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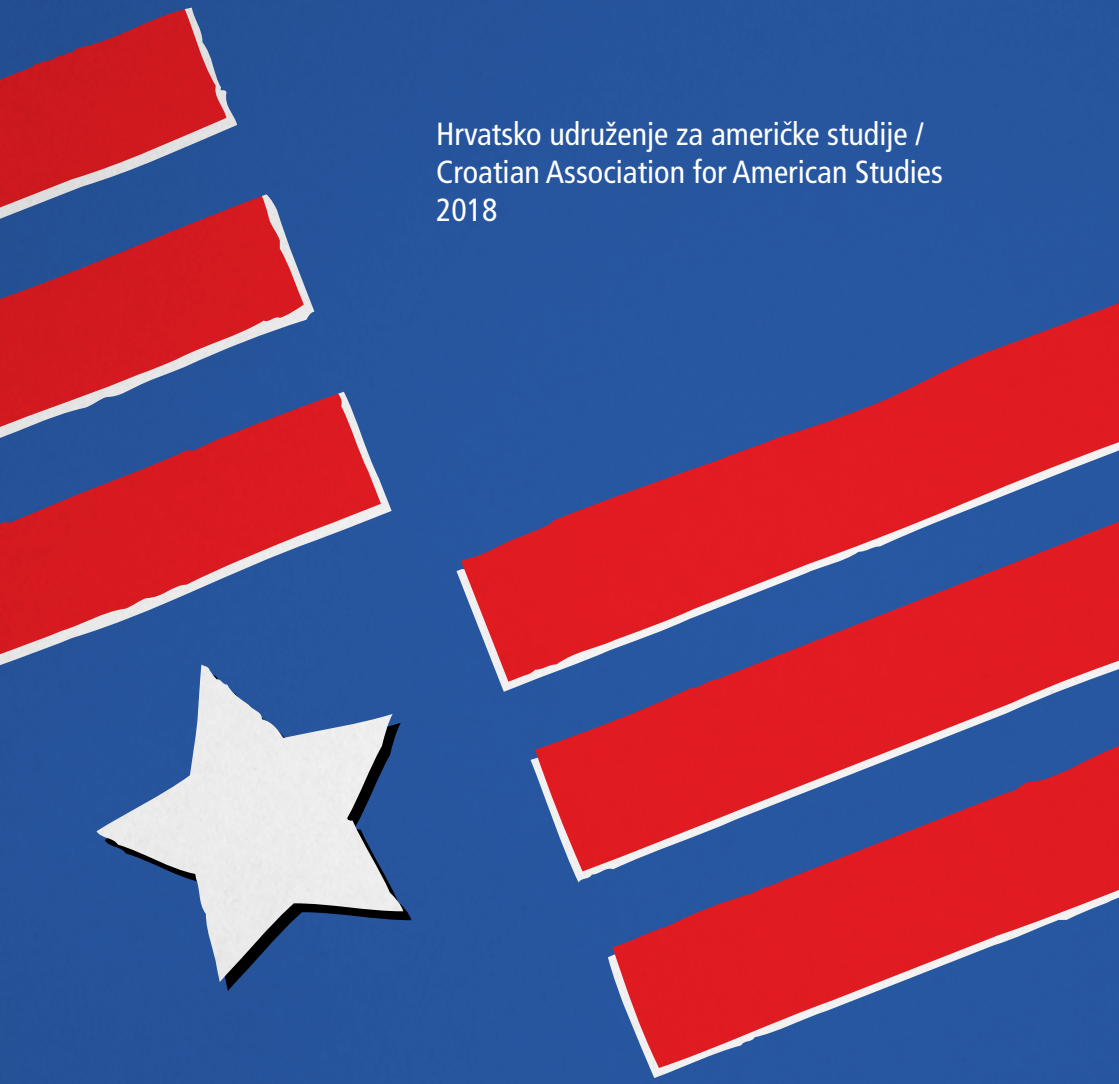

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Editors' Note

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Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* and the Question of Capital

The author holds that the so-called "economic turn" in literary criticism has an unprecedented significance in coping with the present and in conceptualizing the past. On the present occasion, he engages Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* and shows how the economic thematic is registered in the novel in different ways and on different levels. As a first step that substantiates this claim, he culls words and phrases from the novel that reference money. References to money are not confined to this or that episode or to the delineation of this or that character but are strategically strewn throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*. After foregrounding the economic lexis in Pynchon and pointing to its incidence, the author proceeds to show how questions of the economy relate to thematic clusters which extant critical readings have designated as essential components of Pynchon's novel. One such essential of Pynchon's writing is his continual engagement with America. The author argues that a foregrounding of economic themes in *Gravity's Rainbow* correlates with the novelist's preoccupation with America.

Key words: *Gravity's Rainbow,* Thomas Pynchon, economics, money and finance, America

What terrible structure behind the appearances of diversity and enterprise?
(*Gravity's Rainbow*, 165)

1.

In the introduction to her book on recent "turns" in the study of culture, Doris Bachman-Medick writes, "As regards the historicization and contextualization of the cultural turns, an important role was initially played by

the fact that these turns came to replace scientistic, positivist and economistic explanations of the social world and initiated a fundamental reassessment of symbolization, language, representation and interpretation" (7)[1]. Later in the book, she recognizes that "there are already indications that the existing and still emerging turns are bringing the humanities as a whole into contact with fields such as biopolitics, economics, neuroscience and digitization" (30). I add that, for reasons immanent in disciplinary knowledge but also having to do with the world at large, not all of these contacts have developed apace. To use a formulation from the book *Financial Cultures and Crisis Dynamics* (2015), whose title points to the field that will be privileged in the following reading, I contend that the "intellectual use-value" (27) of the economic turn, a turn which I have used more and more in my recent forays into literature, culture, and society, has an unprecedented significance in coping with the present and in sifting through the past in order to find mappings for its complexity.

The history of theoretical turns shows that, in the humanities, past practices are never antiquated. Past ways of cognizing the world have a retentive power which explodes when new circumstances show that we have been overhasty in discarding extant knowledge. To be even more explicit: if Bachman-Medick registers how "economistic explanations" were superannuated by new developments, she also acquiesces that there are indications of how the field of economics is staging a reengagement with the humanities. The reading of *Gravity's Rainbow* that I offer here is biased towards the economic sphere. That bias is not a mere subjective preference but stems from and is a response to what I see as the hegemony of the economy over contemporary human life. I firmly believe that, if literary theory has any relevance to that life, it has to take up the challenge of that hegemony.

That imperative is even more pressing if we realize that literature has, in different ways, always engaged economic issues. My reading of *Gravity's Rain-*

1 Research for this article was supported by the HRZZ 1543 grant (A Cultural History of Capitalism).

bow will foreground those dimensions of the novel that show Thomas Pynchon partaking in that engagement. In due course, I will also argue that "the fundamental reassessment of symbolization, language, representation and interpretation," to quote Bachman-Medick again, did not take place in abstract space and time, but that these can be viewed as concurrent with mutations in the economic sphere. I will propose that, if collated with changes that money underwent during the latest phase of history, the said "reassessment"—very much contemporaneous with poststructuralism—can be retrieved as a "usable past" providing a horizon for thinking the economy today. Needless to say, the very fact that I reengage Pynchon on this occasion testifies to my belief that his work is part of that "usable" past. The reading I provide below assembles from *Gravity's Rainbow* a problematic that speaks to us from the past. In my conclusion I will argue that what it says, the "use-value" of Pynchon's novel, is less to be sought in the realm of action, in the overcoming of the all-pervasive hegemony, but rather in confronting and contemplating its gravity.

2.

The usability of literature stems from its apparent ability to lend evidence to the most diverse theoretical readings. If this is true for literature as such, it is even truer for works which are multi-layered, resistant to interpretative closure and thus welcoming of ever newer interpretations. A vast and ever-expanding archive of descriptions and interpretations confirms that *Gravity's Rainbow* is in this sense an exemplary work. Taking for granted the multifold readings to which it has been subjected, I am merely proposing here that it can be read as a text that, in ways that will be expounded upon below, addresses economic themes.

Keeping in mind the enormous corpus of critical writing on Pynchon, it can hardly be expected that others have not attended to this layer in Pynchon's palimpsest. Two examples will suffice. William Spanos, a keen appreciator of Pynchon, contends in his last book that *Gravity's Rainbow* is about the Puritan Calvinist doctrine of providential history that "in distinguishing

between the elect and the damned—the chosen and the 'preterite' or 'passed over,' in Pynchon's terms—produced the Puritan work ethic and the "spirit of capitalism" (135). In an earlier appraisal of the novel, Richard Powers wrote,

> A Corporate State, as the quickest study among slow learners long ago pointed out, knows how to turn even innocence to its many uses. Childhood, vulnerability, every fairy tale that ever soothed us to sleep will, along with the rest of individual experience, be exploited, interrogated, made to turn a profit, put to efficacious and pacifying work by the controlling powers. Such a nightmarish historical motion pervades *Gravity's Rainbow*. (Powers)

One can have no quarrel with these readings, and I think they, in summary terms, encapsulate the thematic at the core of Pynchon's novel. However, I maintain that these generalities, which presuppose the economic focus I am relying on here, deserve closer attention and greater analytic rigor. This is necessary because, as a rule, the economic dimension of literary texts is dealt with only summarily, if at all. I hold that both the economic presence in literary works and the mode of its inscription into fictional worlds, privileging these as the genre most accommodating to economic themes, need to be articulated differentially. I have undertaken such readings of Pynchon's first novel (2015a), of *Mason & Dixon* (2015b) and of his last novel (2014c). My findings point to the conclusion that Pynchon has always addressed economic issues in his work, and *Gravity's Rainbow* is no exception to this rule. Quite the contrary: it provides evidence that can be used to lend further proof to my findings; more significantly, however, it can help us contemplate the identity and difference of the economy and how that sameness and its mutation figure in the present conjuncture.

3.

Gravity's Rainbow abounds with evidence of the economic thematic. As a first step in substantiating this claim, I have culled from the novel words and phrases that reference money. To list all these references would tax the

reader with inflationary overkill. Rather, I will attempt to systematize them and restrict my page references to their first appearance in the text. Thus we find what I would label neutral referencing such as "amount of money" (74)[2]. However, this very first instance of the appearance of money is not as neutral as I make it out to be, and the quote illustrates the hazard of decontextualizing linguistic evidence. I admit to having left out the adjective which precedes the syntagm, namely the word "amazing." I stress that all the synonyms of this word—such as *stunning*, *fabulous*, etc.—are latently present and enact a slippage in Pynchon's statement of fact. For present purposes, I have pared down the phrasing because Pynchon's "amazement" at not only money but, as I show below, other elements of the economy find fuller expression elsewhere in the novel. But to continue with my listing, Pynchon evokes historical events which were primarily determined by economic processes such as "the Great Depression" (77). Not mere money but money aggregated in "funding" (77) or a "grant"(84) play an important role in the narrative. Pynchon inscribes into his text economic procedures and transactions such as "rate of exchange" (108). That he is in the know about how the nature of money value is changeable is evidenced by, for instance, the phrase "incommensurate with gold" (108). His sense of the economic past can be illustrated by the Dutch episode and the quip "tulips (a reigning madness of the time)" (108). There is talk of "fluctuations in currencies" (112), both in this anonymous form and designating national currencies: "Swiss francs" (261). Certain utterances are premonitory of developments that took place after the time frame of the novel: "Is it any wonder the world's gone insane, with information come to be the only real medium of exchange?"(258). Personifications of capital, to use a Marxist formulation, are alluded to both in generic form, "energetic businessman" (295) and in references to historical persons such as "Morgan money, there's Morgan money in Harvard" (332). Politico-economic formations of the time frame of the novel are named: "Red Army version of economics"

2 All further citations from *Gravity's Rainbow* will be followed by the page reference in parentheses.

(349) or "Reichsmarks" (371). Capital itself, the word that appears in my title, is referenced: "capital" (400). Colloquialisms for money are resorted to—"some dough" (439)—just as it appears in joking asides, as when Seaman Bodine denigrates a Red Cross volunteer girl: "wonderful organization that was charging fifteen cents for coffee and doughnuts, at the Battle of the fucking *Bulge*, if you really wanna get into who is stealing what from who" (600).

This is a mere sampling but suffices to show how the economic sphere—money and financing to start off with—is superabundant in Pynchon. References to money are not confined to this or that episode or to the delineation of this or that character but are strategically strewn throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*. And yet, having documented the money nexus on the lexical level of the book, I ask, Can it be assigned a deeper significance? Doesn't the novel as a genre always register the economics of money in the attempt to reflect or, as Pynchon would probably prefer, construct a world? To a certain degree, I would answer "yes" to the question but add that the presence of money in narratives frequently goes unnoticed because readers have naturalized it. In other words, my groupings of money/finance references foregrounds a presence which readers frequently let pass under the screen of their attention. After foregrounding the economic lexis in Pynchon and pointing to its incidence, the next question to ask is whether its presence relates to thematic clusters which extant critical readings have designated as essential components of Pynchon's novel. This question can be placed in a different manner: what if the designated lexis is not epiphenomenal but relates to the more fundamental workings that ultimately produce *Gravity's Rainbow*? In what follows, in a series of subjunctive takes on the novel, I will show that the second part of the question is not a mere conjecture but rather a path of entry into the novel. Supplementing the lexical evidence, this will lend additional support to my economic reading.

