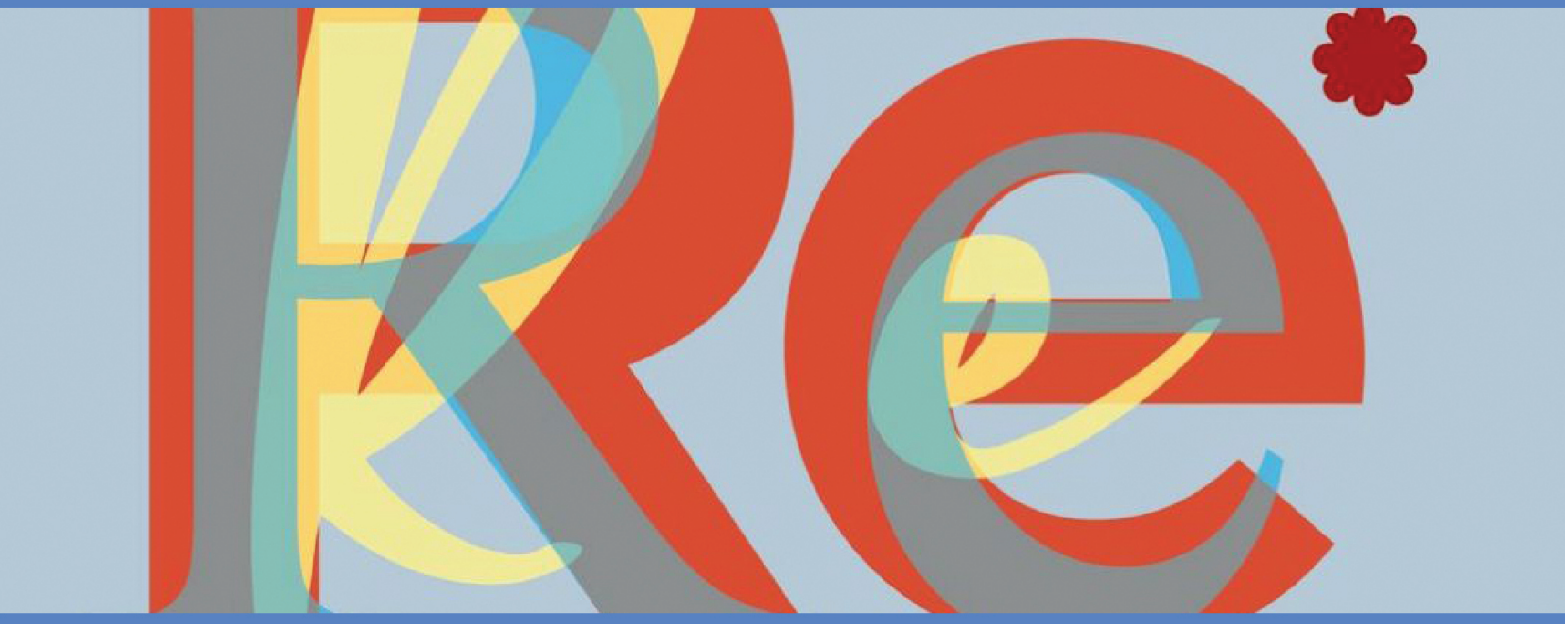
JAST

JOURNAL OF AMERICAN STUDIES OF TURKEY



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The Journal of American Studies of Turkey (JAST) is an international, print and online publication of the American Studies Association of Turkey (ASAT). It is published biannually in June and December. The journal follows a double-blind peer review process and publishes transdisciplinary research in English on a wide range of topics related to American literature, history, art, music, film, popular culture, institutions, politics, economics, geography, and more.

Since its inception in 1995, *JAST* has been the sole academic journal for American Studies in Turkey. As part of its mission, the journal supports the work of both Turkish and international scholars engaged in American Studies. *JAST* is indexed in the MLA International Bibliography, Index Islamicus, and Jufo Portal. It appears in Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory and the MLA Directory of Periodicals. It can be accessed in print and online through the DergiPark database and ASAT website (www.asat-jast.org).

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Contributors in this Issue

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Jeffrey Howlett is a scholar, musician, and creative writer currently living in Istanbul. He majored in Classical Studies and Music Theory at Elmira College in New York. His PhD studies at Binghamton University focused on English Literature. He is currently a member of the English Translation and Interpreting Department at İstanbul Health and Technology University. He has previously taught at Wayne State College, the University of Nebraska at Kearney, Başkent University, Kadir Has University, and Girne American University. Howlett was a Fulbright lecturer at the Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University in Baku. His publications include "The End of the American Frontier? Male Escapism in Twentieth-Century American Literature," "Nawal Saadawi and the Birth of a Native Egyptian Feminism," "Between Sound and Sense: Literary Translation and The Thousand and One Nights," and *Gender Issues in North American Fiction* in collaboration with Emine Sonal.

