his cabin aboard the *Kite*: "[w]henever anything particularly striking or beautiful appears, I am called on deck, and with my hand-glass placed at the open transom over Mr. Peary's head, manage to give him a faint glimpse of our surroundings" (Diebitsch-Peary 30). If Diebitsch-Peary here seems to control her husband's perception, she shares with him the colonial gaze that Mary Louise Pratt discusses in *Imperial Eyes* (1992), for example by her tendency to see the Inghuits in swarms: "I went back for the rest, preferring this to staying with the sledge, where the natives were now swarming, and wanting to handle everything they saw" (Diebitsch-Peary 131). She compares the Arctic to Europe in order, presumably, to tame it. In passing a glacier, she finds it shaped like the Swiss Matterhorn and names it, without further ado, the little Matterhorn. "We were in an Alpine landscape," she writes, "but the more striking features of the European ice-covered mountains were here brought out in increased intensity" (140).

Like her husband and the other members of the expedition, she never questions their right to enter the Arctic or name locations as they please. But while Diebitsch-Peary vacillates between being a tourist admiring Arctic aesthetics and a survivor in a hostile anti-landscape, her husband depicts the North as a no-place, without defining textures and signposts: "[i]n clearest weather, the solitary traveler upon this white Sahara sees but three things outside or beyond himself—the unbroken, white expanse of the snow, the unbroken blue expanse of the sky, and the sun. In cloudy weather, all three of these may disappear." In walking on the icecap, he feels he is walking on "nothing," and "[a] mental as well as physical strain resulted from this blindness with wide-open eyes" (Diebitsch-Peary 232). The two Pearys act like Pratt's colonial "seeing-man," who, from a position of dominance, describes a landscape of absence in which only his own colonial project will add a degree of civilization (Pratt 7). They subscribe to the tradition of seeing the Arctic as "an empty space for fantasies and projection" (Hansson, "Arctopias" 76). In *The*

Coldest Crucible, Robinson calls Arctic exploration "imperial theater" and argues that an "ersatz war" against the forbidding cold and ice created a space "to flex imperial muscle without having to do the heavy lifting required by a colonial empire" (12). Robinson acknowledges the cultural impact of the Arctic on the American imagination, even if the Peary project did not literally involve combat with hostile enemies. The Peary couple's clashes with the land and its inhabitants, and their attempts to dominate their surroundings, nonetheless activated soft or symbolic power. An American flag planted in the ice, or the Snow Baby wrapped in an American flag—included in Robinson's monograph (11)—demonstrated colonial intent, or a performative theatricality not without impact on domestic or international audiences and politics.

Clashes in the Contact Zone

In *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt introduces the notion of a "contact zone," which she defines as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (4). Given her own position of colonial power, Diebitsch-Peary's memoir refers repeatedly to run-ins with the Greenlanders and the lack of comprehension—or empathy—she displays in her reactions. She sprays her text with derogatory terms for the Inughuits—"huskies" among the least racist—but she also fails to comprehend the reality in which they live and survive. Referencing Dea Birkett's work on Victorian female travel, Erikson notes that colonial women who challenged gender conventions by journeying to remote areas "tended to exaggerate racial boundaries to reaffirm a safe social position for themselves" ("Homemaking" 270). Diebitsch-Peary complains repeatedly about the hygiene and the looks of Greenland natives, in terms and accounts reeking with white superiority.

Lyle Dick notes that members of the American intellectual elite in the late-nineteenth century "were Social Darwinist *and* expansionist" ("The Men" 6). Dick focuses exclusively on Peary and the powerful group of men who backed and promoted him, but his words apply as well to Peary's resourceful wife. Both "were convinced of the superiority of the Anglo-Sazon 'race' and advocates of its leading role in world affairs, for which exploration and discovery served as harbingers of American dominance" (Dick, "The Men" 6). Only when the Inughuit women perform work that benefits her husband and his staff directly does Diebitsch-Peary acknowledge their efforts, though from as much distance as the close living quarters allow. She does not recognize the vital contribution by Inughuit women's craft to Arctic history, culture, and survival (LeMoine and Darwent 212–14, 233). She does mention the work of Mané, who arrived with her husband Ikwa and two children in the earliest days of the settlement and appears in the photograph with Diebitsch-Peary already discussed. She also feels fortunate to have brought in M'gipsu, wife of Annowka, who chews deerskins with Mané to prepare them for sewing. Though she includes herself in descriptions of accomplished work—for example, as she writes, "we have been busy working on the fur outfits" (86)—her daily entries show that only Mané and M'gipsu sew. She claims to understand the neat and rapid M'gipsu and wants her to complete the work assignment: "I hope it is not a case of new broom, and that she will wear well" (87). After comparing her skilled seamstress to a broom, she recounts the story of M'gipsu's mother Klayah. When Diebitsch-Peary asks how many children Klayah, called "Widow," has, M'Gipsu whispers that she had three but has had to strangle one to attract another husband. Diebitsch-Peary asks again if this is a custom, and M'Gipsu responds: "[o]h, yes, the

women are compelled to do it" (88). This explanation completes Diebitsch-Peary's account, in that she does not seem sufficiently interested or concerned to add a comment on this tragic situation.

Nonetheless, she does include native women in her publication and thus takes steps toward acknowledging their existence, though, as Reeploeg writes, her ambivalent reaction toward Inughuit women "fluctuates between appreciation and disgust" ("Women" 1070). As the year goes by, she learns the names of many Greenlanders, and their language steals into her own, as in the title of chapter XVI: "'Oomiaksoak Tigalay!' The Ship Has Come!" (176). She writes unapologetically that "I have only a few white men and some uncivilized people, together with three months of darkness, to make my life pleasant," and adds that this is "not a very enviable existence, I am sure" (178). In fact, her own dissatisfaction causes her to notice the plight of native women on a few occasions: "Ikwa has beat Mané so badly that she cannot come out of her tent; her head is cut and bruised, and one eye is completely closed" (179). Yet she retreats from further speculation by seeking out the community she finds more comfortable: "[w]e know of no reason for this peculiar conduct" (179). She averts a crisis of conscience, or gender, which brews in her summary of the meeting between "them" and "us." In the chapter "Farewell to Greenland," she writes: "[h]ave these poor ignorant people, who are absolutely isolated from the rest of humanity, really benefited by their intercourse with us, or have we only opened their eyes to their destitute condition?" (207). Ultimately, this thought—and the native population—recedes, and she mentions only "the sad loss of Mr. Verhoeff" and her own good fortune (210).

Marital Crisis

Though she declares herself fortunate, a major crisis lurks ahead, beyond the pages of Diebitsch-Peary's Arctic journal. In March 1899, Peary had undergone an operation for frostbite that left him with only his two little toes, though he was walking again before summer and resumed his mapping of the unknown region west of Kane Basin. In early August, his exploration ship, the *Windward*, managed to break free of the winter ice and sailed toward Etah, where a rescue ship, *Diana*, brought him news from home. In January, his wife had given birth to a second daughter, Francine, though Peary decided to stay in the Arctic and try for the North Pole. In May, he would reach a point later called Cape Wyckoff, where he would confirm that Greenland was indeed an island and then return to his quarters at Fort Conger, which he reached on June 10, 1900. But unknown to Peary, the *Windward* had returned and reached Etah on August 19 with his family aboard, a few months after Peary's return from his journey. Unable to locate Peary, the vessel was soon blocked by ice for another winter, two hundred and fifty miles south of Fort Conger, where Peary would enjoy "this cabin, this mellow light, this freedom to do as I please" (qtd. in Weems 191).