4.

4a. To begin with, if *Gravity's Rainbow* is a novel about war, which is saying the obvious, I would contend that Pynchon is less concerned with describing war in terms that we customarily associate with it, but gives expression to the rationale and causes of war that are usually given short shrift. This is adumbrated as early as the opening section of the novel, which describes characters and things as integral parts of a wartime, black-market, economy: "Pirate, driven to despair by the wartime banana shortage, decided to build a glass hothouse on the roof, and persuade a friend who flew the Rio-to-Ascension-to-Fort-Lamy run to pinch him a sapling banana tree or two, in exchange for a German camera, should Pirate happen across one on his next mission by parachute" (5). A few pages later we read of "black-market marshmallows"(9) and of "waffle batter resilient with fresh hens' eggs, for which Osbie Feel has exchanged an equal number of golf balls, these being even rarer this winter than real eggs"(9). These early indications of economic activity reappear and are elaborated as the novel develops. One can justifiably say that Pynchon is less interested in the human cost of war than he is in narrating how the cunning of market actors utilizes the opportunities opened up by war and surmounts the inconveniences of warfare. This pretty much summarizes many of the plot lines that constitute *Gravity's Rainbow*.

But Pynchon does something more. He unequivocally states that war is embedded in economic concerns. The most emphatic statement regarding this is the following:

> Don't forget, the real business of the War is buying and selling. The murdering and the violence are self-policing, and can be entrusted to non-professionals. The mass nature of wartime death is useful in many ways. It serves as spectacle, as diversion from the real movements of the War . . . Best of all, mass death's a stimulus to just ordinary folks, little fellows, to try 'n' grab a piece of the Pie while they're still here to gobble it up. The true war is a celebration of markets. Organic markets, carefully styled "black" by the professionals, spring up everywhere. Scrip Sterling, Reichsmarks continue to move, severe as classical ballet, inside their antiseptic marble chambers. But out here, down here among the people, the true currencies come into being.

> So, Jews are negotiable. Every bit as negotiable as cigarettes, cunt, or Hershey bars. (105)

The identification of war with "markets," with the business of "buying and selling," needs little explication. The reference to the Jews and the metaphoric equivalences Pynchon signalizes at the end of the passage can almost be labeled as profane, inhuman blasphemy.

Regarding the war theme, I note that Pynchon wrote about it with hindsight. The two quotations that follow, and there are many others in the text, stem from the post-war economic present of his writing. The first reads thus: "He saw the war in progress as a world revolution, out of which would rise neither Red communism nor an unhindered Right, but a rational structure in which business would be the true, the rightful authority—a structure based, not surprisingly, on the one he'd engineered in Germany for fighting the World War" (165).

The anticipation of what peace will bring—"the rationalized power-ritual that will be the coming peace" (177)—projects the essence of the world in which Pynchon's war story continues to resonate. The phrase "power-ritual" prefigures the thematic with which I will conclude my analysis.

4b. Secondly, if *Gravity's Rainbow* thematizes technology, an abiding concern in Pynchon's writing, then that theme in *Gravity's Rainbow*, like in his other novels, implicates and is enmeshed in economic issues.[3] I begin with a quote that brings together war and technology and then inserts the agency of pecuniary factors into that assemblage:

> It means this War was never political at all, the politics was all theatre, all just to keep the people distracted . . . secretly, it was being dictated instead by the needs of technology . . . by a conspiracy between human beings and techniques, by something that needed the energy-burst of war, crying, "Money be

3 I deal at length with this in my reading of his last novel (2014c). The English translation of my Croatian title signalizes that enmeshment: "On the Bleeding Edge of Technology and the Economy."

> damned, the very life of ⌈insert name of Nation⌋ is at stake," but meaning, most likely, *dawn is nearly here, I need my night's blood, my funding, funding, ahh more, more. . .* The real crises were crises of allocation and priority, not among firms—it was only staged to look that way—but among the different Technologies, Plastics, Electronics, Aircraft, and their needs which are understood only by the ruling elite. . . (521)

I have used this quote as epigraph to a paper discussing the place of the Gothic in American Studies (Grgas 2014a). Here I merely state that Pynchon depicts finance capital in the above passage as a vampire whose dynamic subsumes both war and technology. The interdependence of technology and the economy had been adumbrated in an earlier passage describing the German building of the rocket: "But others had the money, others gave the orders—trying to superimpose their lusts and bickerings on something that had its own vitality, on a technologique they'd never begin to understand"(401). A telling comparison appears in the same section when the scientists are depicted working on the construction of the rocket:

> They called it the magic number, and they meant it literally. As some gamblers on the stock market know when to place stop orders, feeling by instinct not the printed numbers but the *rates of change,* knowing from first and second derivatives in their skin when to come in, stay or go, so there are engineering reflexes turned always to know, at any moment, what, given the resources, can be embodied in working hardware—what is "feasible." (406)

I think that the references to "stock market," "orders," "rates of change," and "derivates" in this context are not incidental but point to the economic nexus I am foregrounding in my reading. The "magic number"—the serial number 00000 on the rocket—deserves, as I argue below, particular attention. As a matter of fact, an important part of my argument, one that I have not encountered elsewhere, hinges on the importance I assign to those zeroes. Here I merely draw the reader's attention to the fact that the "magic number" is obviously an instance of Pynchon's earlier mentioned "amazement" and

that the passage enacts a slippage from technology into the economy.

4c. Thirdly, if *Gravity's Rainbow* has a main character, if after reading it, we "can still see Slothrop as any sort of integral creature any more" (740), can a reading geared to economic concerns help us describe Slothrop? To answer this question, we can start with family genealogy. "In 1630,"Pynchon writes, ". . . Governor Winthrop came over to America on the *Arabella*, flagship of a great Puritan flotilla that year, on which the first American Slothrop had been a mess cook or something" (204). The Slothrop family's role in America's "errand in the wilderness" is shown to have been socially differentiated ("mess cook"). Furthermore, when Pynchon writes that "the anarchist persuasion" (268) appeals a little to Slothrop, he goes on to ruminate that it might relate to his pedigree: "Back when Shays fought the federal troops across Massachusetts, there were Slothrop Regulars patrolling Berkshire for the rebels, wearing sprigs of hemlock in their hats so you could tell them from the Government soldiers" (268). The 1786–7 uprising was of course sparked by issues of economic injustice and taxes. Pynchon's ruminations on that pedigree earlier in the novel are particularly telling:

> They began as fur traders, cordwainers, salters and smokers of bacon, went on into glassmaking, became selectmen, builders of tanneries, quarriers of marble. Country for miles around gone to necropolis, gray with marble dust, dust that was the breaths, the ghosts, of all those fake-Athenian monuments going up elsewhere across the Republic. Always elsewhere. The money seeping its way out through stock portfolios more intricate than any genealogy: what stayed at home in Berkshire went into timberland whose diminishing green reaches were converted acres at a clip into paper—toilet paper, banknote stock, newsprint—a medium or ground for shit, money, and the Word. They were not aristocrats, no Slothrop ever made it into the Social Register or the Somerset Club—they carried on their enterprise in silence, assimilated in life into the dynamic that surrounded them thoroughly as in death they would be to churchyard earth. Shit, money, and the Word, the three American truths, powering the American mobility, claimed the Slothrops, clasped them for good to the country's fate. But they did not prosper . . . still they would keep on. The tradition, for others, was clear, everyone knew—mine it out, work it,

> take all you can till it's gone then move on west, there's plenty more. But out of some reasoned inertia the Slothrops stayed east in Berkshire, perverse—close to the flooded quarries and logged-off hillsides they'd left like signed confessions across all that thatchy-brown, moldering witch country. The profits slackening, the family ever multiplying. Interest from various numbered trusts was still turned, by family banks down in Boston every second or third generation, back into yet another trust, in long rallentando, in infinite series just perceptibly, term by term, dying . . . but never quite to the zero. . . . The Depression, by the time it came, ratified what'd been under way. (27–28)

Pynchon's history of the Slothrop family is recounted here through the lens of economic processes and events. These constitute the milestones of its chronology. I quote this passage at length not only because it is so very pertinent to the economic topic but because I consider it the most usable and yet succinct passage in the archive of American literature for focusing on the sphere that I think American Studies have to prioritize. [4] Furthermore, it is significant that the outlined historical trajectory builds up to the Depression, an event that recurs in Pynchon's writing and that in *Gravity's Rainbow* plays a specific role.

That early in the novel, on page 28, one does not yet recognize the significance of the Depression in Tyrone Slothrop's narrative. It fully dawns upon the reader when Slothrop comes to the knowledge of what befell him:

> Nice way to find out your father made a deal 20 years ago with somebody to spring for your education. Come to think of it, Slothrop never could quite put the announcements, all through the Depression, of imminent family ruin, together with the comfort he enjoyed at Harvard. Well, now, what was the deal between his father and Bland? I've been sold, Jesus Christ I've been sold to IG Farben like a side of beef. (286)

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4 In my recent book on contemporary American Studies, I argue that the study of the United States has to recognize the centrality of the economy, of capital to be more precise, at its point of origin, during its history, and in contemporary America (2014b).

The motif of Slothrop having been used for pecuniary interests is repeated on page 444: "You sold me out." The insight that his life has been capitalized is a turning point in Slothrop's self-exploration. But I reiterate that those self-explorations are more than attributes of a character. They are centrifugal and, almost as a rule, include Pynchon's thoughts on America itself. Such is one of Slothrop's epiphanies in the Zone:

> Trees, now—Slothrop's intensely alert to trees, finally. When he comes in among the trees he will spend time touching them, studying them, sitting very quietly near them and understanding that each tree is a creature, carrying on its individual life, aware of what's happening around it, not just some hunk of wood to be cut down. Slothrop's family actually made its money killing trees, amputating them from their roots, chopping them up, grinding them to pulp, bleaching that to paper and getting paid for this with more money. (552–53)

This passage on "trees" can be put to use in American Studies. It subverts Perry Miller's notion of America as "nature's nation" and unearths how this ideologeme whitewashed historical evidence: America does not have a special relationship with nature but subjugates it and puts it to use for profit. Put otherwise, Pynchon inscribes historical evidence that shows how the nation betrayed its utopian origins.

There are other instances in the novel where Pynchon registers this betrayal. One is Pynchon's description of Slothrop's ancestor William's "pig operation." The position of the family in the American story is indicated when Pynchon writes that William "wasn't really in it so much for the money as just for the trip itself." Imagining his ancestor in relation to his society, Pynchon comments, "pigs out on the road, in company together, were everything Boston wasn't, and you can imagine what the end of the journey, the weighing, slaughter and dreary pigless return back up into the hills must've been like for William" (554–55). In the same section of the novel, Pynchon asks a poignant question: "Could he have been the fork in the road America never took, the singular point she jumped the wrong way from?" (556). That

Slothrop ought to be read less as a character than as a synecdoche through which Pynchon engages America itself can be read in the following description of Slothrop: "He's been changing, sure, changing, plucking the albatross of self now and then, idly, half-conscious as picking his nose—but the one ghost-feather his fingers always brush by is America. Poor asshole, he can't let her go" (623).

4d. Fourthly, if, to use Pynchon's phrasing, *Gravity's Rainbow* cannot "let go" of America, does the American theme connect to the economic nexus that I have been excavating? Obviously, the previous section was not only the story of Slothrop but America's story as well. Let me add a few references that show how Pynchon's America has more to do with economics than with anything else. The first is historical: "'It is gone where the woodbine twineth.' Exactly what Jubilee Jim Fisk told the Congressional committee investigating his and Jay Gould's scheme to corner gold in 1869" (438). The second is Pynchon's reference to America's most powerful icon: "There is a theory going around that the U.S.A. was and still is a gigantic Masonic plot under the ultimate control of the group known as the Illuminati. It is difficult to look for long at the strange single eye crowning the pyramid which is found on every dollar bill and not begin to believe the theory, a little" (587). That dollar bill enables the "primal American act," the act of paying, in which the American officer Marvy, for example, is "more deeply himself than when coming, or asleep, or even dying" (605). Economic concerns are also included in Mom Slothrop's letter to Ambassador Joe Kennedy: "We've *got* to modernize in Massachusetts, or it'll just keep getting worse and worse. They're supposed to be taking a strike vote here next week. Wasn't the WLB set up to prevent just that? It isn't starting to break down, is it, Joe? . . . Sometimes I think—ah, Joe, I think they're pieces of the Heavenly City falling down" (682).This lament, an example of what Bercovitch has labeled as the "American jeremiad," shows that the schemata of American Studies, including the "city upon a hill" myth, factors into the horizon of ideas through which Pynchon presents the American experience. Thus, if we restrict our search for a usable past that would be pertinent to the discipline of American Studies, there is no doubt that *Gravi-*

ty's Rainbow is an important part of that past. Self-representations of the United States as a nation on an "errand" or as "nature's nation," the allusions to the "frontier thesis," the American jeremiad as well as the "city upon a hill"—all of these are revisited by Pynchon. In that context, one can say that Pynchon deploys the economic theme in order to explode these self-representations. But my reading of *Gravity's Rainbow* did not solely seek to assimilate the novel into disciplinary interests. On the contrary, the focus of my reading has been to foreground a problematic in the novel that undermines the *very raison d'être* of identity studies, since that problematic is more fundamental than identity, whether it be of the individual or of the nation. At a time in history when both of these are being undermined, when as a consequence we have lost the capacity to understand what is unfolding, the retrieval of the said problematic in *Gravity's Rainbow* can be of use in our epistemological floundering.