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Emine Sonal received her BA degree from the Faculty of Education at Dicle University, her MA from Anadolu University, and her PhD in American Culture and Literature from Ege University. She obtained her Associate Professorship in the field of Comparative Literature. She has taught at Fırat University, Uludağ University, Girne American University in Northern Cyprus, and Yaşar University. Her research interests include Anglo-American fiction, gender studies, and comparative literature. She is the author of three books: *İki Evrensel Yazar: John Steinbeck ve Yaşar Kemal ve İki Edebi Çalışma Örneği; The History of Literary Theory: From Plato to the Renaissance Period*; and *Gender Issues in North American Fiction* (co-authored with Jeffrey Howlett).

Cenk Tan received his BA in American Culture and Literature from Hacettepe University in 2002. He earned his PhD from the Department of English Language and Literature, Pamukkale University, Denizli. He specializes in topics such as science fiction, ecocriticism, film criticism, and continental philosophy. He works as an associate professor at Pamukkale University. His latest editorial works include *Science Fantasy: Critical Explorations in Fiction and Film* and *Eco-Concepts: Critical Reflections in Emerging Ecocritical Theory and Ecological Thought,* published in 2024 by Lexington Books (Bloomsbury). Cenk is currently co-editing the upcoming volumes entitled *Class Conflict in 21st Century Science Fiction & Film and Reinventing the Witch: Witchcraft and Sorcery in 21st Century Fiction and Film* to be published by McFarland Books.

Clémentine Tholas is an Associate Professor of American Studies at Sorbonne Nouvelle University (Paris). She teaches American history, contemporary civilization, and American art history. Her current research focuses on contemporary American visual arts and museum studies, particularly exhibitions of African American artists in French museums. She also works on equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) strategies in both French and American museums and examines how curatorial practices are evolving in response to historical revision and calls for greater representation. She recently received support from the Terra Foundation for American Art and the French American Museum Exchange (FRAME) network for a series of round tables titled “Contemporary Black Artists in Museums: A French-American Conversation,” which brings together visual artists, curators, and academics.

Himmet Umunç received his PhD in 1974 from the University of London (King’s College) for his doctoral study of Edmund Spenser’s The Faerie Queene within the context of Renaissance neo-Latin humanism. He earned his associate professorship in 1981 and his full professorship in 1987. He taught British culture and literature for over forty years in the Department of English Language and Literature, Hacettepe University. Currently, he is affiliated full-time with the Department of American Culture and Literature, Başkent University. Professor Umunç has published in blind-refereed national and international journals of recognized indexes and presented papers at national and international conferences.

Table of Contents

Editorial

Welcoming the 30th Anniversary of *Journal of American Studies of Turkey*

This 63rd issue of *Journal of American Studies of Turkey* (*JAST*) marks our journal's 30th anniversary. The first editorial of *JAST* in the 1995 Spring issue reflected our late professors' dedication to their field with great joy and enthusiasm. The editors in the first issue wrote, "The issue you have in your hands has been the cherished dream of many in the Association of American Studies of Turkey, and we are happy to have at last realized it" (1). Thirty years ago, *JAST* was born from a conviction that American Studies in our country needed a space committed to interdisciplinary critique, cultural inquiry, and a reconsideration of narratives. *JAST* has positioned itself as more than just an academic repository since its inception; it has served as a platform for up-and-coming voices and functioned as a debate crucible. Following the opening of American Studies to critical race theory, gender studies, and transnational frameworks, *JAST* came into being with a focus on burgeoning critical inquiry and acted as both a witness and an interlocutor as the field questioned the very concept of the United States of America within various contexts.

As we celebrate the 30th anniversary of *Journal of American Studies of Turkey*, we are pondering back on both the journal's past and the evolving landscape of American Studies in general. Hundreds of articles we have published have made significant contributions to the field, and our contributors have reimagined the boundaries of American identity, questioned the colonial legacies of US imperialism and the limits of American exceptionalism over the course of three decades. The diverse and dynamic commitments of the field are demonstrated by the articles, which have drawn from Indigenous studies, African American studies, Chicano/a studies, Asian American studies, cultural studies, media studies, history, politics, ecocriticism, and more. Since 1995, *JAST* has aimed to become an original voice in American Studies, reaching from Turkey to the world. Today, it stands as a prominent interdisciplinary publication addressing a broad academic community.