Aboard the *Windward*, Peary's wife was stuck for months. Diebitsch-Peary had not only suffered the death of the seven-month-old Francine in August of 1899, but now learned that her husband had fathered another child in her absence. A native woman and fellow passenger, Allakasingwah, revealed that her relationship with "Pearyarksuah" had resulted in her newborn son, a disclosure that shocked Mr. Peary's faithful and supportive wife. Peary had two sons with Allakasingwah, the second in 1906, when Matthew Henson's son with Akatingwah was also born (Counter 27). Both maintained the silence surrounding the sexual relations of white men with women of color in this era (Counter 48, 99). Biographer John Edward Weems applauds Mrs.

Peary's nursing of "Ally," as she called her Inughuit fellow traveler, during her serious illness and recovery over the months they spent together on the *Windward*. He also quotes a letter dated August 28, 1900, in which Diebitsch-Peary writes: "[y]ou will have been surprised, perhaps annoyed, when you hear that I came up on a ship . . . but believe me had I known how things were with you I would not have come" (Weems 190; Harper, "Heartbreaking Letter"). Peary himself remained unapologetic. Before his Arctic adventures began, he wrote in his 1885 diary:

> It is asking too much of masculine human nature to expect it to remain in an Arctic climate enduring constant hardship, without one relieving feature. Feminine companionship not only causes greater contentment, but as a matter of both mental and physical health and the retention of the top notch of manhood it is a necessity. (qtd. in Weems 72).

His hegemonic masculinity does not allow concern for the Inughuit family he would eventually leave behind. Counter notes that when Peary and Henson left the Artic forever in 1909, "[i]t was the last time the boys saw their fathers" (34–35).

In recounting how Peary's wife and mistress spent the winter together, Weems stresses Diebitsch-Peary's "invariably masked deep feeling" and her "staunchness of character" (191). He quotes another letter she writes aboard the *Windward* on January 23, 1901: "[d]on't forget to let me know about coming down and if I am to meet you anywhere. Etah, the lodge, or Fort Conger will make no difference. Oh, Bert, Bert. I want you so much" (191). This letter does not necessarily suggest masked emotions or a steadfast character, but rather Diebitsch-Peary's investment in her role as Peary's wife. Kate Manne analyzes the cost of women speaking (against) patriarchal prerogatives and the benefits of silence, or denial. In seeing misogyny as a social rather than a psychological function, Manne writes: "[m]isogyny takes a girl or a woman belonging to a specific social class. . . . It then threatens hostile consequences if she violates or challenges the relevant norms and expectations as a member of a gendered class of persons. These norms include (supposed) entitlements on his part and obligations on hers" (20). If she complained about double standards, Diebitsch-Peary would then face social hostility, if not exclusion. Manne clarifies that "this work is often safeguarded by moral sanctions and internalized as 'to be done' by women. Then there's the threat of the withdrawal of social approval if these duties are not performed, and the incentive of love and gratitude if they are done willingly and gladly" (111).

In Diebitsch-Peary's case, this incentive might explain her life-long support and admiration for her husband, including her constant concerns for his health, her expedition fund-raising, her ambition on behalf of her husband, whom she nudges toward the presidency of the Explorers Club, and the home-made silk taffeta flag she wants him to plant at the North Pole, a flag that, in Erikson's words, "became an enduring monument to the assertion of Peary's conquest of the Pole" ("Homemaking" 281). Reeploeg notes that Arctic memorialization continues "strategic acts of forgetting" and "epistemologies of ignorance" by resorting to erasure and silence on topics that might stress or alienate western audiences and highlighting others ("Gendering" 1071). The missing pieces of the flag might evoke the blank spaces on the map that Peary eliminated (Erikson, "Homemaking" 280), but these blank patches might also, to contemporary audiences, suggest the silences that hide in both Peary's and Diebitsch-Peary's success stories.

Conclusion

As her year in the Arctic comes to an end in 1892, Diebitsch-Peary sums it up: "I returned in the best of health, much stronger than when I left sixteen months before. The journey was a thoroughly enjoyable one" (210). Though at least one major crisis would wait for her at the turn of the century, she had left behind—or repressed—the crises she had gone through during her stay at Redcliffe. Not only had she managed to join her husband's North Greenland expedition as the first white woman to arrive in the Arctic, but she had also stepped up her wifely duties when Peary broke his leg. In the process, she usurped a measure of power from her incapacitated husband. She survived the demands of True Womanhood, including the required cheer and domesticity, but she also conquered the feelings of depression and imprisonment the Angel of the House must hide. As a countermeasure, she seized a gun and some of her husband's outdoor domain, which helped her overcome the fear of murder and destruction that loomed when Greenlandic assistants to the expedition felt cheated and angry. And she survived the Arctic winter, with all its icy challenges. In fact, Arctic nature helped her overcome the inevitable mood swings she could project onto her inhospitable surroundings. Diebitsch-Peary adopted the colonial perspective of her husband's expedition, though she did—somewhat reluctantly—acknowledge the work of Inughuit women such as M'gipsu, as well as the domestic abuse they endured.

This sympathy would eventually be tested with Akatingwah and her husband's infant son aboard the *Windward*, a crisis that waited ahead when Diebitsch-Peary ended her first Arctic journey. Soon afterwards, in August 1893, a pregnant Diebitsch- Peary would revisit Greenland as a member of Peary's new Arctic expedition, housed at Anniversary Lodge in Bowdoin Bay. On September 12, 1893, she gave birth to Marie Ahnighito, the Snow Baby, who became another symbol of Arctic conquest (Erikson, "Homemaking" 271). But in her final chapter, or post-script, Diebitsch-Peary focuses on her husband's aspirations, not her own condition: "[e]verything points to the success which Mr. Peary hopes for" (220). With this wish, she performs the gendered norms that Manne describes, norms that Reeploeg also identifies in Diebitsch-Peary's diary entry about her daughter's birth: "[t]he entry indicates an acceptance of the subordinate and unspectacular nature of this event even within the hypermasculine arena of Arctic exploration. The birth itself is clearly subsumed under the bigger mission, which is focused on her husband" (Reeploeg, "Gendering" 1075). But Mrs. Peary adds a touch of ambiguity, or hesitation, to her support of Mr. Peary's superiority and success: "[w]hat the future will bring, however, no one can tell" (220). At this point in her published journal, Peary takes over. His account of the 1892 excursion across the icecap in the company of Eivind Astrup concludes his wife's memoir, now securely enclosed between his preface and his postscript.

Notes

1. See Robinson, *The Coldest Crucible* 25–29; Craciun, *Writing Arctic Disaster* introduction and chapter I.

2. The Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum moved to the new John and Lile Gibbons Center for Arctic Studies in late spring 2023.

3. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/crisis_n?tab=meaning_and_use#7813670.

4. I have chosen to use Diebitsch-Peary's spelling of "Redcliffe."

5. For a full analysis of Peary's "masculine ethos" and its inspiration and endorsement by Teddy Roosevelt, see Robinson, *The Coldest Crucible* 118–32.

6. See also Showalter's *The Female Malady* (1986).

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Book Review
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BOOK REVIEW:

David Myer Temin. *Remapping Sovereignty: Decolonization and Self-Determination in North American Indigenous Political Thought.* The University of Chicago Press, 2023. 264 pages. ISBN: 978-0-226-82728-5. DOI: https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226827278.001.0001.

To be reminded of how contested issues around political sovereignty are in our time, one need only glance at news headlines. Readers expect, in fact, a daily bombardment of updates on war, genocide, and famine on multiple continents, and news of the latest wave of refugee deportation in the US and Europe. At the level of cultural and educational sovereignty, we confront the increasing precarity of humanities curricula at universities, book bans, and cuts to ethnic studies programs in American schools. If history is written by the victors, those with money and power drown out the voices outside the mainstream, including those of Indigenous North Americans. David Myer Temin's *Remapping Sovereignty: Decolonization and Self-Determination in North American Indigenous Political Thought* demonstrates, to the contrary, how dynamic Indigenous voices have remained throughout the twentieth century and into the present. It is refreshing when a book such as Temin's is published by a major university press.

Equally welcome is Temin's sustained attention to the intellectual development of his selected thinkers and activists. As such, he avoids the social science case study method that often compartmentalizes Indigenous histories and cultures within the non-Indigenous researcher's analytical framework. The case study approach often supports the unspoken assumption that the research can at some level "help" marginalized communities adapt to society's norms, which are seldom questioned. In fact, Temin states explicitly that he takes issue with the case study approach because, he explains, "I contend that the context of (settler-)colonial domination shapes the concept and materiality of sovereignty, in ways evaded in standard accounts of the concept in Western political thought" (6). Temin's interrogation of the terms and the conceptual logic of sovereignty is relevant not only for political scientists and Indigenous studies scholars; his argument is just as timely for Americanists concerned with the idea of American exceptionalism. In its expressions such as the American Jeremiad, the West, Manifest Destiny, the Frontier, and more recently, slogans like "Make America Great Again," American exceptionalism relies on assumptions about sovereignty defined as territorial domination. Temin problematizes this view.

For his approach to "mapping," Temin draws on Tonawanda Seneca literary theorist Mishuana Goeman's use of the term to discuss "Native women writers '(re)mapping' their nations, against the destructive incursions of ongoing colonization" (4). Similarly, for Temin as a political scientist, mapping provides an analytical framework for addressing the ways in which Indigenous North American thinkers contest both the terms of settler state sovereignty, and sovereignty's very conceptual logic (12).

What the book does not do is the cartographer's work of simplifying and flattening multidimensional spatial relationships. In fact, he does not include a single visual map in the entire book. Rather than simplifying relationships, the book moves in the opposite direction: it takes flat ideas about Indigenous North Americans as inherited from five hundred years of settler colonialism and complicates them. Rather than using the term "mapmaking," Temin draws on the anticolonial "earthmaking" to guide his close readings of texts by six US and Canadian Indigenous scholars, activists, and writers spanning time from the turn of the twentieth century to the turn of the millennium: Zitkala-Sa (Yankton Dakota), Ella Deloria (Yankton Dakota), Vine Deloria, Jr. (Yankton Dakota), George Manuel (Secwépmec of British Columbia), Howard Adams (Métis from Saskatchewan), and Lee Maracle (Sto:lo from British Columbia) (3). Not only are Temin's sources Indigenous, but many of the mentors and colleagues who provided feedback on earlier drafts of the book are also respected Indigenous scholars such as Glen Coulthard, Audra Simpson, and Kyle Whyte (192). His choices support the recognition of Indigenous earthmaking methodologies within mainstream academic spaces. As Sara Ahmed notes in *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), citation is a form of power that reproduces, and can resist, hierarchies of knowledge production (Templin). For Temin, "making" the earth is an active assertion of power in "pursuit of reciprocal responsibilities of care that mutually sustain both human and other-than-human beings, contrasted to the colonial sovereignty of a self-possessed collective endlessly fabricating its surrounding environmental conditions through extractive domination from subordinated human and other-than-human others" (16).

The book's chapters develop both chronologically and dialogically in that three of the four chapters pair two thinkers writing at different historical moments: chapter one places Vine Deloria in dialogue with Zitkala-Sa to show how both thinkers resisted the idea that full Native citizenship could necessarily be a positive goal for Indigenous Americans. Zitkala-Sa writes from the context of the Progressive Era before the adoption of the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act. Vine Deloria analyzes how the policy of Termination in the 1950s and 60s, adopted for the alleged sake of benefiting Native Americans as individual US citizens rather than as members of tribal communities, had the paradoxical effect of reinventing the erasure of Native cultures and perpetuating the theft of their lands.

Chapter two shifts the focus from resisting the terms of sovereignty toward exploration of an Indigenous conceptual logic for governance. With this goal in mind, Temin discusses how Vine Deloria and his aunt Ella Deloria develop Indigenous theory related to the practice of treaty making. For Native Americans, treaties represent a "scaling up" of the practice of kinship where being a good relative is central (64). For the US government, in contrast, Native peoples since the *Worcester v. Georgia* Supreme Court decision of 1832 have been regarded as dependent nations. Because at that time the government did not know what to do with Native nations within settler state law, the Court defined them as wards of the US state, not as separate nations worthy of dignity and respect on their own terms. The lack of fundamental respect underpins the long history of the making and breaking of treaties in the US.

Chapter three is the only chapter that concentrates on a single thinker, George Manuel. This choice seems appropriate because here Temin develops one of the book's core arguments that North American Indigenous political thought is pertinent for understanding global struggles for anti-colonial sovereignty. Manuel's "Fourth Worldism" connects issues for North American Indigenous societies with ongoing struggles for

self-determination against colonial and neocolonial domination in the global south.

Chapter four builds on Manuel's Fourth World Pan-Indigenous political thought through the Marxist analyses of Howard Adams in the 1960s, and the gendered Marxist insights of Lee Maracle starting in the 1970s. Adams exposes the ways in which the 1969 Canadian White Paper that reversed the Indian Act of 1876, in the name of multicultural inclusion of First Nations and Metis people in the wider Canadian society, effectively established new terms for systematically erasing Indigenous self-determination. Temin's close reading of Vine Deloria's analysis of the US Termination policy, paired with Adams's discussion of the Canadian White Paper, effectively shows how Canadian and US trajectories of erasure are more similar than different. Both American and Canadian political histories rely on a conceptual logic that places trust in the power of individual agency over collective accountability.

Appropriately, Temin gives the last words in Chapter four to Maracle. Her scholarship, creative writing, and activism examine the ways in which gender and violence against Indigenous North American women is not an adjunct, but rather a central feature of the continuing project of settler colonialism. Maracle's work is central to more recent scholarship by Mishuana Goeman, Sarah Deer, and Leanne Simpson, writers and scholars whose work has influenced Temin's.