5.

At one point in the novel, Pynchon writes,

> It was widely believed in those days that, behind the War—all the death, savagery, and destruction—lay the Fuhrer-principle. But if personalities could be replaced by abstractions of power, if techniques developed by the corporations could be brought to bear, might not nations live rationally? One of the dearest Postwar hopes: that there should be no room for a terrible disease like charisma . . . that its rationalization should proceed while we have the time and resources. . . (81)

This is another instance in the novel where Pynchon is writing his present into the past as a hypothetical possibility. The reader knows that, in the period that ensued after WWII, "abstractions of power" and "techniques developed by corporations" did replace "charisma." They of course still hold sway. I would wager to say that, in the novel itself, those "abstractions of power" had already found embodiment in entities such as "IG itself, Interessengemeinschaft, a fellowship of interest" (164), or, in a more generically named

entity such as "the Firm," which, "it is well known, will use anyone, traitors, murderers, perverts, Negroes, even women, to get what They want" (32–33). Put otherwise, the future projections that Pynchon inscribes into the war were prefigured in the forces that brought the war about in the first place.

After I documented the economic presence in Pynchon by mustering lexical evidence and then by connecting this evidence to some of the crucial thematic clusters in the novel, in the above postulating of a reader "in the know," I might be accused of interpretative overkill. Recognizing that possibility, I nevertheless believe that my deductions from the novel or, as others would say, my graftings onto the novel are warranted not only by Pynchon's multi-layered complexity, but by exigencies of the moment. Leaving aside these exigencies for the moment, I note that, when we choose a particular approach, it foregrounds and priorities elements in the object of study. The anxiety of interpretation stems from the dilemma of whether we are bringing to light something inscribed in a text or whether we are reading into the text our own concerns and interests. In the preface to his book *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero* (1987), which will serve me to propose a reading of the rocket in Pynchon's novel, Brian Rotman is caught in a quandary regarding his preoccupation with his subject: "Is there a zero-phenomenon out there, some actual preoccupation with an extreme or terminal state, with the condition of being a cypher, manifested in these titles, or have I merely sensitised myself to any mention of zero, zeroing in on zero, obsessively foregrounding it out of the cultural noise?" (ix). I share Rotman's dilemma and paraphrase it as follows: is there an economic phenomenon in Pynchon, or have I sensitized myself to any mention of it in the text? I hope that the answer to the first part of the question will be affirmative, although I cannot wholly deny the possibility that the second part is the case. That second caveat ought to be kept in mind, particularly as I embark on the next step of my argument.

If up to now I have found corroboration for the economic theme in the novel by citing passages where it is explicitly named, in what follows I incorporate the rocket into these considerations or, more specifically, its "magic number." As quoted above, that number does at one point in the novel

connect with "gamblers on the stock market,""stop orders," "*rates of change*," and "derivatives" (406). Arguably it can be objected that I am assigning too much significance here to an aside comment on a phenomenon which recurs throughout the novel. In my defense, and taking up present exigencies, I will say that the stratospheric numbers spawned by today's finance have "sensitized" me to the serial number on Pynchon's rocket. Brian Rotman's reading of the zero phenomenon gave me the theoretical framework.

Needless to say, the rocket is an integral and important part of the war and technology motifs in *Gravity's Rainbow*. As Dan Geddes has noted, it is a part of Pynchon's take on "cartels" and "multinational corporations" (Geddes). I have remarked upon these economic entities and draw attention to the serial number "00000." Rotman's discussion of the "semiotics of zero" provides a clue for how to discuss this number within the economic framework. Rotman summarizes his argument as follows:

> certain crucial changes in the codes of number, visual depiction, and monetary exchange that occurred as part of the discontinuity in Western culture known as the Renaissance—the introduction of *zero* in the practice of arithmetic, the *vanishing point* in perspective art, and *imaginary money* in economic exchange—are three isomorphic manifestations, different, but in some formal semiotic sense equivalent models, of the same signifying configuration. (1)

Of the three domains in which he discusses zero, the one that is most pertinent to my discussion is, of course, money. I hold that "imaginary money" finds a correlate in Pynchon's novel in the serial number of the rocket. This "meta-sign" disrupts, as Rotman writes, "the code in question by becoming the origin of a new, radically different mode of sign production; one whose novelty is reflected in the emergence of a semiotic subject able to signify *absence*" (57). I am proposing the possibility that Pynchon registered the mutation of money that occurred during the time he was writing *Gravity's Rainbow*. I am referring to the "Nixon shock," which brought to an end the

dollar's convertibility to gold or, to use Rotman again, inaugurated its "loss of anteriority" (57). If this seems far-fetched, I remind the reader that the fourth section of *Gravity's Rainbow* is headed by the simple epigraphical quotation "What," which has been attributed to Richard M. Nixon. More importantly, in *Inherent Vice*, Pynchon returned to Nixon, and there he placed strong emphasis on what transpired in the sphere of money during Nixon's term in office.

It would be surprising if Pynchon had not taken cognizance of the epochal change wrought by Nixon's decision. Ole Bjerg gauges its significance as follows: "When the US dollar and consequently all the other major currencies pegged to the US dollar was taken off the gold standard in 1971, this was not a temporary exception but rather the institution of a new permanent order. The collapse of the Bretton Woods system signifies a paradigm shift in the history of money" (155). If we now go back to the inventory of money references strewn throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*, we can supplement the syntagm "incommensurate with gold" (108), which, I am proposing, registered that new money regime, with other phrasings such as "money would lose its reality" (613), "in the morning the cash multiplied tenfold" (625), and "funny money" (711). Put otherwise, if we contextualize Pynchon's novel into the time of its writing, it is warrantable to argue that it shows a seepage of then contemporary monetary developments into its reconstruction of history. In that light, it can be argued that in choosing it, Pynchon was aware that the "0" is, as Rotman states, "the urmark of absence" (59) and that he employed it knowingly at a point of time marked by "the ontological abuse involved in the printing of money unbacked by specie" (91).

Before my concluding remarks, I want to show how the use to which I have put *Gravity's Rainbow* can be broadened to encompass postmodernism itself, a label under which it has been frequently subsumed. In doing so, I am taking issue with Bachmann-Medick, who, as we saw, contends that the "fundamental reassessments" undertaken by recent turns in theory replaced, amongst other things, economistic explanations. Are economic concerns wholly absent from these turns? It is symptomatic that Rotman, in his last

chapter, entitled "Absence of an Origin," goes to Derrida, Baudrillard, and other poststructuralists. There, he is answering a question he posed at the beginning of the book. After explicating the "new global order of money signs," he asks, "Now since money is the dominating source of 'value', the image of images, the only absolute given signifying credence in this culture, the question arises whether there ought to be isomorphic patterns, changes parallel to that experienced by money within other contemporary codes" (5–6). This question turns out to be rhetorical, and he convincingly shows that "isomorphic patterns"—or, as he phrases it elsewhere, a "structural morphism" (103)—exist between the mutations of money and other "codes." Of course, he is not alone in recognizing this isomorphism.

In their book *Cartographies of the Absolute* (2015), Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle write:

> One may even see money's hegemony as leading, especially with its detachment from a standard or base (in gold, namely), to a general "ungrounding" of representation, from floating currencies to floating signifiers—a theme evident in the concern with credit-money in the philosophical writings of Lyotard and Deleuze & Guattari in the days of the "Nixon Shock." (38)

My citing of Toscano and Kinkle is not fortuitous. Their succinct statement exemplifies how issues that I have brought up in my reading of *Gravity's Rainbow* are of immediate concern. They also indicate how poststructuralist thought and, I would add, postmodernist narratives, with which Pynchon's novel is frequently grouped, always already address questions of capital. To generalize, I think that those who propose that there is a homology between the "general 'ungrounding' of representation" in poststructuralisms and the mutation of money that we are living through are doing a service to the authors mentioned by Toscano and Kinkle. They show how their thinking provides a usable past in our perplexing present. To return to Pynchon, I think that he provides a similar past not if we confine our readings to the "ungrounding" strategies of his narratives but if we see these as gesturing to what I hope to

have shown always looms in the background, sometimes named, sometimes alluded to, but most frequently presupposed as its structuring core. To return to my title, that background presence is capital, capital in history, capital in action, capital as the ultimate horizon of the human world.

6.

Of course, this is not to say that Pynchon is an exception in dealing with this theme. It can hardly be so if, as Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler hold in their book *Capital as Power* (2009), capitalism "seems to be everywhere":

> The newspapers, radio, television and the internet overflow with talk of neoliberal globalization and crisis, imperialism and post-colonialism, financialization and government intervention. Experts preach the gospel of capitalist productivity, while alter-globalization protestors blame the IMF and transnational companies for many of our social ills. Some view capitalist growth as a magic bullet; for others it spells ecological disaster. (1–2)

They go on to contend that no aspect of capitalism seems to escape debate. Returning to Pynchon, one can say that his oeuvre has addressed every aspect referred to here. The historical scope of his work has dealt with stages of the development capitalism from its mercantilist period (*Mason & Dixon*), to the heyday of industrial capitalism (*Against the Day*), to today's finance capitalism (*Bleeding Edge*). But amidst this omnipresence of capitalism, Nitzan and Bichler note that something really important is missing: "In all the commotion, we seem to have lost sight of the concept that matters most: capital itself" (2). In their analysis, Nitzan and Bichler voice a disaffection with both neoclassical and Marxist thought: "Political economy, both mainstream and critical, lacks a *coherent* conception of capital. And it lacks such a theory because it deflects the issue of power. The liberals analyze capital *without* power, while the Marxists explain capital *and* power—but what we need is to theorize capital *as* power" (64). I bring this up because I think, if

political economy has proven unsatisfactory, perhaps a hearing should be given to literature in order to fathom what capital is. Pynchon, in my opinion, is high on the list of those writers who have engaged the problem of capital. To return to Nitzan and Bichler's critique, I wager to say that, in all of Pynchon's work, power is a constitutive force. I ask the reader to recall the prophesy that has already been cited: "the rationalized power-ritual that will be the coming peace" (177).

However the power of capital is conceived, the reader will find in Pynchon a rendering of its dynamics, its embodiments, its historical trajectory, its price, and its effects. What the reader will not find in Pynchon is a celebration of capital as power. However, neither will the reader find a promise of transcending that power. This is precisely the reason I believe Pynchon engages capital in a more convincing fashion than those activists who need to reduce its complexity in order to deal with it. To show how this is rendered in the text, I refer the reader to the following passage from the "Byron the Bulb" section of *Gravity's Rainbow*:

> Someday he will know everything, and still be as impotent as before. His youthful dreams of organizing all the bulbs in the world seem impossible now—the Grid is wide open, all messages can be overheard, and there are enough traitors out on the line. Prophets traditionally don't last long—they are either killed outright, or given an accident serious enough to make them stop and think, and most often they do pull back. But on Byron has been visited an even better fate. He is condemned to go on forever, knowing the truth and powerless to change anything. (654–55)

If one can speak in terms of "truth" when addressing capital, Pynchon here is fathoming its horrendous power and consequences. That insight can be put to little practical use. Its "use-value" is no more than an abetment to thinking. In its essence, that knowledge is tragic. It finds utterance in the following: "They will use us. We will help legitimize them, though. They don't need it really, it's another dividend for Them, nice but not critical. . . ." (713).

To conclude: if we do use Pynchon to map our present circumstances, he constantly warns us that this does not mean that it will preclude our being used as a dividend by the powers that be. The Preterite, and these grow in number from day to day, watch in awe the proliferation of the number on the rocket falling "absolutely and forever without sound" (760) and read the final dash in *Gravity's Rainbow* not as an invitation to sing but as a gesture commanding silence.

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The Present Moment of the Past: History in and out of Literature

Starting from Timothy Bahti's claim that "literary studies in the university are still the heir to the historicism after Hegel," readily verified by sundry historically organised takes on literary criticism and theory steadily advancing towards the present moment of comprehension, even as the true sources of the thought of the authors under scrutiny as well as of the actual origins of critical problems are unfailingly revealed to stem from the "real world," the paper aims to present T.S. Eliot's very different thinking about literature, criticism and history as a salubrious contravention of the worldwide dominance of approaches to reading works of literature predicated on unexamined notions of context and identity, which Timothy Clark dubbed "institutional Americanism," contending that it is no accident that the final thesis advanced by the historian Elco Runia in his recent *Moved by the Past*, which proposes a complete overhaul of certain certainties on which how we conceive of the past is predicated, should have a distinctly Eliotic ring to it: "By burying the dead we create not our future, but our past."