We pause at this milestone to renew our editorial mission rather than to celebrate in a static manner. In recent years, we have revitalized our book and film review section, further diversifying our content. Looking ahead, we aim to expand this platform by introducing short commentaries and blog-style content on our website. The blog, in particular, will serve as a space open to student contributions, fostering earlier and more direct engagement with the future professionals of American Studies. This is part of our broader effort to bring new features and innovative approaches to the journal. We also plan to occasionally highlight notable past articles on our website to further showcase *JAST*'s rich legacy. With this issue, *JAST* also introduces a new visual design. This refreshed look reflects our commitment to renewal and progress. As part of this momentous issue, we are

also proud to feature reflections by former editors—since this thirty-year journey has been shaped by their vision and devotion.

This issue is dedicated to the papers presented at the 2024 American Studies Association of Turkey (ASAT) conference held in İzmir between October 23 and 25. Our conference stood out with its dynamic panels, broad participation, and timely discussions that shed light on current debates in the field. It was a memorable gathering that truly demonstrated the strength of academic exchange, and we hope to hold many others in the future. The essays in this anniversary issue hint at the journal's future while reflecting the thematic and methodological diversity of its history. They draw on profound historical continuities to provide insightful analyses of both past and current contemplations.

In a time when humanities and social sciences are increasingly constrained by structural challenges, *JAST*'s continued publication for three decades is an achievement in itself. Drawing strength from its history, *JAST* will carry this effort into the future with the same spirit of resilience and clarity. On this occasion, we would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who has been part of this journey—our dedicated editors, our meticulous reviewers, our contributors who enriched the journal with their research and ideas, our ever-supportive readers, and our advisory board members. We wholeheartedly thank you all for guiding the journal's development. Your efforts, ideas, and vision have helped to build this journal and rendered American Studies vibrant in Turkey.

Long live *JAST*— Happy 30th anniversary! Here's to many more years—

Nisa Harika Güzel Köşker

Tarık Tansu Yiğit

Duygu Beste Başer Özcan

Cem Kılıçarslan

Gül Varlı Karaarslan

Work Cited

"Editorial." Journal *of American Studies of Turkey,* no. 1, 1995, pp. 1-2.

Former Editors' Reflections

Celebrating Thirty Years of *JAST*

Meltem Kıran-Raw (for Laurence Raw, editor-in-chief, 2012-2016)

Dr. Laurence Raw, my late colleague and husband, became the editor of *JAST* in the summer of 2012. Although I remained only an outside observer, I was aware that he started out by establishing certain priorities. First, like his predecessors, he wanted *JAST* to maintain high academic standards. Second, again like his predecessors, he wanted the journal to fulfill the eligibility criteria for inclusion in prestigious databases. Third, he aimed to recruit as many scholars as possible—both in Turkey and abroad—to reinforce the journal's visibility in the transcultural and transnational dialogue in American Studies. And lastly, he wanted *JAST* to provide a welcoming publication venue for colleagues at the beginning of their careers.

The task at hand necessitated immediate and collaborative action. Several previous issues awaited publication. The website needed to be redesigned. Publicity material had to be prepared and distributed. Academicians, all with heavy workloads of their own, had to be contacted, asked for special favors, and reminded of deadlines. Younger scholars needed to be encouraged to write reviews and submit articles.

Thankfully, Dr. Raw had—and during the process met—many colleagues who were as determined as he was to contribute their best to *JAST*. Hence the many board meetings, the numerous phone calls, the multitudinous chats, and the unconscionable number of email messages. I will never know what kept Dr. Raw's colleagues going, but in his case, those truckloads of tea delivered to the office at Başkent University and to the study at home must surely have helped. Add lashings of milk and enthusiasm, keep sipping as you plow through the maze that is your inbox, and lo and behold! Numbers 32 to 42, from Fall 2010 to Fall 2015, each leafed through with pride and joy as it came off the press. Not to mention the material already lined up for the upcoming issues…

But all good things must come to an end, as the saying goes. Dr. Raw would have gladly served beyond the spring of 2016 as editor of *JAST*, had it not been for the fact that he had to live with an illness that kept recurring and—more annoyingly for him—a wife that fretted over the strain his commitments put on his health. Still, he was content to turn the job over to another colleague, whom he trusted would work as hard as he did towards making the journal more and more inspirational in the field of American Studies.