Temin begins and ends the book with the 2016 No Dakota Access Pipeline (NODAPL) movement by the Dakota Water Protectors to "reveal and confront the constitutively earth-destroying, antirelational violence of colonial sovereignty" (183). This confrontation provides more than a background for the book's main arguments. Rather, in placing the reader with NODAPL in the twenty-first century, Temin strongly asserts the need for more public attention to the voices of Indigenous scholars, writers, artists, and activists. The disheartening reality is that the neocolonial logic of the profit-driven market still shapes public discourse in both the US and Canada.

In American studies circles, Temin's interrogation of sovereignty challenges us to question the ideological underpinnings of American exceptionalism at a deeper level than some scholars and teachers in the field have done. For example, how would the critical thinking we encourage students to do change if an Indigenous worldview based on kinship were made central to introductory courses? What if required readings could include other-than-human "texts" such as mountains, rivers, canyons, and arroyos that have traditionally been represented as context for literary texts? What if essay assignments included tasks such as tracing the origin of a print book to a location in a forest on the land of a particular Indigenous nation? The long-standing American studies approach to using interdisciplinary methods and texts to respond to current planetary crises keeps us rethinking curricula. That is a good thing, despite, and perhaps especially given, the continued budget cuts to the humanities.

Remapping Sovereignty does have a few gaps worth mentioning. In his discussions of self-determination, Temin might have placed Indigenous resurgence not only in the framework of Fourth Worldism, but also in contrast to the discourse of reconciliation. Since the end of the twentieth century, Indigenous scholars agree that reconciliation and resurgence are the two important contemporary schools of Indigenous theory in Canada. Even though the official discourse on reconciliation did not start until the end of the twentieth century, and even though reconciliation does not address the issue of self-determination that Temin focuses on, referring to reconciliation, even in a footnote, could have

helped include a wider audience of readers. This is especially the case in the wake of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 2015 report on the residential school system's legacy of harm to generations of First Nations and Metis children. As it is, the interested but uninformed reader of Temin's book could get the sense of entering the middle of a conversation among specialists in Indigenous studies.

Considered from my own perspective as a white person descended from European settlers in North America, I also would have liked to hear something about Temin's background. Because he does not mention it, the reader assumes he is a descendant of white European immigrants. Revealing more about his own stake in these issues would reinforce his commitment to Indigenous methodologies. Not doing so risks creating a façade of disembodied objectivity that Donna Haraway aptly calls the "god trick" in her often-cited 1988 article on "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective."

Temin's book is nevertheless worth taking time to read as closely as he reads the work of twentieth-century theorists and activists Zitkala-Sa, Ella Deloria, Vine Deloria, George Manuel, Howard Adams, and Lee Maracle. Through his meticulous attention to the intellectual development of these thinkers and activists, in dialogue with their communities and with settler colonial histories, Temin makes a timely contribution to twenty-first-century American studies scholarship.

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Book Review
10.22439/asca.v56i1.7178

BOOK REVIEW:

Gunlög Fur. *Painting Culture, Painting Nature: Stephen Mopope, Oscar Jacobson, and the Development of Indian Art in Oklahoma*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019. 356 pages. ISBN: 978-0-8061-6287-4.

In early 1927, four young Kiowa men left their reservation to begin taking art classes at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, where their mentor would be a Swedish-born professor, Oscar Jacobson. This unusual arrangement, and the friendships that resulted from it, are the topics of Gunlög Fur's *Painting Culture, Painting Nature.* Fur, a professor of history at Linnaeus University in Sweden and a member of the Swedish Academy of Letters, History, and Antiquities, has long championed a perspective that views the histories of immigrants and Indians as intertwined, and the elegant approach of this book allows her to bring that perspective down to a personal level by looking at the relationship between Jacobson and the most prominent of the Kiowa artists, Stephen Mopope, who, after his time in Norman, would work as a painter for the rest of his life.

Painting Culture, Painting Nature provides the reader with extensive biographies of both men, but what really interests the author is what her introduction calls the "anatomy" of their friendship, and how it was affected by attitudes and policies toward Indians and immigrants in the first third of the twentieth century. To that end, Fur offers extensive contexts for the two, as well as a useful history of the state they both called home, Oklahoma.

To explain the work and inspiration of Mopope, *Painting Culture, Painting Nature* discusses the plight of the Kiowa after defeats suffered in wars against the US military in the late 1800s. Deprived of the buffalo that had sustained their way of life for generations and confined to reservations which limited their mobility, and where poverty and disease were major challenges, the Kiowa feared that their culture and traditions would vanish altogether. To Mopope and others, painting became an essential way to keep their cultural heritage alive, and changing from traditional surfaces like hides and tipis to paper and canvas was not an insurmountable challenge. In addition to being an artist, Mopope was also widely known as a skillful dancer, another way in which he and other Kiowa preserved traditions. In both paintings and in dancing, he deftly managed to balance often-stereotypical white expectations of what "true" Indians were against the need to adhere to tribal history and tradition.

When it comes to Jacobson, Fur stresses that he was born in Sweden and came to the United States with his family as a young boy. The destination for the Jacobsons was Lindsborg, a small town in central Kansas that was settled by Swedish immigrants, and where two of Oscar's older brothers were already living. Initially missing the family farm on a Baltic Sea island, young Oscar soon took to the wide-open spaces of his new home state, exploring the surroundings of Lindsborg on a newly acquired pony (and often

skipping out of farm work, to his father's annoyance). Fur argues that Jacobson's childhood and youth in Lindsborg, where he attended Bethany College, a Swedish-American educational institution, were essential in making him identify as a Westerner. From Bethany, he would go on to take art classes at Yale, and then to take up teaching positions in Minneapolis and Washington state before accepting an appointment as director of the School of Fine Arts at the University of Oklahoma, still a fledgling institution when Jacobson and his wife arrived there in 1915. It was in that capacity that he crossed paths with Stephen Mopope in the late 1920s.

While their initial relationship was that of teacher and student, it would evolve after Mopope left Norman. Jacobson continued to promote the work of the Kiowa (who, for a long time, were not allowed to travel outside the reservation without authorization from reservation officials and also needed a white person as a chaperone), arranging, among other things, for Mopope to paint murals on the walls of a local post office at the height of the Depression. Mopope and his friends had been frequent visitors to the Jacobson home in Norman while they were students, and Oscar Jacobson would in later years visit Mopope on the reservation. The professor would also use his contacts to arrange for exhibitions throughout the Southwest, and even in Europe, although Mopope himself soon turned out to be astute in maintaining contacts with potential buyers on his own. In a thoughtful conclusion, Fur asks whether Jacobson and Mopope could be friends, given their very different situations in life. Her answer is yes.

A central theme in *Painting Culture, Painting Nature* is that both men were outsiders in American society, and that this may have strengthened their relationship. Fur readily acknowledges that their circumstances were radically different: although emigration inevitably entails a sense of loss, there is an enormous difference between Oscar Jacobson's rather well-to-do family voluntarily leaving Sweden for greater opportunities in America and Stephen Mopope's ancestors being forced onto a small area of land and treated as wards of the government. Scandinavian immigrants in the 1920s also did not encounter prejudice from mainstream society in the way that Native Americans did. It is telling, for instance, that the Kiowa students in Norman were habitually referred to as "boys," even though Mopope was in his thirties when the group attended the university.