Key words: history, literature, modernity, hermeneutics, theory, T.S. Eliot, "institutional Americanism"

The distinction between past and present unavoidably underpins the very attempt at conceiving to conceive history, and in fact Jacques Le Goff posits that this is an insight most to the purpose in the writing of history. At least since Saint Augustine, the notion of the past has been inconceivable but in relation to the tripartite structure of past/present/future, the beginning of the present or contemporary moment being especially complex and including a most intricate compound of presuppositions on the collective level. For

this reason, Hegel's fabled "burden of history" weighing down the enterprise of historiography is not the same for every nation or culture, and Le Goff singles out the United States as a specifically daunting instance of overdetermination of relatively recent events due to the lack of a long autochthonous history (cf. 2). In proposing that this rather particular relation to the past haunts the purview of American criticism no less than its history, this piece takes its cue from T.S. Eliot's comparison of Hawthorne and Henry James: "Both men had that sense of the past which is peculiarly American, but in Hawthorne this sense exercised itself in a grip on the past itself; in James it is a sense of the sense" (1918; in 2014a: 738).

It is the break with the past that enables us to perceive and therefore potentially to study it, but by the same token, it makes the past irretrievably alien to us, placing it forever out of our reach. The ruptures and discontinuities, resurgences and gaps, revisions and inconsistencies all bear witness to the fact that the dialectic in which the past and the present are entangled cannot be eschewed. One must of necessity be separated from the other, but never can be completely. Marc Bloch states the problem thus: "Incomprehension of the present is the inevitable result of ignorance of the past. But it is perhaps just as fruitless to struggle to understand the past if one knows nothing about the present" (qtd. in Le Goff 18). In other words, there can never be any understanding of the past as such except from a particular historical standpoint. Ceaselessly interpreting each other, the past and the present are entangled in a particular kind of hermeneutic feedback.

In actual fact, there is no past as such; it only comes into being when put into the perspective of a specific approach to it. Historical events are a rather paradoxically named category, since they can only come into being by virtue of a twofold process: they are rendered historical—i.e. amenable to comprehension—at the price that they stop taking place—i.e. being events. What is required is, on the one hand, selection from the all-encompassing backdrop and, on the other, embedding into a (more often than not, narrative) heuristic framework. And both selection and embedding are based on a whole set of presuppositions, motives, and aims ruled by some underlying

epistemology or other: "The past is constantly being constructed and reinterpreted, and it has a future that is an integral and significant part of history" (Le Goff 108). Precisely because the whole of the past must forever be ungraspable in its multifariousness, *history* is always a narrative structure of some sort. In short, literature will inexorably underwrite the historian's brief.

In a radical challenge to historiography's business-as-usual attitude, Elco Runia has recently proposed a complete overhaul of certain certainties on which how we conceive of the past is predicated:

> FOURTH THESIS:
> People start to make history not *despite* the fact that it is at odds with—yes, destroys—the stories they live by, but *because* it destroys the stories they live by.
> I would like to remark in this connection that we routinely assume that our history is *behind* us. In the sense, however, that after a sublime historical event our worldview lags behind with what was all too possible, our history really is *before* us. We have to "catch up with it"—as the nineteenth century tried to catch up with the French Revolution, and as we, at the moment, are still trying to catch up with what the dual World War of the first half of the twentieth century has shown to be possible. I do not think—as Humboldt did—that we remain forever foreigners in the palaces we erect. Rather, we try to make them habitable. If the event we have brought about is too conspicuous to be smuggled away, catching up with it may even be a psychological necessity. (8)

Contrary to the usual practice of historiography, in order to comprehend what took place, the very taking place of an occurrence needs to be retrieved, i.e., conceived as something that has not been anticipated precisely because it could not have been foreseen.

> Historians try, as Ranke said, "um die letzte und nächste vergangenheit mit der früheren in Einklang zu bringen" ("to bring recent history [i.e., the French revolution] into harmony with what happened before"). Making a palace habitable, "taming a monster," has, however, a rather annoying conse-

> quence: it obliterates its most salient feature, namely, the fact that it was an underdetermined answer to the question "Why not?" This can perhaps be seen most clearly in the American Declaration of Independence. The famous phrase "we hold these truths to be self-evident" suggests that these "truths," though perhaps unrecognized and unfulfilled, had always been there—and that the revolutionaries only gave them their due. But that, of course, is a typical ex post facto account. The decision to throw off the British yoke was not the result of "self-evidence." On the contrary: only after the irreversible step had been taken did it occur to Thomas Jefferson that the reasons for doing so were not contingencies but "truths," and not just truths but "self-evident truths." The "self-evident truths" didn't create the event, the event created "self-evident truths." Sublime "acts of people" like the American rebellion transform consciousness to such an extent that the status quo ante becomes unimaginable the moment the status quo post becomes self-evident. Differently put: the one thing without which the sublime historical event could not have taken place—our acting upon our impulse to make a difference—evaporates in the process of coming to terms with it. This, in fact, is my fifth thesis: FIFTH THESIS: The more we commemorate what we did, the more we transform ourselves into people who did not do it. (8-9)

Protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, these assumptions are emphatically *not* assumed in literary and cultural criticism as these are practiced today. Rather, the fundamental postulates of literary and cultural history are what they have always been since these disciplines came into view in the nineteenth century: that events come about due to their historical context, that change takes place developmentally, and that this change is the unfolding of a notion, principle, or some other ideal entity. Even though it may no longer be the unexamined presupposition it once was (although this is in fact highly debatable), a hypostasised reality actually taking place "out there" still refuses to give way to the view that all contextual evidence—precisely by virtue of being evidence and inasmuch as it needs to be deciphered and interpreted, that is, "read"—is textual in nature. While there is no doubt that the relationship between text and context is, as Hayden White put it, crucial for "historians of anything whatsoever" (186), for historiography to assume

the existence and nature of the very object of its inquiry (i.e., of the historical past) would amount to an instance of *petitio principii*.

> The historically real, the past real, is that to which I can be referred only by way of an artefact that is textual in nature. The indexical, iconic, and symbolic notions of language, and therefore of texts, obscure the nature of this indirect referentiality and hold out the possibility of (feign) direct referentiality, create the illusion that there is a past out there that is directly reflected in the texts. But even if we grant this, what we see is the reflection, not the thing reflected. (209)

As if moving a flashlight in the dark, to adopt a somewhat imprecise comparison, the context is illuminated, and in a sense created, solely by the hermeneutical moves of the text at hand, which can shed light on and bring into focus only *certain parts* of the context, the supposed totality of which is bound to *always* remain out of reach.

While this might lead one to expect countenance of the *modern* in literary matters—as White for one has suggested might be favourable—even the most cursory of glances at the critical practices prevalent in the United States—and by extension of its academic reach, everywhere else—patently demonstrates that the inverse actually happens to be the case. The urge to look for history "as it really happened," instead of wasting one's time on textual nuances, and to do so on the basis of evidence supposedly "out there," as opposed to the speculative abstractions of what is dismissed as "theory," reigns unchallenged in the humanities—as witness not only the number of works devoted to the "histories" of this, that, and the other, but more importantly the self-styled "historical" viewpoint of virtually all current critical approaches. The danger this tack is fraught with has been succinctly pointed out by Antoine Compagnon: "The paradox is obvious: you are using context to explain an object that interests you precisely because it escapes this context and survives it" (10). Runia goes even further:

> Yet, precisely because our mindset resists it, fathoming how the exhilarating,

> frightening, sinful, sublimely new comes about should be a question right up the alley of theorists of history. In recent decades however, theorists of history stuck to being in their right minds rather than venturing into the disposition from which the new emerges and from which this emergence can be understood. It is, on consideration, quite beyond the pale: in a century abounding in discontinuities, theorists of history have almost exclusively focused on what historians do instead of on what happened in history. (178)

Timothy Clark even coined the phrase "institutional Americanism" (24) to describe the worldwide dominance of approaches to reading works of literature predicated on unexamined notions of context and identity. Its defining trait is the tendency to conceive of instruction as a progressive mastering of a set of tools for manufacturing "critical" readings. The discursive approach these readings employ might be described as inquisitorial, for it is a pronounced feature of this discourse that it relies upon an all-explanatory interpretative schema that is rather crudely causal, holding everything in the text "to be determined by its conditions of making" (159). It is also extremely "self-righteous" (21) and tends to view any uncertainty, ambivalence, and ambiguity, to say nothing of irony, as evasion. In practice, this tends to produce sweeping panoramas of literature (and much more beyond) that are very often the result of "inaccurate library cramming" (26). This is hardly surprising, as it is certainly not disturbed by anything so trivial as reading, its main concern being nothing less than identity.

The text is only an illustration, a puzzle to be solved, for "the fundamental claim of this critical practice is that a notion of identity, either as given or striven for, can serve as an exhaustive principle of explanation for anything in or of the text at issue" (17). The text as such and in itself is of no significance, but a means to the higher end of moral instruction. Being mere extensions of their author's identities, all texts are *exempla*: "Texts and people are continually subjected to kinds of trial procedure designed to either condemn or acquit them of degrees of complicity in metaphysical/colonial/patriarchal thinking" (20). Such readings, "insidiously reductive" as they are "in that they

pivot around one unexpressed but all-determining norm, that of a supposedly natural drive towards self-definition" (22), come across as a motley of nifty catchphrases, lofty clichés, and righteous sloganeering.

Almost a century ago, T.S. Eliot had already noticed a similar tendency when he wrote about a certain critical pronouncement that it represents "the Symbolist Movement after it has been boiled down in an American University" (1917; in 2014a: 597). The French reference is particularly a propos in the present context, for, as Susan Sontag pointed out half a century later, not incidentally introducing the work of Roland Barthes, the modern tendencies that have long occupied "the central position in contemporary letters" in France tend to be "regarded as marginal and suspect by the Anglo-American literary community," no more than a provocative minority current, labelled "avant-garde" or "experimental" literature (xiii). Although this goes a long way in explaining why, for instance, Jonathan Littell recently chose to write in French what is in many respects, as Walter Benn Michaels argued (cf. 2013), an exemplary instance of the Great American Novel – *Les Bienveillantes* (2006) or *The Kindly Ones* – the more pressing query should perhaps be how it is that in America the past is, in Faulkner's memorable apothegm, "never dead. It is not even past" (535). That a propitious way out of this peculiar conundrum elaborated in the poetical and critical writings of T.S. Eliot, from whom the title of this paper is appropriated, has on the whole gone unnoticed despite the ample currency of his work, might in and of itself suggest that what is really at stake in discussions of the relations that obtain between literature and history is the notion of the modern.

To anticipate somewhat but also recapitulate, here is Runia's concluding thesis, interestingly presented under the rather Eliotic chapter heading "Burial of the Dead":

> by committing sublime historical deeds, by doing things that are at odds with our identity, we place history outside ourselves. Committing history thus is a kind of burial: we take leave of ourselves as we have come to know ourselves and become what we as yet do not know. In the process we come to see

> what is lost forever: what we are no longer. This is my tenth and final thesis: TENTH THESIS: By burying the dead we create not our future, but our past. (16)

In spite of his general reticence in this regard, Eliot does avail himself of the term modern on various occasions in his miscellaneous writings and sometimes even in their titles, as witness *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (1933) and *Essays Ancient and Modern* (1936). The most explicit use of the word is perhaps to be found in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England*. Based on his lectures delivered at Harvard in 1932–1933, when he was Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry, the book presents Eliot at his most academic. The penultimate chapter, "The Modern Mind," opens with the discussion of the "progress in self-consciousness," supposed to be characteristic of the subject the chapter-title refers to. Eliot is quick to point out, however, that he has been charting this "*progress*" throughout the preceding discussion of conceptions of poetry and that it is not to be taken as being necessarily accompanied by "an association of high value," since it cannot be "wholly abstracted from the general changes in the human mind in history." And that "these changes have any teleological significance is not one of [his] assumptions" (2015b: 668). But he did write that the task of the critic is "to determine what is meant by 'modern' poetry, and to trace, among the variety of currents and eddies, what is the line of true poetry, as distinguished from mere novelties" (1920; in 2014b: 212).

Eliot was not modern in the sense that he belonged to the period textbooks call "modernism" to a large extent because he was averse to any form of historicist narratives, as *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* makes abundantly clear. Ostensibly charting the history of poetic criticism in England, Eliot in fact undermines the possibility of any such history. There is continuity, but, and this is all important for Eliot, there is also the perspective from which the continuity is perceived:

> Amongst all these demands from poetry and responses to it there is always some permanent element in common, just as there are standards of good and bad writing independent of what any one of us happens to like and dislike; but every effort to formulate the common element is limited by the limitations of particular men in particular places and at particular times; and these limitations become manifest in the perspective of history.

No "objective" history is possible – precisely because there is no escape from history. It is perhaps a commonplace that "our criticism, from age to age, will reflect the things that the age demands," but it is equally important to notice that, as "each age demands different things from poetry," these demands "are modified, from time to time, by what some new poet has given." And we are not exempt from this predicament: "Our contemporary critics, like their predecessors, are making particular responses to particular situations." Which is not to deny the need for histories, only to realise their relativism, since "the criticism of no one man and of no one age can be expected to embrace the whole nature of poetry or exhaust all of its uses" (2015b: 680). All the periods are presented as relative to one another and at the same time each as absolute on its own terms.