Today, *JAST* boasts an amazing editorial board and publishing board, many members of which are academicians Dr. Raw worked with. He would have been especially proud to see that some of them are indeed the up-and-coming scholars of his day. "Look, Meltem," he would have said, "our young ones are now at the helm." A well-established journal celebrating its thirtieth anniversary, *JAST* was and is in safe hands.

Özlem Uzundemir, editor-in-chief, 2016-2020

The publication of academic journals in Turkey poses numerous challenges, especially when the editorial work is undertaken by academics trying to balance research, teaching, and administrative duties. My editorial journey with the *Journal of American Studies of Turkey (JAST)* began in 2012. During a board meeting of the American Studies Association of Turkey (ASAT), the president of the board, Meldan Tanrısal, asked me to become the editor, following in the footsteps of Nur Gökalp Akkerman and Barış Gümüşbaş. Taking on this responsibility was both an honor and a formidable undertaking, as the journal had built a reputation as a respected medium for scholarship in American Studies since its founding in 1995.

Lacking experience in journal publishing at the time, I proposed collaborating with my valued colleague Laurence Raw, who had a large academic network and expertise in journal publication. Together with Laurence and Berkem Sağlam, we tried to broaden the journal's scope and move it in "a more transdisciplinary direction . . . examining the idea of 'America,' and how it continues to shape our lives, irrespective of where we might reside" (Raw 4). Laurence's diligent work in curating calls for papers enabled us to engage with a scholarly community within Turkey and internationally. Between numbers 32 to 42, we published both general and themed volumes on "Adaptation," "Gore Vidal," "Transnational Feminisms," "Henry James," and "Transnational Latin Studies." This period marked a dynamic phase in the journal's development, characterized by a diversity of academic contributions and critical perspectives.

After collaborating with Gordon Marshall for the following three issues, Berkem and I carried forward the editorial responsibilities until 2020, with general as well as themed issues, addressing subjects such as "F. Scott Fitzgerald," "Richard Nixon and Public Memory," "Amiri Baraka," "Travel Writing," and "Native American Studies."

A milestone in *JAST*'s history was its inclusion in the ULAKBİM index in 2017, an achievement made possible through the efforts of the editorial team and the support of ASAT board members. This recognition affected the journal's academic standing and broadened its visibility in academic circles.

My decade-long involvement with *JAST* has been a deeply rewarding professional experience. The process of coordinating publication schedules, managing peer reviews, and refining each issue through meticulous revision with Berkem Sağlam has been accompanied by invaluable collaborations and intellectual enrichment. I would like to thank Meldan Tanrısal and Tanfer Emin Tunç for their unwavering support. I would especially like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Laurence and Berkem, whose partnership and editorial insight were instrumental throughout this journey.

Long live *JAST*!

Work Cited

Raw, Laurence. "Editorial Introduction: Forging New Collaborations." *Journal of American Studies of Turkey*, no. 32, 2012, pp. 1-8.

Defne Tutan, editor-in-chief, 2020-2023

I had the privilege of serving as the editor-in-chief of *JAST* from 2020 to 2023, administering the publication of 8 numbers, namely 53 (Spring 2020) through 60 (Fall 2023). I recall writing a brief editorial for number 55, in which I reflected on "the troubling times and the urgency to adapt" while the pandemic was still ongoing. Though I still believe that the skill to adapt is of utmost significance at present, I would like to add persistence and resilience to the list of vital skills. The 30th anniversary of the initiation of *JAST*'s publication–the sole academic journal for American Studies in Turkey, attests to both persistence and resilience at their finest. *JAST* has its roots in a spirit of humility, yet has reached worldwide renown; it is a beacon that has stood the test of time–and of the pandemic, natural disasters, bureaucratic crises–yet has always signified heritage, devotion, motivation, and passion. Had it not been for the collective and cumulative efforts of everyone associated with *JAST*, as well as the broader network of the American Studies Association of Turkey–the single firm-standing professional association for the field, such a historic beacon could never have persevered. I would like to express my endless gratitude to and constant appreciation of those who preceded us with the hope that we have served well in passing the torch onto those who succeed us. May such invaluable efforts always receive their worth.