Fur also devotes attention to the paintings of both men and how they reflect their divergent views. Jacobson was a great admirer of Swedish landscape painters such as Bruno Liljefors, who often portrayed nature as untouched by humans, and his own work, depicting scenes from the Southwest, followed similar lines. Fur connects Jacobson's landscape painting to his youth in Lindsborg, where stories of the Swedish settlement's founding stressed that the newcomers from Sweden came to wide open, untouched spaces, ignoring the long-standing indigenous presence there. Mopope's work, by contrast, concerns itself with people doing everyday chores, dancing, and courting; his spaces are not void of a human presence. As the author puts it in a nice reference to the title of her book, Mopope painted culture, Jacobson nature. And, just as his nature scenes tended to emphasize a bygone time, Jacobson had firm opinions that Native American art should be traditional and "genuine." Watercolor was preferred, for instance, while oil was seen as far less acceptable. Mopope was more open to adapting his art to new influences.

Painting Culture, Painting Nature is a fascinating read, and Gunlög Fur is open about its few shortcomings. As she notes, chronicling the life of Oscar Jacobson is fairly easy, as a great deal of source materials exist, including a detailed account by his wife. For Stephen Mopope, source

materials are scarcer, often consisting of accounts by white reservation officials with patronizing attitudes. As a result, Jacobson's life looms somewhat larger than Mopope's in the book.

It could also be debated to what extent Oscar Jacobson was representative of Swedish immigrants to the United States. Although he was born in Sweden, his arrival in the United States at a young age made him more like the second-generation Swedish Americans who were becoming an increasingly prominent part of the Swedish immigrant community in the 1920s: he received an American high-school education and clearly was comfortable with English. Although it was founded by Swedish settlers, "the Americans" and the English language had made clear inroads in the Lindsborg of Jacobson's youth, and it is telling that his exploits in the town as a young man were chronicled in the English-language *Lindsborg Record* rather than in the Swedish-language weekly *Lindsborgs-Posten.* Jacobson's time at Yale and his marriage to a French-born fellow faculty member also set him apart from many of his fellow Swedish Americans. Although a miniature Viking ship hung in his summer cabin in Colorado as a symbol of his roots, and although he was part of a nationwide network of Swedish-American artists, what emerges from Fur's book is the image of a man who more readily identified himself as an American Westerner than as a Swedish immigrant. That, however, is a minor point. Overall, *Painting Culture, Painting Nature* is a rich and rewarding work.

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Book Review
10.22439/asca.v56i1.7170

BOOK REVIEW:

Jennifer Eastman Attebery. *As Legend Has It: History, Heritage, and the Construction of Swedish American Identity.* University of Wisconsin Press, 2023. 218 pages. ISBN: 978-0299344702. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.6557180.

Heritage and memory are defining aspects of the history of migration. They are significant for individual migrants transitioning to a new homeland, but they are also a crucial feature of how their descendants make sense of migratory pasts. Jennifer Attebery's book *As Legend Has It* is a welcome contribution to this area of study. Focusing on heritage-making in Swedish American ethnic communities, it adds significantly to a relatively small body of scholarship on the cultural memory—broadly defined—of Scandinavian American history and relations.

Attebery is professor emerita of English specializing in folklore, and the study combines her expertise in literary analysis, Swedish American ethnicity, and empirical studies of folklife history. Structured across seven chapters with a preface, a substantial introduction, and a coda, the book offers analyses of historical legends told in Swedish American local histories from the West and Midwest, produced between the 1890s and the 2020s. The bulk of the sixty-one local histories surveyed are from the late twentieth century. Thirty-three of these include historical legends, and they form the empirical foundation of the book. These are histories that originated in oral storytelling, and, through publication by individual writers and editors or by joint committees, received textual form.

The first chapter delineates the phenomenon of historical legend, a "particular kind of storytelling" used in "explaining the history of a community" (ix). Historical legends are informally circulated narratives that are "told as true" (29). Although they can be mediated in many different ways, they are always set in the past and have what Attebery calls "an emic generic quality" (19); they are told from the point of view of individual migrants and their descendants. Attebery situates her study in relation to the genre of local history writing, and to a broader US discussion about heritage, taking a point of departure in current debates and conflicts over memories of slavery, the Civil War, and Indigenous dispossession.

Attebery has three aims with the book: to "better understand how American ethnic groups claiming whiteness have employed historical legend and local history writing"; to "better understand historical legend as a subgenre of legend"; and to "better understand one context for historical legend in America, vernacular local history writing" (15). As reflected in these aims, the thrust of the book is the theoretical study of a selected narrative phenomenon within ethnic history writing. Although the aims serve an overarching goal of creating a greater understanding of the role of legends for Swedish Americans historically and today, this contextual approach to legend studies is less pronounced in the book.

Chapter two digs into the specifics of Swedish American local history writing. Attebery emphasizes the generic patterns in local histories common in the United States such as local geography and accounts of settler-Indigenous contact. The chapter's analysis is focused on three "sample histories" produced through different means: one authored by a committee, one written by a single author, and one compiled by a single editor. The histories were produced in 1983, 1972, and 2008, respectively, though the dating of the publication does not appear to have been a key reason for its selection. Within each local history, Attebery identifies moments where writers and editors "break into their text with historical legends that dramatize, reinforce, or extend the narrative message" (45). The legends highlight themes such as the overcoming of hardships, entrepreneurial success, and the importance of religion, foodstuffs, and entertainment.

The methodology of reading historical legends embedded in local history writing is analyzed in chapter three. It focuses on a set of features such as "the transition from local history to storytelling," "the linkage among stories," the "underlying points" of the narratives, and the use of "motifs" and "tableau scenes" (57–60). The chapter continues the analysis of the selected local histories studied in chapter two—thus favoring in-depth analysis of a limited number of texts—showing ways in which stories about immigrant experiences are brought temporally into the present, making narratives about local history feel relatable.

The most interesting part of the book, from my point of view, is chapter four, which is devoted to content analysis. It is the chapter that most immediately connects to broader scholarship on US ethnic and immigration history. Attebery focuses on historical legends' relation to time and place and highlights a set of narrative patterns across the corpus. One observation is that very few legends deal with events in Sweden. Instead, they are predominantly about the passage to North America and the place of arrival: these are narratives about transcontinental relocations, destination stories with a focus on "place-building experiences" (96), and narratives about next generations. Of these, the place-building narratives were most common, indicating the significance of making sense of life in a new environment and the creation of new societies and social orders through settlement. Within these narratives, stories about Native American encounters are prevalent.

Subsequent chapters explore in analytical depth the long-term community importance of historical legends. Chapter five investigates rhetorical strategies used by selected communities about shared pasts, and chapter six studies "ostensive behavior," or the acting out and acting on, such stories. These chapters demonstrate the way that historical legends are used to embody settler colonial experiences, placing readers in a past landscape and thus underlining for future generations the precarity and achievements of their ancestors. The final empirical examination, in chapter seven, analyzes how historical legends can serve as vehicles of contemporary critique. By allowing for discomfort and uncertainty, some legends can offer alternative perspectives and ask questions that open for imagining different futures.