At the outset, Eliot writes, "my subject is not merely the relation of criticism to poetry, if by that we assume that we already know what poetry is, and does, and is for. Indeed, a good part of criticism has consisted simply in the pursuit of answers to these questions" (580). Unlike the historicist, but like the critic, he does not know what he is looking for. The danger he thus tries to avoid is the one that plagues much contemporary writing in the humanities: generalisation from a privileged example. The usual reason for "the unsatisfactoriness of our theories and general statements about poetry is that while professing to apply to all poetry, they are really theories about, or generalizations from, a limited range of poetry." For we are "apt either to shape a theory to cover the poetry that we find the most moving, or—what is less excusable—to choose the poetry which illustrates the theory we want to hold" (679–80). Rather, one must "start with the supposition that we do

not know what poetry is, or what it does or ought to do, or of what use it is." In fact, we "may even discover that we have no idea what *use* is; at any rate we had better not assume that we know" (580).

In counter distinction to the dominant practices of both literary history and theory, Eliot—like Derrida or Bakhtin, for example—rejects a simplistic linear understanding of history, in which periods (or poetical and critical schools) neatly follow and develop, eventually discrediting in order to replace one another, all the while remaining curiously on a prescribed course. Over against this essentialist "merry-go-round" view, in which new interpretations of a given period amount to nothing more than a changing of the guards on painted horses, Eliot argues for a complex interrelation of the past, the present, and the future as all mutually informing and constituting each other. One important consequence of accepting this view is that a particular critical position under discussion should be seen more as situated—and therefore to be judged as, for example, aligned, incongruent, or conflicting with other positions available at a given point in time—rather than as primarily oriented against all or some of those that preceded it. This problematic is in its turn—and most pertinently in the context at hand—inseparable from the concept of identity.

It is nothing short of curious to see the view that Eliot may once have had a point, but that, as they say, times have changed espoused by the radical proponents of the historicist outlook. It was Fredric Jameson who put forth a striking assertion that those works that are "part of the so-called canon and are taught in schools and universities" are *thereby* deprived of any thought-provoking potential, for this very fact, he claims, "at once empties them of any of their older subversive power" (1998: 17-18). It is not clear what subversive power Jameson and his ilk could ever have conceivably claimed for their own theories, which had long since become part of "the so-called canon" of theory and are surely taught in the universities. It is, however, in regard of such considerations that the question Jameson once asked should be considered: "But is T.S. Eliot recuperable?" (1991: 303). From where Jameson stands, the viability of this operation is to be gauged by the profit it would yield for a

given academic project. And it is a widely accepted contention that the relegating of modernism to a closed historical period is one such project.

As exemplified by Eliot, the modernist stance, by means of drawing attention to its own strategies of representation, foregrounds precisely what historicism sometimes preaches but always steers clear of in practice—to wit, the historical context. In this it contrasts strikingly with any return to history in an ahistorical manner, which proceeds by ignoring the historical nature of historical enquiry. The various movements, schools, "studies," and "–isms" in vogue in the humanities for the last couple of decades have thus more often than not tended to practice just such ahistorical historicism by no means inadvertently, but for a very good reason. A case in point is provided by, among others, Frank Lentricchia, when, in a widely accepted practice, he rewrites "Tradition and the Individual Talent" point for point as an argument *against* Eliot (cf. 118ff). To lack a "historical consciousness," Lentricchia writes, giving credit to Kenneth Burke, "to be without a sense of history is not only to be without a sense where we are but also to be disqualified as agents of change." Historical consciousness is nothing less than a precondition for revolution: "To be without a proper sense of history is necessarily to be complicit with all that is, with the institutions and the authorities in dominance" (119).

This failing is what Eliot purportedly shares with so-called theory and, in an interesting case of begging the issue, Lentricchia proceeds to claim that what, for instance, Paul de Man "provided" was but "a reading machine," merely "the models of deconstructive strategy, the terminology, the idea of literature and literary history" (38). If it is far from clear why what this machine was producing should be politically nefarious or why de Man's teaching in particular and "the message of poststructuralism in the United States" in general, should be "political conservatism" (50), the figure for this insidious intent was none other than Eliot: "Deconstruction is conservatism by default—in Paul de Man it teaches the many ways to say there is nothing to be done. The mood is all from early T.S. Eliot. We are Prufrocks all, all hollow men, who inhabit the wasteland that we now know is the humanities wing of the modern university: "Paralyzed force, gesture without motion" (51).

No wonder deconstruction left the canon "pretty much intact" and again asserted "literary autonomy," that is, the "segregation of the literary and political functions of the intellectual" (39). For Lentricchia—and here he is clearly representative of a swarm of subsequent critical schools—literature is "all writing considered as social practice." He quotes Burke with approval: "Not only is *Mein Kampf* literature, it was highly effective literature" (157). For, in an italicised rebuff of Auden: "*Literature makes something happen*" (105). The problem, however, is that although this is invariably claimed to be achieved "through literary form" (104), in actual fact, the examples given without fail comprise contents and themes. This is the difficulty all ideological criticism encounters but for the most part refuses to acknowledge—if there is such a thing as an intellectual act, and without this premise ideological criticism itself is rather pointless—then how is an act of intellectual deliberation not acting? Or, in what sense exactly is de Man a quietist and Lentricchia a revolutionary? Have they not both wrought certain changes in the teaching of literature? (One has yet to hear of a critical book helping those in need.) If the effectiveness of literature is to be measured on the scale of millions slaughtered and world wars caused, then certainly the academy can shut up shop.

More to the point, surely no one has ever read *Mein Kampf* as anything else than what it is—a jingoistic call to arms and fascist propaganda—and still not everyone joined in. And what is it that makes that possible? According to Lentricchia, this can only mean that such readers have not read (or just barely) Hitler's book at all, since "if the ideology of the text and the ideology of the reader do not overlap in some substantial way, the reading experience" will "not take place, or it will barely take place" (106). Eliot, of course, could not stress his disapproval more emphatically. Most uncharacteristically, he even advances a "thesis" in this regard:

> *If* there is "literature," *if* there is "poetry," then it must be possible to have full literary or poetic appreciation without sharing the beliefs of the poet. This is as far as my thesis goes in the present essay. It may be argued whether there is literature, whether there is poetry, and whether there is any meaning in the

> term "full appreciation." But I have assumed for this essay that these things exist and that these terms are understood. (1929; in 2015a: 727-28)

All hermeneutic approaches that insist that interests are constitutive of knowledge, while at the same time relying upon some variant of the non-relativist order of truth, are of course in serious trouble, as far as epistemology is concerned, even if they tend not to worry about such issues. According to Timothy Bahti, the net result of the re-orientation in critical thinking under the aegis of the so-called "new" historicism, the school of that name being but the tip of the iceberg, was historicism pure and simple only "with jazzier materials, licentious crossdressing, and lurid tales of crime and punishment, and the like" (292). In fact, historicism, which was widely reported to have returned, seems never to have left the humanities: "The preponderance of historically defined teaching and research in the modern university's study of literature leaves history today a horizon beyond which we can scarcely think. Literary studies in the university are still the heir to the historicism after Hegel" (291).

The claim that the historicist outlook underwrites most thinking about literature in the academy can be easily verified by the fact that all surveys of and readers in criticism are organised historically, moving more or less steadily towards the illumination of the present moment, while the method of presentation claims to uncover the real sources of thinking of the authors under scrutiny and the true origins of critical problems—which are all, of course, to be found in the "real world" to which the works of literature and criticism alike are supposed to refer.

In marked contrast, Eliot's stated aim is "to recognise a number of uses for poetry, without admitting that poetry must always and everywhere be subservient to any one of them" (1933; in 2015b: 685). Most importantly, however, "Poetry is of course not to be defined by its uses" (692). Examined closely, poetry and criticism prove to be especially resistant to being inserted into a framework of development or degradation. And this is no accident, according to Hans-Robert Jauss: "The form of literary history sanctioned

by the historian is conceivably the worst medium through which to display the historicity of literature" (51). The illusions of "romantic historiography," predicated upon the "epic fictions" of the completed process, of the first beginning and the definitive end, and of the self-presenting past (cf. 53–54), exploded by Droysen, are nowhere less apposite than in art and literature. A new literary work does not present itself as absolutely new, but "predisposes its audience to a specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions" (23). The new is only ever conceivable as a historical category, for only against the background of something that is understood to be old can something else be apprehended as being new, and it is exactly this, the charting of such constellations of relations of innovation and rearrangement, that literary history should concern itself with.

It is because Eliot was of the same view that in his most famous essay, on the dialectical relation of the individual talent to tradition, he expounds his claim that the new work must be "judged by the standards of the past" by insisting on the verb he just used: "I say judged, not amputated, by them; not judged to be as good as, or worse or better than, the dead; and certainly not judged by the canons of the dead critics." What tends to happen is exactly the critical amputation that Eliot warns against, and precisely due to the lack of the historical sense, of the awareness of one's place in relation to the past and the discrimination between what is living and what is dead. "It is a judgement, a comparison, in which two things are measured by each other." The relation is again dialectical. The new work extends the whole structure (which is what the word order really means here), which for its part made it possible. There is no other way about it: "To conform merely would be for a new work not really to conform at all; it would not be new, and would therefore not be a work of art" (1919; in 2014b: 107).

The idea of conforming is here anything but conformist, as Eliot had made clear in his dissertation: "The idea, from one point of view apart from the world and from another attached to it, yet contains already the character of the world, a world, as I said before, which shows by the very fact that that

idea can be attached to it that it is somehow prepared for the reception of that idea" (1916; in 2014a: 264). Consequently, "what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it" (1919; in 2014b: 106). Criticism, as expounded in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and elsewhere, is for Eliot above all a reflexive activity. To contend that "we should be none the worse for articulating what passes in our minds when we read a book and feel an emotion about it, for criticizing our own minds in their work of criticism" (105) evidently means that, since we are always already engaged in various acts of discrimination and analysis, criticism proper is an active awareness of that constitutive activity of which we of necessity must to a large degree remain unconscious, precisely in order to function as conscious beings.

That the past works become visible and progressively ever more definable in the subsequent changes of aesthetic experience, effected by the interaction between the literary work and the literary public, is precisely the function of their being past. The structures that condition the process of formation of tradition are none other than those formed by the changes of horizon, which allow for the possibilities of interpretation and comprehension. The hubris of much recent "radical criticism," predicated upon not acknowledging this, lies in the fact that it knows which of the relations are more important than others, not only which are more "relevant," but also which are "true." The most important usually overlooked assumption behind this orientation is a form of what Hilary Putnam termed the "epistemic naturalist fallacy" (297). In his analysis of historicism, he points out the "incoherence and inconsistency of positivism" which are due to the fact that "the verifiability theory of meaning is itself neither empirically testable nor mathematically provable," which forces even its proponents to concede that it is no more than a proposal. "But proposals presuppose ends and values; and it is essential doctrine for positivism that the goodness or badness of ultimate ends and values is entirely subjective." It is because of this that one critic's insight is another critic's hogwash. (The frequently encountered claim that an otherwise misguided work of criticism is really quite true as soon as it

is read as a commentary on its author rather than on its purported subject is surely informative in this respect.) While admitting the general truth of this fact, the historically inclined critic is nevertheless able to stand aloof and observe how things really proceed. Unfortunately, the ground for the historicist's own belief is no more firm, at least philosophically: "Since there are no universally agreed upon ends or values with respect to which the positivist 'proposal' is best, it follows that the doctrine itself is merely the expression of a subjective preference for certain language forms (scientific ones) or certain goals (prediction)" (288). The prejudices of a preferred interpretive approach (historicism being a particularly instructive case in point) render the possible insights of different methods invisible by default, even as it blinds such criticism to the fact that its own manner of explanation, like any other, "is interest-relative and context-sensitive" (297). Which means that, in criticism, "there is no method except to be very intelligent," with "intelligence itself swiftly operating the analysis of sensation to the point of principle and definition" (1920; in 2014b: 267), as Eliot put it describing the perfect critic keenly aware of his own imperfection.

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The Language Poetry Experiment and the Transformation of the Canon[1]

American language poetry was the most important form of experimental poetry formation to appear in the 1970s. It challenged our way of writing poetry and thinking about it, and impacted the transformation of the canon of American poetry. My intention in this article is to conceptualize the work of these poets through several "turns": the linguistic, the cultural, the performative, and the global/neoliberal turn.

Key words: cultural turn, experimental poetry, neoliberalism, language poetry, linguistic turn, performative turn

The phenomenon of American language poetry now belongs to history. According to many of its interpreters, it was the most important experimental poetry to appear in the United States during the last three decades of the twentieth century. The importance and complexity of the work of these poets impacted the transformation of the very field of poetry. The language poets[2] reshaped the canon of American poetry, and they did this by reshaping the practice of writing poetry, as well as the practice of thinking about and interpreting poetry. They position themselves on the political left and consider their work to be political. Their work from the 1970s to late 1990s went through several important turns, from the language turn to the performative and cultural turns to the global turn, which I will discuss below.

At the beginning, it should be said that we might think of language

1 This text was written as a part of MPRTNRS project no. 178029.

2 Charles Bernstein, Ron Silliman, Barrett Watten, Lyn Hejinian, and Michael Davidson, to mention some of them.

poetry as a *poetry formation*, to use Alan Golding's words, in the same way that Raymond Williams defined the social formation as "those effective movements and tendencies, in intellectual and artistic life, which have significant and sometimes decisive influence on the active development of a culture, and which have a variable and often oblique relation to formal institutions" (Williams 117). The concept of social formation in language poetry is interwoven with the interest in innovative forms (Watten 2015: 241). Language poets' work can be situated in the "social momentum of post-1945 countercultural literary movements" as well as their precursors the Beat poets, the New York School, or the Black Mountain College poets (Watten 2015: 241), all of whom are known under the umbrella term *New American Poetry*. Language poets connected "oppositional politics and cultural views with linguistically inventive writing" (Bernstein 286), which was at odds with earlier left-wing poets who were interested in representational and populist approaches to poetry (ibid.). This meant that, for them, it was not important just what poetry is or what it does, but also how it works, and this *how* led them to consider poetry as a social activity, in which the commitment to the community formation was important and performed through intensive mutual interaction (Bernstein 282). The interaction was realized thanks to the established alternative network of publishing and editing, which made it possible for them to produce alternative concepts of poetry, ways of reading, and literary histories. All these were possible because of the technical revolution which enabled the proliferation of small presses, little magazines, and book editions, a tendency that started in the 1950s and reached its peak with the language poets. Oren Izenberg explains:

> Language poetry has, since its inscription in 1971, devoted a significant portion of its energies to the construction of an 'alternative' literary culture, founding little magazines such as This, Hills, o-blek, Temblor, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, Poetics Journal, and Aerial, small presses such as Roofs, Potes and Poets, O Book, The Figures, Tuumba, and Sun and Moon,

> and an endless number of mimoes, broadsheets, newsletters, reading series, collaborations, and, of course, conferences. (144)

Language poetry was avant-garde, radical, and experimental. It appeared in the context of the anti-academic field of poetry. If we consider the moment of these poets' appearance diachronically, we see that they were a continuation and at the same time a critique of *New American Poetry* as a countercultural stream. The movement appeared as an offshoot of New American Poetry, critiquing its bardic, personalistic impulses (Đurić 146). If we look at the synchronic level, language poetry appeared at the same time as the so-called *workshop poem*, which developed after confessional poetry became the new mainstream. The term *workshop poem* refers to narrative poetry, which constructs a lyrical *I* "as the central organizing or ocular point" (Derksen 130). The goal of so many writing programs at various universities where workshop poetry was taught was to promote a poetics of *individual voice* articulated in regard to a poet's previous experiences and emotions, which were supposed to be authentically expressed in free verse (Rasula 416). In relation to the anti-intellectualism of workshop poetry, language poets developed a highly intellectual approach to the production of poetry.

Language poetry and the linguistic, cultural, and performative turns

At first, the language poets focused their attention on the very language they used in making the poems. This characteristic made their work part of a *linguistic turn* in arts and humanities. This direction was emphasized by Ron Silliman, who pointed to Robert Grenier's now famous proclamation "I hate speech" as a starting point for language writing (Silliman 1986b: xv). Grenier's proclamation was a gesture of rejecting the speech-based-poetry of the New Americans as an earlier avant-garde poetry. Referring to the Russian Cubo-Futurist notion of *word-as-such*, the language poets focused in their work on the "production of material text" (Watten 2003: 44). In other words, like other avant-garde movements, they insisted on the materiality of their techniques, which meant "of a material signifier: language, print, sound

as the foundation of its genres or media" (Watten 2003: 48). They insisted on the social materiality of the linguistic, which is why this "language centered" writing worked with parataxis, in which connectors between the elements of the sentence have been elided. Silliman introduced the term new sentence, by which he meant the "serial or paratactical ordering of grammatical sentences" (Bernstein 291). Silliman emphasized that the *new sentence* "is the first mode of 'language writing' which has been able to incorporate all the elements of language, from below the sentence level *and* above" (Silliman 1986b: 575). In other words, the language poets, according to Silliman, used *sentence-centered poems*, investigating the sentence, as well as the paragraph and the stanza, or consider the *page-as-field*, in which the page is a "spatial unit filled with 'desyntaxed' words or phrases" (Silliman 1987: 62). Golding claims:

> Writers like Lyn Hejinian, Carla Harryman, and Ron Silliman break down story, argument, and autobiography into narratively and logically discontinuous juxtaposed sentences; they are particularly concerned with how narrative embodies certain ways of constructing the individual self or subject (and thus, implicitly, certain concepts of 'life'), and with investigating Silliman's question: 'How do sentences integrate into the higher units of meaning?' . . . . (149)

Poets like Charles Bernstein, Susan Howe, Bruce Andrews, and Barrett Watten worked with different forms of disruption, breaking down "the syntax of sentences into the parataxis of phrases and shifting parts of speech" (Golding 149). These poets broke words into component syllables, disrupted syntax, and worked with typography and the visual aspect of the page.

Here are a few examples. In his work *Pcoet*, David Melnick worked, in Silliman's terms, with the level below the sentence, which means with the materiality of the signifier:

> thoeisu

thoiea

akcorn woi citrus locqvump

icgja. . . (Melnick 90)

Charles Bernstein's poem "Islets/Irritations" works with the page-as-field, upon which the poet puts words in which syntactical connections are destabilized and questioned:

to proper to behindless weigh in a rotating.
rectilinear our plated *embrosserie des petits cocobons*
pliant feint insensate, round hands of immense . . . (Bernstein 1)

The beginning of Ron Silliman's *Tjanting* is an example of the poet's working with sentence and paragraph, using procedural forms which are generative. In this sense, Silliman used the rule-governed procedures of "Fibonacci number sequence to determine the number of sentences in each paragraph" (Watkin).

Not this.
What then?
I started over & over. Not this.
Last week I wrote "the muscles in my palm so sore from halving the rump roast I cld brely grip the pen." What then? This morning my lip is blistered.
(Silliman 1986a:11)

Although this focusing on the formal aspects of language writing, which was performed in accordance with the linguistic turn, could appear to be a depoliticizing gesture, what was at stake was the politicization of the poetic. In other words, from the late 1970s through the 1980s and 1990s,

the language poets worked with the leftist concept of *politicization of culture*, which they share foremost with Post-Marxism, New Historicism, Cultural Studies, and Cultural Materialism. The crucial issue was that the *cultural turn* brought in by cultural studies in poetry meant rethinking the category of the aesthetic, which is now understood as an active agent that is in intensive although usually hidden interaction with the political, social, and economic realms (Damon et al. 2). Shaping the post-formalist contextualizing theories of the poetic text (DuPlessis 7), Barrett Watten introduced the notion of *social formalism*, referring to the way the "social exists in and through its [textual] forms" (Watten, qtd. in DuPlessis 8), and Charles Bernstein's *politics of poetic form* pointed to "how radically innovative poetic styles can have social meanings" or how "choices of grammar, vocabulary, syntax, and narrative reflect ideology" (Bernstein vii).

As already pointed out, the attention of the language poets was from the beginning directed toward the visual aspect of the printed page, in the tradition of historical avant-garde movements, from Futurism and Cubo-Futurism to Concrete and Visual poetry, but poetry readings were also an important part of their interest. This led them to the discussion of the acoustic aspect of poetry, which I see as the *performative turn* in their theorizations of poetry, as well as their poetry practice. Although the notion of *performance* could be applied to the visual outlook of the printed page, and Johanna Drucker has investigated *visual performativity* (Drucker 1998) in experimental writing, I will focus on the sense of this word which refers to the foregrounding of the acoustic aspect of the reading of poetry, or the *sounding* of the poem, to use Jerome Rothenberg's term (121). This means that the language poets were aware that twentieth-century innovative poets "work with the sound as material, where sound is neither arbitrary nor secondary, but constitutive" (Bernstein 4). The poem is seen as multiform, due to its different typographic appearances within the printed culture (magazines, books, anthologies) and the oral interpretation of it can be seen as a destabilizing "resistance to textual authority" (Bernstein 10; Đurić 152-53). Pointing to the different attitudes toward reading, Bernstein emphasizes that one group of poets considers the

reading as "an extension of an authorized and stable written work" (123), while others consider oral interpretation to be quite a different version of the work, and thus develop different performance styles. Emphasizing that, for some contemporary poets, the poetry performance is central to their practice, Bernstein in historical perspective distinguished between the orality of analphabetic cultures and alphabetic ones:

> The poetry of analphabetic cultures used prosodic formulas both to aid meaning and to goad composition. Since there were no scripts, literal memorization was inconceivable. Memory, as a poetic practice, involves an active exploration of the unknowable in ways that impart an evanescent presence. Memorization is a postscript technique that requires precise, literal reproduction of a prescribed source. In contrast, the oral poetry of analphabetic cultures is a technology for the storage and retrieval of cultural memory that involves variance, improvisation, elaboration. In this sense, memorization in poetry is a theatricalization of orality rather than an instance of it. So it's not surprising that, currently, the memorized spoken word is the most marked 'performance' style of poetry presentation, which often resembles an actor's performance (motivated character and all). (124-25)

The language poets' experience as interpreters as well as poets help them to establish themselves as authorities in the field of poetry production and interpretation, which has resulted in their impact on the transformation of the canon.

Reshaping the canon

In the field of American poetry, the university is a dominant institution with the important function of shaping the poetic canons, which means that "institutional and canonical critique become synonymous" (Golding 149). In this respect, the language poets challenged "almost every aspect of poetic canon formation as it has been historically practiced in the academy" (Golding 145). As has already been mentioned, they managed to establish their own alternative institutions, while at the same time opposing and occu-

pying the dominant institutions of the academy, which started happening after 1990. The language poets' intention was, like many avant-garde movements before them, to transform the dominant idea of what poetry is as an art. In their theoretical and poetical practice, they reshaped the canon by, on the one hand, focusing attention on the authors, which had not been an important reference for actual poetry practice, and, on the other, by the devices they activated in the process of writing. The poets pointed to European avant-garde poetry movements like the Russian Cubo-Futurism, Italian Futurism, international Lettrism and Sound poetry. Within the context of American poetry, to the main figures of the first modernist wave like Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, they added and revived interest in Gertrude Stein as well as the Objectivists, the second wave of modernists, like Louis Zukofsky, George Oppen, and Lorine Niedecker. The heritage of the Black Mountain school, especially the work of Robert Creeley and Robert Olson, as well as the New York school, especially the work of Kenneth Koch and Barbara Guest became important. Their interest also embraced the ethnopoetics of Jerome Rothenberg and the talk poems of David Antin.

In the discourse of poets and critics, the notion of poetry was generally equivalent to the notion of the lyric. This meant that poets in the poem are dealing with a lyrical "I", which emotionally reacts to its environment and the people it interacts with. In this paradigm, the way a poet uses the language is strictly coded as poetical, i.e., different form prose (Đurić 30). Language poets also changed the way of writing poetry. Instead of the lyrical "I", emotional and narrative expressivism, their writing is realized by fragmentation and parataxis, and they have blurred the distinction between poetry and prose writing, destroying the bourgeois aesthetics with its myth of individualism and humanism. Connected with this was the most interesting intervention that was equally found in poetry and in other writings: the blurring of the distinction between poetry and theory. Jed Rasula points out that, in the context of American poetry, "poetic praxis and theoretical examination have rarely been so intimately bound together" (405). This also has to do with the language poets' insistence on "structuralist homology of language and social

order" (Derkson 125). According to Derkson, the "self-determined individual free to participate in the marketplace" could be understood as the ideal subject produced by neoliberalism (130), which implies the commodification and commercialization of all aspects of contemporary life. In order to oppose this totalizing tendency, language writers started treating language as the site of social engagement. The idea could be recognized in line of the avant-garde as a utopian project. Namely, the idea was to transform the social subject through language and also through the model of reading as productive consumption. So, in the language poets' writing, the poets themselves were produced as a community of active readers of one another's work, and as a reader, every poet could become a member of the community (Rasula 397). In language writing, the poets emphasized the materiality of the text, and the reader became co-producer of the text (ibid.), so that the variety of aesthetic possibilities and methods had a function "to bring reader and writer through language to experience and reconstruct meaning together" (Messerli 8). The question those poets were dealing with was, What is "the place and the nature of writing under capitalism"? (Golding 150), or in Jeff Derksen's formulation: "The question was not just *how* do you write a lyrical poem after Nixon, but *how* do you create social meaning during Reagan's time?" (124). In order to answer this question, the important aspect of language poetry practice was to establish the relation "between material text and literary community," and this was done, among other ways, using the strategies of multiple authorship (Watten 2003: 44). In this way, the language poets subverted the idea of the individual writer as a source of literary creativity, as well as the idea of authorial originality. One of the first collaborations I will mention is the project *Legend* written by Bruce Andrews, Charles Bernstein, Ray di Palma, Steve McCaffery, and Ron Silliman in 1980. In *Legend*, we find single-authored sentences, as well as texts written by two or three authors writing in the form of dialogic improvisation, as well as multi-authored collaborations. Barrett Watten described five types of texts published in *Legend*:

> 1) thematic arguments, 2) the exploration of the signifying potential of spe-

> cific linguistic levels; sentence, phrase, lexeme, morpheme, phoneme, 3) the exploration of the signifying potential of graphic signs, both linguistic and non-linguistic; 4) forms of intertextuality created by mixing modes of signification as they explore the space between subject positions, and 5) dialogic argument. (2003: 64-65)

The second multi-authored work I would like to mention is *Leningrad – American Writers in the Soviet Union* (1991) written by Michael Davidson, Lyn Hejinian, Ron Silliman, and Barrett Watten. Izenberg characterizes this work as a "'narrative' poem, the text *documents* the meeting of Soviet and American poets. It records their conversation and exchanges, their troubled efforts to bridge the gap that separates East and West, but at the formal level the poem is also a highly self-conscious occasion for a meeting of the American poets themselves" (154-46). *Leningrad* was written using a complex procedure for exchanging and circulating manuscripts in progress, allowing the poets to respond to one another and revise the text in light of each other's contributions (Izenberg 147).