As Legend Has It offers compelling close readings of historical legends. Its theoretically informed empirical analyses make it a valuable resource for scholars of US ethnic history generally and Swedish American history specifically. At the same time, it is somewhat difficult to evaluate what the legends tell us more exactly about Swedish American heritage in historical perspective. (Here it is worth pointing out that I come to this reading as a historian, and not as a folklorist.) The social, cultural, and political contexts within

which the legends and local histories were written down or expressed are not systematically accounted for. As a result, the historical legends seem to float rather freely in time. For example, having discussed a legend published in 1957, Attebery writes that "[a]pproaching immigrant narratives through the lens of ostension refines one's sense of how storytelling is useful to storytellers, in this case the immigrants" (145). There is a temporal conflation here, in that legends may have originated among first-generation immigrants, but they were written into local histories many decades or a century later by descendants of immigrants. There are few discussions about why certain legends were framed the way they were, or the consequences and meaning of them at given historical moments.

Although Attebery does consider the issue of context theoretically, few contextual explanations are offered explicitly that help us understand the broader social and cultural significance of legend (re)telling. Given the rich empirical analysis, there are many materials and exciting insights to build on—perhaps, one can hope, in an article waiting to be written. A thicker contextualization of the legends, and an analytical acknowledgement of their role and influence in the US heritage landscape, has the potential to show how historical legends link up with the social and political climate of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This, though, is the view from a reader who read the book with great appreciation. It should be taken as a testament to the usefulness of Attebery's study, and a belief that this will remain an important volume in the growing scholarship on heritage and memory in Swedish American history.

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Book Review
10.22439/asca.v56i1.7179

BOOK REVIEW:

Ryan Rodgers. *Winter's Children: A Celebration of Nordic Skiing*. University of Minnesota Press, 2021. 448 pages. ISBN: 978-1517909345.

It is impossible to understand the United States without understanding its sports, yet the existing research into this topic often prioritizes the US sports trinity of baseball, basketball, and American football over less stereotypically "all-American" sports. However, Ryan Rodgers's recent book *Winter's Children: A Celebration of Nordic Skiing* makes an effort to fill this gap in the research on American sports history.

Rodgers is an avid cross-country skier who lives in Duluth, Minnesota, meaning that he has first-hand experience with the sport and a good background for writing the history of skiing in the US. The book has a natural emphasis on the Midwest, where cross-country skiing was first brought to the US in the nineteenth century by immigrants from Nordic countries, and where the sport eventually enrooted and perpetuated. The story starts with an anecdotal situation: in Wisconsin in the mid-nineteenth century, the tracks in the snow left by a skiing Norwegian immigrant were mistaken by puzzled locals for the footprints of some strange monster. These people had never seen skis before! While snowshoes had been adopted from the Indigenous peoples by European settlers, American snow, so to say, was clean from ski tracks until the arrival the Norwegians, the Swedes, and later the Finns to the Midwest. Yet, as Rodgers skillfully demonstrates in his book, this snow has been gradually crisscrossed by many ski trails left by many people.

Winter's Children makes clear that it was not quite easy for skiing and skis to become a part of North American life. While the Nordic immigrants practiced this activity, mainstream US society and other non-Nordic immigrant groups at first saw skiing, and especially ski jumping, as exotic, a spectator show not unlike the circus. It took time to entice Americans to the ski track, yet slowly but steadily skiing was enrooted in the new country. Rodgers's book skillfully and carefully chronicles the rises and falls of this winter sport from the nineteenth century till today. Rodgers writes about many practitioners and enthusiasts of skiing—some professional athletes and many amateurs—but besides detailing prominent skiers and ski jumpers, Rodgers also pays tribute to ski makers and ski sellers, who are no less deserving of inclusion in the history of skiing in the US. He puts into the limelight numerous ski contests and races, winter carnivals, ski clubs, and ski resorts, some that are very much alive and some that vanished a long time ago. Overall, the author outlines a long and glorious journey from Gullick Laugen—the above-mentioned Norwegian immigrant who caused a panic in a little community in Wisconsin by leaving the first ski trail—to such skiing superstars as Jessie Diggins, who won the gold at the Winter Olympics in 2018.

As the title of the book suggests, Rodgers focuses on *Nordic* skiing, so he particularly concentrates on those who have brought skiing to the

United States. This makes *Winter's Children* especially precious since Nordic Americans and their contribution to the new country are regrettably often overshadowed by other, larger immigrant groups. Rodgers, however, brings to the fore the Norwegian Americans, Swedish Americans, and Finnish Americans, their rich cultures and identities, and their importance in the social fabric of the Midwest and the United States in general. Although the book centers somewhat more on Minnesota and Norwegian Americans, the author does not leave other skiing states behind, and equally pays attention to other skiing Nordic people in the US. Rodgers particularly explores the concept of Norwegian *idrett*, seen as community building through sports, and he also examines the Finnish national trait of *sisu* (stubbornness, strength, determination), expressed by Finnish American athletes such as the famous "Flying Bietilas" of Ishpeming, Michigan.

In his book, the author also particularly highlights the challenges that skiing has faced and is currently facing in the United States. For instance, he illustrates the obstacles American girls and women had to meet and overcome in order to engage in skiing as a professional sport. The twenty-first century has its own problems for skiers, ranging from climate change and consequent shortages of snow to the negative effects of the Covid pandemic and financial troubles (mundane but always relevant). Some battles are yet to be won. Rodgers, however, expresses hope that the future can still be bright for skiing, and that the great legacy of the daring Nordic immigrants in the Midwest and throughout the US will live and be perpetuated by many different US inhabitants.

Winter's Children is a genuine compendium of skiing and ski culture in the United States and is richly illustrated with photographs, posters, and other visuals. The book has the taste of crisp snow and the feel of fresh winter wind. It is a great ode to skiing in all its variety, and I can highly recommend this book for anyone interested in winter sports and for any scholar exploring Nordic Americans.

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Book Review
10.22439/asca.v56i1.7169

BOOK REVIEW:

Jolene Hubbs. *Class, Whiteness, and Southern Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2023. 191 pages. ISBN: 978-1009250658. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/9781009250627.

A comprehensive study of the literary representations of poor white southerners across the twentieth century, Jolene Hubbs's book *Class, Whiteness, and Southern Literature* anatomizes ideological containment and subversion within such representations. Central to Hubbs's argument is the assertion that poor white literary characters serve as "barometers of the cultural anxieties gripping middle-class white people in the periods in which they are produced" (7). Through this lens, Hubbs illuminates how stereotypical tropes have been employed by creators and consumers alike to uphold white middle- and upper-class superiority. Poor white southerners, Hubbs posits, circulate in the middle-class white imagination as *others* that contribute to making and demarcating exclusionary models of whiteness. Hubbs tracks the works of authors across generations who have challenged such tropes and models through innovative portrayals of poor whites in the South. These alternative renditions constitute what Hubbs terms "a formally innovative counter-tradition," bodying forth the social disruptions that undermine white middle-class social solidarity (8). The greatest contribution of Hubbs's project thus lies in the intricate symbiosis between sociocultural apparatuses and formal literary devices—highlighting literature's pivotal role in white class formation and self-presentation.