The last group work I will mention is *The Grand Piano – an Experiment in Collective Autobiography, San Francisco 1973-1980*, written by the Bay Area Language poets from the 1970s: Bob Perelman, Barrett Watten, Steve Benson, Carla Harryman, Tom Mandel, Ron Silliamn, Kit Robinson, Lyn Hejinian, Rae Armantrout, and Ted Pearson. It appeared in ten volumes from 2006 to 2010. It is imagined as "a vital contribution to the collective memory of the poetry of that period," according to James Sherry, who adds, "This collaborative series explains one group's perspective on the history of the progressive poetry movement of the 70s and 80s and as such represents a unique biography. The relations of the individual to the society and its intermediate institutions, such as the Grand Piano readings, is relevant to any thoughtful analyses of the place of poetry writing and production today" (Sherry).

Global turn and language poetry

Discussing the global/neoliberal turn in politics, economics and culture, Jeff Derksen stresses the "cultural logic of globalization" with its imposition of "neoliberalism's ideology of economic growth and progress" (Derksen10). This process results in the uneven expansion of economic accumulation, and the economization of every aspect of human life. In this context, Derksen emphasizes:

> the fundamental changes that the Language writers present to the social role and production of poetry in a public sphere that was rapidly changing as a result of social disinvestment and the reorganization of the relations of culture and politics of globalization and neoliberalism. (124)

The goal of the language poets was the intended transformation of the social subject through language, which would enable productive consumption, so that the reader is not passive in his/her reception of the already given meaning. The texts have become productive, which means they show to the reader that language is not a transparent medium, which conveys pre-given meaning, but is productive, and in that productivity solicits an active reader as co-producer of the text's meaning. This kind of open text can be understood, according to John Hartley, as a *cultural ideological apparatus* and enables the reader to "enter into the overdetermined field of language as a productive rather than the interpolated subject" (Derksen 140). But the open text and the production of multiple meanings understood within the context of the post-Fordist flexibility of production and consumption could also be interpreted as an instance of the neoliberal way of production and consumption.

In this regard, we find two opposite approaches to the phenomenon of language writing. One is to consider language writing as a radical poetic movement geared towards larger social struggles, and the other is to consider language writing as complicit with the symptoms of globalization (Derksen125). This contradiction in understanding the work of language poets I

will leave unresolved.

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Pacific Ocean Experience as a "Different Optic" of Hawaiian Literary History (Floating between Asian American and Pacific Studies)

This article focuses on the regional, local and oceanic aspects of Hawaiian literature proposing that its value might be interesting for the understanding of the heterogeneity of the American project. Literary voices from these islands are randomly discussed within the Asian American Studies or Pacific Studies projects. The author hereby proposes that the literary history of these islands might be useful for research in cultural human geography, giving us a better understanding of the concepts of island, sea, and ocean, as well as for the comprehension of the role of the economy in the development of the regions of the United States. An oceanic approach in this sense might be of value if introduced more thoroughly into the agenda of American cultural and literary research. As a meeting point between East and West this archipelago is situated at the crossroads of the modern trade routes of the Pacific Rim and therefore its literary production might offer an interesting insight into the understanding of the contemporary world.

Key words: American Studies, oceanic approach, Hawaiian literature, Pacific history, literary cartography

Generally speaking, contemporary Hawaiian literature represents an exotic and at least triple mixture, that of East, West and native Polynesian voices. An understanding of the writing of Hawaiian local authors requires historical insight into the development of the islands before and after their entrance into modernity. Official western history of this archipelago begins

with its discovery by James Cook for the British Crown, which marked the beginning of the end of the Stone Age for the islanders. The changes that followed were deep and ruthless for the indigenous population. Politically independent but economically and culturally overpowered by the new settlers, by the end of the nineteenth century these islands became territory of the rising new world power, the United States. In the course of the twentieth century, as the American project was reaching its position at the center of a new world order, Hawaii found its place as the official fiftieth star of the Union flag. The only island state, it was always a different and seemingly far-away Pacific paradise. Yet, reading this literature leads to many different and less paradisiacal conclusions.

The aim of this article is to enter the fiction of old and modern literary Hawaii through a proposed reading of the notions of island, sea, and ocean as somewhat neglected concepts in cultural human geography. The article will also try to comprehend the meaning of this region for the development of the American project. Besides, since the country's economic and military focus has been changing recently, and the Pacific Rim is leading in the game of world trade and exchange of goods and capital (Wilson 391), it might be interesting to question and analyze the possibility of reading the economy and the American project through the literature that has been written in the very center of what is still the American Pacific. Sporadic criticism of this literature can be found within Asian American Studies or as a part of Pacific Studies, but we will try to prove, drawing from Grgas and Dvorak, and their proposals of an oceanic and heterogeneous approach to American Studies, that Hawaiian literature – native, settler or immigrant – rightfully belongs to its own oceanic Hawaiian-American niche.

Founding our argument in the real-life oceanic economy and its importance for the United States, we will focus our attention on Hawaii, the only oceanic state. Hawaiian literature is burdened with the different histories of its peoples, their voyages, generations who have travelled, lived, migrated across the Pacific, from continents to islands and back, and from islands to islands. We will try to pinpoint how useful these different histories and stories

might be for the understanding of literature, the human geography of the sea, and furthermore we will try to approach this literature in the contemporary world as possible literary cartography valuable for American Studies. The article does not focus on specific work of fiction but merely tries to set a course for the proposed kind of literary navigation.

Oceans and the United States

As Stipe Grgas suggests in his book in the chapter entitled "Oceanic Space in American Studies," (published in Croatian in 2014), the role of the oceans in the formation of American history and the impact they had on the economic and military development of American exceptionalism have not been appropriately considered (254-68). In an unpretentious attempt to offer one possible reconsideration of the oceanic approach within the agenda of American Studies it may be useful to borrow from the discipline of geography by quoting the *Routledge Handbook of National and Regional Ocean Policies*, from the chapter "Development of a National Ocean Policy in the United States":

> The United States is a major maritime nation. Its ocean and coastal areas are priceless assets that support the nation's economy, security, health and well-being, and long-term resilience. The United States claims an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of 11.5 million km2 – the world's largest (FAO, 2005). The US EEZ is 25 per cent larger than the US land mass area of 9.2 million km2, and its coastline extend for 19.924 km (CIA, 2014). The oceans and coasts of the United States directly support marine transportation, fisheries and aquaculture, energy production, recreation, biotechnology, and other uses. US coastal shoreline counties (including the Great Lakes) accounted for 41 per cent of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2010. This economic activity contributed about 44 million jobs and US$2.4 trillion in wages (NOAA, 2012). While these figures certainly matter, it is important to consider that these are only the market values of ocean and

> coastal resources. The non-market values, such as that of public access to the beach or unobstructed ocean-view, are estimated at over $100 billion a year (NOEP, undated). Further, it is becoming increasingly clear that the services that these ecosystems provide, including coastal storm protection, carbon sequestration, and the regulation of climate, natural hazards disease, wastes and water quality, are of significant value that has not yet been captured (NOAA, undated). Ocean and coastal ecosystems and sectors are clearly a vital part of the US economy. (Cicin-Sain et al. 311)

Relying on the logic of economy and trade and the importance of the oceans and the sea for the United States, we should have in mind that both the Atlantic and the Pacific obviously had — and still have — significant effect on historical development as well as on contemporary political and strategic developments (Grgas 2014: 263, 267). Out of this comparative insight, a distinction emerges indicating that the Atlantic Ocean is somewhat more visible within English studies as a result of the research on the slave trade, the Middle Passage and the influence of the British naval empire. On the other hand the Pacific Ocean is significantly less visible in English studies and for the most part remains out of academic focus. The following theoretical examples indicate that a shift of focus is taking place.

In 2015, Greg Dvorak suggested in his article "Oceanizing American Studies" that a "shift from continental to oceanic thinking in and of itself is a valuable way to rethink our approaches not only to the United States of the Pacific but to *the entire world*" (616). The Pacific perspective is not merely a project of cultural decolonization, it also proposes "a completely different optic . . . about our heterogeneous water planet" (616). Dvorak argues that for American Studies, "Oceanian awareness" might "positively conceive the heterogeneity of America itself" (616). Dvorak himself might be considered as an insider to the topic, since he lived in the Marshall Islands; his father also lived there, where he worked in the American military establishments (609).

Stipe Grgas proposes something similar for the American Studies agenda in his book *Američki studiji danas: identitet, kapital, spacijalnost* (*Amer-*

ican Studies Today: Identity, Capital, Spatiality) stating that the real historical and economic sweep of the United States' global, military and economic power cannot be completely understood if we approach the American project as merely a history of the continental conquest or discovery (2014: 263). In that sense, the oceanic approach would provide the necessary and inevitable insight in the less visible yet highly productive Pacific area as the source of power and domination.

One additional but no less important aspect should be clarified for this "different optic," and again drawing from Grgas, human spatiality and human geography seem to have missed the real importance of the sea and the oceanic experience for the understanding of how the wheels of history and real-life economy are turning (2008: 96). In *The Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, edited by Barney Warf, there is no mention of the island, the ocean or the sea in the List of Entries (vii-xv). Although the history of the modern world was marked by navigation and maritime discoveries, there is no mention of these concepts either, except partially within other entries. Another *Encyclopedia of Human Geography* by Gerald R. Pitzl has the same lack in the entries, although there is one that may be of crucial relevance for the optic that we hereby propose. The relevance of the Pacific Ocean is noticed in the concept of *Pacific Rim economic region*:

> This expansive region is experiencing rapid economic growth, and every country has developed significant worldwide trading connections. An important shift is underway on the global economic scene. Europe was the leading economic center in the nineteenth century during the heyday of the **Industrial Revolution** (emphasis by Pitzl, 2004). Leadership passed to North America in the twentieth century as the U.S. economy grew rapidly. The twenty-first century may see the Pacific Rim emerge as the most affluent economic region of the world. (171)

Relying firstly on this argument, and secondly on the proposal of the heterogeneous approach, suggested by Dvorak as well as by Grgas (2014)

that the United States is not merely an exceptionalist continental project, while thirdly taking into consideration what Cicin-Sain et al. elaborate on the economic and geographic importance of the oceans in American life we propose that the regional oceanic approach might be appropriate and meaningful. The Pacific oceanic region in that sense, with its literary renderings of the sea and the ocean, might be interesting for American Studies as a relevant segment for the understanding of the complexity of the American project. In the middle of the Pacific Ocean and at the crossroads of Pacific Rim trade routes, there lies the archipelago that is the fiftieth state of the Union, Hawaii.

"Crossroads of the Pacific"

Discovered in 1778 by James Cook on his third and last voyage around the world, these islands, Hawai'i nei, have had an interesting history. Today they represent the spectacular and unique meeting place of East and West. According to Ralph S. Kuykendall and A. Grove Day: "[T]he vast Pacific Ocean is the most prominent geographical feature of our Earth. Scattered in this ocean, which occupies a third of the surface of the globe, lie the Hawaiian Islands, the 'Crossroads of the Pacific'" (3). An additional remark by the same authors may be useful for the perspective of this faraway archipelago, "It was an accident that Hawaii was the last important Pacific island group to be discovered by voyagers from the outer world; but it was no accident that Hawaii because of its strategic position, was the first to achieve modernity" (v). If we consider the location and the importance of these islands, the question emerges on the role of the Hawaiian history in the development of the American project.

In less than two hundred and fifty years of dynamic history, these islands have been changing in such a rapid way as a result of the undeniable fact that their development followed the logic of capitalist development to the utmost. The economy of Hawaii depended in different phases on the trade with newcomers, the sandalwood trade, whaling, mono-cropping agriculture, sugar cane, pineapple and coffee plantations, the development of the American

military bases, and, finally, tourism in every aspect of island life. Those less attractive episodes of the history of the Pacific paradise remained hidden from the mainstream headlines. Modernity did not come in an easy manner. It carried with itself the burden of land appropriation, the breaking of the old kapu (taboo), the importation of coolies from Asian countries, heavy labor, hunger, personal and familial disappointments, plague, leprosy, racism, racialized labor, forced abolition of the monarchy, annexation, destruction in World War II, postwar militarization, and pollution. Today Hawaii is a naval, military and economic outpost of the United States in the middle of the Pacific Rim.