Class, Whiteness, and Southern Literature investigates southern literary works across four different periods: the Gilded Age, the Great Depression, the Civil Rights Era, and the 1990s. Its primary object is to interrogate the white classist hegemony undergirding the production of the stereotype. Reading the white middle class less as a category than as a phenomenon that happens only "when better-off people . . . define themselves against the figures depicted," Hubbs stresses the malleability and plasticity of the prevailing stereotypes of southern poor whites (15).

Hubbs's four chapters encompass an eclectic range of authors. While each chapter explores popular texts of the era that promulgate negative representations of poor white southerners, each chapter also engages with a specific writer who rebuts classist conceptions entrenched in their contemporaries' works. The opening chapter attends to the imagery of poor white southerners as depicted in late nineteenth-century literary magazines, *The Atlantic Monthly* in particular. Hubbs examines how plantation fiction writers and local colorists such as Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page routinely pathologized white poverty in the post-Reconstruction period and categorized it as a medical condition and a sign of biological or racial inferiority. In contradistinction to this dominant literary tradition, Hubbs notes, is the pioneering formal innovation of Charles Chesnutt, who introduced a polyvocal narrative structure that diverged from

the frame narrative technique commonly found in plantation stories. As Hubbs cogently lays out, by modifying plantation fiction's dialogism between a white upper-middle-class character and a Black speaker—which typically emphasizes political alliances between Blacks and white patricians—Chesnutt's tripartite narrative form addresses multiple audiences whose members are of disparate and often incompatible ideological predispositions. Hubbs acutely observes that this "[p]olyvocality frustrates any attempt to draw a straight line from characters' utterances to textual or authorial politics"; it challenges plantation fiction's nostalgic fantasies of a rosy antebellum order in particular (42).

Chapter two turns to modernist representations of poor southern whites during the Great Depression. According to Hubbs, middle-class white writers, eugenicists in particular, responded to modernism's call to "make it new!" by projecting poor white people as antiquated and obsolete. Taking William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* as an exemplar of the period's counter-discourse, Hubbs argues that Faulkner's novel invokes deep-seated ideas about poor whites in the rural South as an anachronism, only to then undermine and recast them. In her remarkable reading, Hubbs demonstrates that the novel's investment in a sweat economy and its undivided attention to filth expose how middle-class "townspeople establish their modern identities through . . . signs of obsolescence that throw into relief their own cutting-edge practices and possessions" (55). Furthermore, Hubbs maintains that Faulkner's subversive stance takes shape formally, in the novel's radically innovative representational techniques. The novel's use of stream-of-consciousness narration, according to Hubbs, contests the stereotype of unintelligent country poor whites by allowing these characters to articulate their sophisticated, even avant-garde sensibilities. Additionally, Hubbs sharply notes that the novel's repeated use of stylistically structural suspension further underscores the social stagnation and cultural marginalization experienced by poor white individuals. These thematic and formal strategies work in tandem to destabilize received ideas about class in the South by "lay[ing] bare how the figure of the poor white serves as a foil to Anglo-American modernity" (46).

Chapter three engages with racist representations of poor white southerners during the Civil Rights era. By meticulously examining the acts of racism perpetrated by marginalized poor white characters in the works of middle-class white southern women writers—namely, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Eudora Welty's short story "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" and Lilian Smith's autobiographical *Killers of the Dream*—Hubbs maps out the ideological framework of the period's dominant discourse. According to Hubbs, these authors "represent racism as personal prejudices blighting poor white people, rather than as policies and practices architected . . . by middle- and upper-class white people" (69). Hubbs contends persuasively that these authors, regardless of their intentions, inadvertently absolve the true perpetrators of institutional racism, rendering themselves complicit in the racial violence and racial suffering of the era. Hubbs then turns her analysis to Flannery O'Connor's short stories "Revelation" and "Good Country People," which break rank with the prevailing denigratory aesthetic of the white middle class during the Civil Rights movement. O'Connor turns what Hubbs terms "middle-class monologic," the narrative device employed by Lee, Welty, and Smith, on its head (79). Instead of utilizing middle-class monologues to overdetermine poor whites as the sole enforcers of racism, O'Connor reveals "the cross-class nature of racism by representing white women across the social spectrum voicing differently worded versions of the same bigoted sentiments" (76).

Chapter four shifts its focus away from middle-class writers and instead studies the representations of southern poor white characters by two poor white authors whose works appeared during the economic boom of the 1990s. Through her analysis of Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* and Barbara Robinette Moss's *Change Me into Zeus's Daughter*, Hubbs cannily shows how Allison and Moss establish a new hunger economy that challenges the classist association made by middle- and upper-class writers between the material and intellectual deficiencies of poor whites. Hubbs demonstrates that Allison and Moss present characters who are physically hungry but culturally sated, thus refuting the entrenched notion that literature is a luxury for the leisure class only. By doing so, Hubbs adds, Allison and Moss testify to "how narratives authored by middle- and upper-class writers can beget a form of false consciousness in poor white readers" (102). Hubbs also compares Allison and Moss's works with canonical male grit lit, including Cormac McCarthy's *Suttree*, Tim McLaurin's *The Acorn Plan*, Larry Brown's *Joe*, and Harry Crews's *Scar Lover*. She argues compellingly that Allison and Moss's portrayal of hungry poor white women characters significantly contradicts the representations of horny poor white women found in male grit lit, in which a fixation on fellatio is symptomatic of a general disinterest in women's minds. Hubbs notes that by creating "decidedly inedible female figures" such as Allison's heroine Bone, who defies expectations in male grit lit that poor white women's bodies are fungible and routinely associated with food, both authors upend grit lit's sexualization of the female body (96).

Class, Whiteness, and Southern Literature concludes with a coda that delves into the representations of poor white southerners in the early twenty-first century. Through her analysis of the recurrent motif of katabasis in Arlie Hochschild's *Strangers in Their Own Land* and J. D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy*, Hubbs highlights the endurance of hegemonic white classism. Hubbs specifically cautions against Hochschild and Vance's renditions of poor whites as "unalive" (123), arguing that such depictions further contribute to enduring class divisions in the South, wherein the presence of poor whites is still likened to "a major bugbear haunting better-off people today" (124).

While the range of primary texts Hubbs covers is commendable, readers familiar with only a subset of the selected works might find it daunting, if not exhausting, to engage with such a diverse array of authors. This challenge is particularly evident in chapter four. Here, Hubbs's otherwise persuasive analysis is hampered by her labored comparative reading of Allison and Moss's works alongside novels by McCarthy, McLaurin, Brown, and Crews. There are also some rather strained comparisons within the genre of male grit lit itself. Chapter two, by contrast, offers a more focused and sustained close reading of a single novel, rendering it more accessible to general readers.