The complexity of contemporary life and existence in the area is astounding and vibrant; therefore a simple division or juxtaposition into hegemonic/imperialist or native/decolonizing moment would be inconsistent and superficial. If two centuries ago William Ellis of the London Missionary Society was having interesting conversations with the Hawaiian priestess, the incarnation of Pele, the goddess of volcanoes (Bohls 490-94), today it would be impossible to go back to the roots and put aside the intensive and rapid changes in society, culture and geography. What makes this literature additionaly interesting is the representation of the island geography through the settlers', natives' and immigrants' relation to space, geography, soil, waterways, land division (Mahele), and the ways these are remembered and retold by old and by modern local Hawaiian writers. In an attempt to understand the real power of the contemporary United States, and having in mind that the Pacific will be, or already is, in economic focus, it might be useful to take into consideration the different oceanic optic, and for this, no other region of the U.S. offers a better platform for reflection.

Hawaiian Literary Anarchistic Polyphony

Research centers for the Pacific Islands can be found in Australia, Hawaii, New Zealand, France, and Japan (Firth 144-46). The Pacific and Hawaii can be randomly found within courses focusing on the Asian Pacific Amer-

ican experience in research done by Victor Bascara, Susan Najita, Robert Diaz, and Erin Suzuki (Lee 101-11, 167-74, 175-88, 352-66). Hawaiian literary history seems to be floating somewhere between Asian American Studies and Pacific Studies. In Paul Lauter's *Companion to American Literature and Culture*, Shirley Geok-lin Lim argues that "[S]ome Americans . . . continue to view Hawaii as not part of the United States" (515). Native American literary studies do not tend to include Hawaiian literary voices. Politically, Native Hawaiians are not Native Americans. Being a strategic outpost in the Ocean and directly facing the East, these islands will never be part of the mainland, not only in the geographical sense, but in the sense that their function is to be a faraway ocean base and an American center in the ocean facing the East.

Literary voices from this area are various, contradictory and complex. Considering the experiences of these territories, their different individual and collective views could, as proposed previously, be distinguished in terms of their native, settler and immigrant insights. All of these three perspectives have local grounding, and out of these positions, the last less than two hundred and fifty years of modern history, in this distant and seemingly isolated archipelago, look like a time laboratory within which different histories have been told, chanted, recorded, forgotten, invented, written, retold, remembered, and conceptualized. The voices of different nations, races, cultures and continents have crisscrossed and found their place in vibrant and multilayered Hawaiian fiction.

The nineteenth century reflected the voices of the newcomers, settlers, missionaries, traders, and economic conquerors. American and British writers who wrote about Hawaii and the Pacific were mostly cultural outsiders like Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson, Jack London, Charles Warren Stoddard, and Herman Melville. Less known, but also published in the same century were books by Hawaiian King David Kalakaua (*The Legends and Myths of Hawaii*) and by Queen Liliuokalani (*Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen*), both in the English language. What marks Hawaiian literature from its beginnings are the multiple visions of stories and histories as told by different races and cultures.

Although discovered and named the Sandwich Islands by James Cook for the British Navy, Hawai'i nei were never part of the British Empire. The Islands were unified under the leadership of the King Kamehameha I and functioned as a monarchy with written constitution until 1898, when they were annexed by the United States. What lurked behind political independence and what changed the course of history was their economic dependence on the world trade system, whaling, agriculture, labor, and production. Once contact with the Europeans was established, there was no possibility to escape the economic changes and consequences that contact brought. Those who forced Queen Liliuokalani to abdicate were a group of white Hawaiian merchants, plantation owners, and descendants of missionaries, who lived in the Islands and whose trade dictated the development of society, the island economy, and the complete way of life. The overthrow was a successful attempt to protect the financial and economic interests of the owners of the sugar industry (Daws 2009: 7—32). The same was the reason for the inflow of the cheap Asian labor force. Histories of this kind are told and retold in novels by contemporary Hawaiian writers like Kiana Davenport. When the Islands became the fiftieth state of the Union in 1959, the celebration was followed by the publication of James Michener's grandiose historic novel *Hawai'i*. Although referring to different periods of Hawaiian history, Michener's epic-like, celebratory view bears the mark of the dominant American stream of history and greatly differs in tone from later fiction on native topics by Davenport, whereas the revitalization of subordinate histories and memories of Asian immigrants and descriptions of life and work on the plantations started with Milton Murayama.

The nineteen-seventies brought the revival of different cultural voices. According to Stewart Firth in his article "Future Directions for Pacific Studies", "Pacific Studies in Hawaii . . . are mostly conceptualized as projects of cultural Renaissance, in which the aim is to reclaim and reassert cultural identity" (147). A similar topic is analyzed by Susan Najita in her study *Decolonizing Cultures of the Pacific*. Eric Chock of Bamboo Ridge Press identifies local Hawaiian literature as "Modern Hawaiian Literary Tradition" re-

fusing to accept mainland culture and literature as the norm (7). Ku'ualoha Ho'omanawanui writes about Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) empowerment through literature. There are also those who write for the political protection and preservation of native culture, like Haunani Kay Trask, Noenoe Silva, and Rona Tamiko Halualani.

Important Hawaiian fiction writers today, besides those already mentioned, include Lois Ann Yamanaka, Kaui Hart Hemming, Rodney Morales, Nora Okja Keller, Chris McKinney, Graham Salisbury, and Gary Pak. Be that as it may, the literary production of these islands reflects interesting histories of the American age in the Pacific. The literary texts of, as Chock puts it, the "Modern Hawaiian Literary Tradition" reveal not only the histories and experiences of the local population, their hopes, dreams, fears, failed expectations, and more or less successful pursuits of happiness; more than just reflecting on the lives of the islanders, contemporary literature as well as early American and Hawaiian voices from the Pacific constitute maps of the invisible ocean histories, a cartography of travels across the largest of oceans. We hereby try to suggest that in this fiction is inscribed an interesting literary cartography that could be perceived as the experiences of the island, the sea and the vast ocean. A reading of Hawaiian literature in this "different optic" might be a useful contribution to the understanding of the human geography of islands, the history of the American Pacific, and its economic and cultural development as well as of the role that the Hawaiian archipelago has had in the formation of the power of the United States and continues to have in the future of the Pacific Rim.

Before we continue with the aim to pinpoint certain crucial elements of the hereby proposed mapping of the Pacific in Hawaiian literature, it might be appropriate to mention that this type of reading literature does not intend to neglect different cultural and political appropriations of the Pacific or Hawaii, the settler culture with its imperial moments, the decolonizing aspects of the cultural survival of the native societies nor the voices of the immigrants who are seeking their own locality in the Hawaiian soil and sea. On the contrary, these different perspectives are extremely valuable as the initial points

of entry into the proposed analysis. Also, this article is only an incomplete and superficial introduction to a possible topic that should be elaborated on a much larger range of reading. The texts and authors mentioned on these pages are but a few out of many who deserve critical attention in this direction. After condensing the meaning of the Ocean for the life and culture of the Unites States and the need to understand its only fully oceanic state through its literature, stories, and histories, let us now direct our argument towards the possible different meanings of terms *the island, the sea* and *the ocean* in different novels, stories, cultural representations, and myths of the Island literature.

Literary cartography of the Rock'n'Sea

To draw an initial frame for further discussion we have to refer to the human geography of islands and the contemporary position of Hawaii. Stephen Royle's book *Geography of Islands* (2001) is one of rare successful attempts to systematize the knowledge on world islands, including their geography, meaning, economic and political destinies, their development, and their different natural and cultural features. In the book he states that "[S]mall places such as islands are usually powerless in political terms" (4) and that "the insular position . . . is one of powerlessness, dependency and insignificance" (134). The reasons for this, Royle argues, are "the unequal contestation between islands and outside forces" (4). According to Gavan Daws, the relations of power between the United States and Hawaii are the following: "twentieth century America, like it or not, was cast in an imperial role. She was a world power, with especially heavy commitments in the Pacific hemisphere, and Hawaii was an indispensable forward base" (Daws 1974: 386). Today, when discussing the Pacific military situation, Royle elaborates:

> unlike the situation on Okinawa or the Philippines, there is no governmental pressure on the Americans to reduce their presence in the Hawaiian archipelago. There are some Hawaiian people who would wish for more indepen-

> dence, and there are movements such as Ka Lahui Hawaii which have this agenda, but Native Hawaiians make up only about 13 per cent of the total population. (146)

The undeniable fact remains that Hawaii is an American island state. From the perspective of a Native Hawaiian, Pilahi Paki, who remembered the days when, as a result of the American conquest, the histories of Native Hawaiians, their islands and their traditional ways of life were irrevocably transformed. The only thing that remains is hope that the remembrance of the old ways will at least be harbored in native people's memory as the last point of resistance under the civilizational overturn that they as people are painfully aware of: "'You will be living in the *haole* time, and the wise thing to do is to move with the time, because time is a thing that belongs to no one . . . there's only one thing I ask of you, my children – You are Hawai'i, and I would appreciate that you remain Hawai'i' (Pilahi Paki 1910—1985)" (Noyes 67). The documentary voice of Noyes' collection attempts to maintain the remembrance of the traditional culture under the overwhelming political, economic, and historical influence of the American state over Native Hawaiian stories and histories.

If the islands were indeed paradise on Earth for the Native Hawaiians before their contact with Europeans, for Mark Twain, who remained forever enchanted with these islands, they were a big chance for America. For Stevenson and Jack London, this archipelago was a domain of romantic pursuit and the essence of the adventurous spirit. For Melville, the Pacific is a stage for trade, whale hunting, and human enterprise. The experience of the Asian coolies was the history of hard work, prison on the rocks, with an ocean of opportunity and a long distance from home, but their *Pau Hana* (finished working) helped develop the diversity (Takaki xi) of contemporary island life. Different perspectives of island history are mapped in the stories of immigrants from Japan, the Philippines, China, Korea, Spain, Portugal and other countries. The Hawaiian islands remember various histories: the history of cattle farms with "paniolos," Hawaiian cowboys; the history of capitalist de-

scendants of American Boston missionaries; the history of lepers who were forced to live on Kalupapa peninsula of the Island of Molokai; the horrific memories of the World War II; the history of the victims of sexual slavery in Japanese war camps; the history of nuclear testing grounds; the rise of the tourist industry, and the struggle of the local population against pollution in this specific and limited ecosystem. All of these histories are marked by ocean travel, migration, and the repetitive movements of generations of travelers and can be found in local Hawaiian stories and novels.

Setting aside the more or less familiar concepts of island paradise or island as a prison, what remains valuable to explore is the old tradition of Polynesian sailors that travelled and navigated these waters a thousand years before James Cook. According to Melissa Nelson in her "Indigenous Science and Traditional Ecological Knowledge," "Pacific Islanders use traditional non-instrument wayfinding to navigate the entire Pacific Ocean using their observations of the star Canopus, other stars, and other natural signs like wind and wave patterns, to travel across the Pacific and arrive at small island nations" (199). The importance of the practical local knowledge in this sense is a kind of the specific island and ocean mapping. This form of oral cartography and this cognitive diversity enrich the importance of the situational knowledge; for hundreds of years Polynesian seascape was, according to Nelson, contained and memorized in "storyscapes" and "songscapes" (201).

The extreme vividness and concentration of events in this region rises the awareness that on these little specks of land, or as Epeli Hau'ofa names the Pacific region "A sea of islands" (Wood, 349) somewhat important courses of events were taking place, and that this vast watery area is extremely dynamic.

The Value of the "Different Optic"

Whether the property of kings or queens, a monarchy or a republic, Hawaii is the most remote archipelago in the largest of oceans. Based on that undeniable geographic position, even if politically changeable within the course of history, it is a challenge for the mind to understand the experiences

of generations of people whose private individual or collective destinies are impregnated with this natural circumstance. No matter how useful cultural politics are, with its different ways of thinking, literary theories, political points of view, contemporary power issues, in spite of it all, it remains a challenge for the mind to do research in a triangle that consists of man, ocean/island, and storytelling.

It would be a rare and priceless privilege for American Studies to incorporate this kind of thinking into its agenda, instead of leaving it to fluctuate between Asian American and Pacific Studies.

Instead of railways and visible roads being built, books and novels have been written that struggle to maintain the truth and history about the region above the surface of the ocean. It is surely worth exploring this literature resembling maps of remembrance, just like Polynesian hula chanting and dancing. If Polynesians were navigating these waters by following waves, clouds, winds and stars, then perhaps cultural and human geography is today written and preserved in written stories and novels by Hawaiians. In that sense American Studies and human geography can only gain from the inclusion of this different optic of the oceanic experience, explaining simultaneously many aspects of the American project and the invisible flow and circulation of capital, money, labor and goods across the Pacific Ocean, within the Pacific Rim.

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