Finally, Hubbs's study does not engage with discussions of how twenty-first-century southern writers—Black as well as white—are similarly engaged in the process of recycling and recasting the pioneering works of their predecessors. For example, Jesmyn Ward, very briefly mentioned in the coda, radically repurposes Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* to launch a pointed critique of the neoliberal discourse that consigns poor Black southerners, too, to the category of waste in *Salvage the Bones*. Perhaps other scholars will expand on Hubbs's compelling readings to consider further the inter-generational and cross-racial dynamics of twenty-first-century southern writing.

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CONTRIBUTORS

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Call for Presentations:

"ASPIRATIONS"

The 28th Biennial Conference of the Nordic Association for American Studies

University of Turku, Finland June 4–6 2025

https://sites.utu.fi/naas2025/cfp/.

We welcome proposals that think through, reflect upon, and reconsider the significance of *Aspirations* in the pasts, presents, and futures of the United States. Aspirational ideals and beliefs have always been at the crux of the United States' national ethos, but they have also evolved during the course of history. In addition to the traditional paper and panel formats, we accept workshop sessions as well as alternative format proposals that reinvent the traditional paper session.

Abstract Submission: Abstracts for individual papers are max. 250 words and for panel/workshop/alternative sessions max. 500 words.

Deadline: June 15 2024.

Call for Papers:

Individuality and Community in Mid-Century American Culture (1945–1964)

Special issue of American Studies in Scandinavia
Editors, Annika J. Lindskog and Sanna Melin Schyllert

https://www.sol.lu.se/engelska/innc.

We are planning a peer-reviewed special issue of *American Studies in Scandinavia* focused on the topics of individuality and community in mid-century American culture (1945-1964), inviting explorations of the literature, film, art, and thought of the period. We seek 8,000-word articles that focus either on individual writers/artists/thinkers in the period or engage with the topic more broadly.

Mid-century US culture tends to be described in both simplified and paradoxical terms. On the one hand, it is thought of as a period of 'containment' culture, 'Red-Scare' rhetoric, and McCarthyism: a time when norms were strong, and it was difficult to be different. On the other hand, it is a period romanticized as the great era of American exceptionalism and industry. As today's politicians from left to right increasingly rely on nostalgia for an idealized past, it becomes relevant to ask questions about the culture and values of mid-century America, and to challenge stereotypical images of this time, especially that of the white, churchgoing nuclear family, which has become an almost indelible image of the 'long' 1950s.

At this pivotal moment in American history, the individual was often seen as being in conflict with society. Early Cold-War culture saw an increased focus on the negative effects of social conformity on the individual, whether in the form of Holden Caulfield's restless depression in Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (1951) or Guy Montag's awakening from totalitarianism in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953). Elsewhere, individualism and self-expression were celebrated, as can be seen, for example, in the Beat Generation's rebellion against conformity and in the deep subjectivity in some of the work of the so-called Confessional Poets.

Conformity was not necessarily only a negative aspect of social life in post-war US, however; the period was also characterized by a very real sense of community and the importance of 'sticking together' through thick and thin, especially in the early post-war period. A sense of community can also be noted in how the rights and needs of individual groups of people began to be emphasized, which is clearly seen in how the Civil Rights movement gained traction and in the burgeoning feminist movement. While some cultural groupings dominated the cultural scene and appear to have been impermeable, marginal groups developed their own literature and arts scene. In *American Literature in Transition*, Stephen Belletto writes that 'one reason the

1950s can still seem bland and white bread, with a literature to match, is because at the time the same kind of writers tended to be celebrated while whole groups of others were seen as unliterary' (4). Further research into alternative cultural output is needed in order to paint a more inclusive and accurate picture of the 1950s, moving beyond WASP culture and the image of the white, nuclear family.

Delving into the complexities of mid-century American culture, our proposed special issue serves as more than just a historical exploration; by inviting perspectives on diversity and voices from the margins, we seek to paint a more inclusive and accurate portrait of this era. We think a reevaluation of the legacy of the 1950s, and its relevance in today's socio-political landscape, is urgently needed. Our special issue will challenge readers to reconsider their assumptions and critically engage with the complexities of the past.

For this special issue, we seek articles that approach the topics of individuality and community in the period more broadly, but also articles that focus on individual writers, artists, and thinkers. Topics include but are not limited to:

- Individualism and conformity culture
- Individual and community
- Individual works/authors/artists/thinkers
- Literary groups or movements
- Mainstream or avantgarde perceptions of literature and culture
- The political influence on cultural output
- National or transnational cultural relations and exchanges
- The legacy of mid-century American culture and values
- The legacy of colonialism in mid-century US
- The commercialization of literature and culture
- Cultural representations of family
- Religion
- LGBTQIA+ culture and mid-century America

We are calling for 500-word abstracts to be submitted by **1 September 2024**; to submit, send by email to annika.lindskog@englund.lu.se. Selected submissions will be notified by 1 October 2024. Finished articles are planned for production in autumn 2025.

Annika J. Lindskog, Lund University, Sweden

Sanna Melin Schyllert, Nantes University, France

Call for Papers:

Transnational Literature in America: Where Do We Stand Twenty Years After Fishkin's Transnational Turn?

Special issue of American Studies in Scandinavia
Editor, Tijana Przulj

This special issue sets out to explore fresh figurations of transnational literature and aesthetics in works of fiction about America or those produced therein, and offer new perspectives on the entanglements of transnational experience and the American society at large without reducing the notion of transnational to a symbolic moniker for the various consequences of the American geopolitical position. In her presidential address to the American Studies Association in 2004, Shelley Fisher Fishkin poignantly pointed out that:

At a time when American foreign policy is marked by nationalism, arrogance, and Manichean oversimplification, the field of American studies is an increasingly important site of knowledge marked by a very different set of assumptions—a place where borders both within and outside the nation are interrogated and studied, rather than reified and reinforced.

Faced with the imminent unfolding of yet another divisive election which many American citizens will experience as choosing the lesser of two evils, Fishkin's statement rings truer than ever. And yet, despite employing the notion of "transnational" in ever freer terms, American studies scholars seem for the most part hesitant to engage with transnational literature as both a field of study AND a kind of literature that is "of our own time, a time marked by the profoundly uneven forces of decolonization, globalization, postmodernity, and electronic technologies" (Paul Jay 2021, *Transnational Literature: The Basics*, 57). This hesitation has intermittently been explored in scholarship. However, to my knowledge, American Studies in general, as well as American Literary Studies more specifically, still refrain from offering a more holistically transnational approach to cultural objects created in America and/or about America, which is where this special issue makes its scholarly intervention.

For this special issue, we seek articles that explore fresh figurations of transnational literature and aesthetics in works of contemporary literature (produced in America and/or about America), as well as the various ways scholarship can take a more holistically transnational approach to such literature. Topics include but are not limited to:

- The transnational ties of new immigrants/migrants
- Transnational communities in all their forms

- Intimacy and identity in liminality
- Memory and the transnational
- Nation, belonging and transnational communities
- Aesthetic configurations in transnational literature
- Immigration, exile, postcolonial and the transnational

We are calling for 500-word abstracts to be submitted by **15 June 2024**; to submit, send by email to tijana.przulj@uib.no. Selected submissions will be notified by 20 August 2024. Finished articles are planned for production in 2025.

AMERICAN STUDIES IN **SCANDINAVIA**

For Contributors

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 MLA citations 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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