In Memory of Professor Gönül Uçele (1942-2025)

Gönül Uçele was among the first research assistants at Hacettepe University's English Language and Literature Department, established by Prof. Emel Doğramacı in 1966. She received her PhD with a dissertation entitled *The Conflict Between Illusion and Reality in O'Neill's Latest Plays* in 1969. Her associate professorship thesis was on Jerome Lawrence's and Robert E. Lee's work, *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*. In 1982, she was a founding member of Hacettepe University's American Literature Department. From 1984 to 2000, she was the chair of the department, which was later renamed the Department of American Culture and Literature. Under her leadership, the faculty and the student body flourished. In addition to offering classes and guiding MA and PhD students, she wrote numerous articles, attended national and international conferences, and supported ASAT's endeavors to create networks beyond Turkey. Gönül Uçele continued to teach after she retired from Hacettepe in 2000. Her last post was at İstanbul Aydın University, where she taught until the Fall of 2024, only a semester before she passed away.

I would like to celebrate Gönül Hoca's life by referring to both her personality and her academic achievements. Her classes inspired numerous students because she was always interested in the avant-garde and new literature of the time, introducing us to the most recent noteworthy publications. She would methodically follow contemporary writers in American theater and fiction and include them on her syllabi. Her effort to educate students was particularly admirable given the reality that new publications were difficult to access. I learned about Joyce Carol Oates in her classes before deciding to study her novels for my PhD dissertation. When I joined Hacettepe University's Department of American Culture and Literature as a research assistant, she was the

chair, and like many of my colleagues, she supported my application. I worked with her as the vice chair before she moved to İstanbul.

Gönül Hoca's laughter was unique and unforgettable. She laughed so heartily and in such a fashion that when she did not, all of us were concerned. When she was not in her usual cheerful mode, we would wait to approach her until she regained her sunny disposition. A person who smiled so sincerely and profoundly obviously loved life and socializing. Her home was always open to friends, colleagues, and students. As anybody who crossed paths with her can testify, she was also a great cook. The food she served at her house parties was legendary. The rice dishes were cooked with saffron, pine nuts, and currants; the grape leaves were delicately stuffed; and the desserts were exquisitely mulled with unusual spices. She was well-versed in Ottoman cuisine, and her knowledge of lesser-known Turkish recipes was admirable. She would host visiting Fulbright professors and invite her colleagues and other guests, guaranteeing good conversation and lively evenings. Her home, located on Güniz Sokak, Ankara, was a well-known spot to all of us.

Her circle of friends and colleagues was also extensive. Numerous academics, writers, and poets from the United States visited our department during her time as chair. Robert Creeley, Ed Foster, Simon Pettet, Raymond Federman, Bob Bertholf, Paul Levine, David Landrey, William Jones, and David Espey all came to give lectures, participate in conferences, and offer classes. Due to her networking skills, her junior colleagues and research assistants were able to forge their networks and receive support from other academics. For example, Bob Bertholf sponsored the annual department periodical between 1993 and 2002. Gönül Hoca not only introduced American writers and academics to the department, but also prominent Turkish actors. She invited Zuhal Olcay, Haluk Bilginer, and Ahmet Levendoğlu to our department. They accepted her invitation to discuss their play, Harold Pinter's *Betrayal*, which was staged in Ankara in 1996. Following the discussion, we were invited to watch the play from a far more informed perspective.

Gönül Hoca's generous attitude towards her colleagues was exemplary. In 1994, she spent her sabbatical year at the Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey, with a second Fulbright grant, and invited Ayça Germen and me—two research assistants at the time—to stay with her during the semester break. She was temporarily living in a small one-bedroom apartment in their graduate housing complex. She kindly gave us her bedroom while she and her son, Alp, slept on the two couches in the living room. She cooked for us, invited American academics to guide our research activities, and accompanied us while sightseeing. I cannot forget the long walks we took on the streets of New York, during those very snowy and cold winter days, to catch events in different parts of the city. On one occasion, we decided to watch *Schindler's List*, a recent release at the time. We picked a theater without knowing that it was in a Jewish neighborhood and that the audience consisted of families affected by the Holocaust. The matinee was interrupted by sobs from the audience and a prayer session at the end; an unforgettable cultural experience we shared with her.

Gönül Hoca was more than a chair and colleague for the members of the Department of American Culture and Literature. She guided us in academic as well as personal and social matters. Even

after she moved to İstanbul, she kept in touch. In 2012, she delivered the welcoming speech at our international conference, “From Cover to Cover: Reading Readers.” In 2013, she invited some of us to present our research at İstanbul Bahçeşehir University. At the end of that day, she treated us, once again, to her lovely cuisine at her İstanbul apartment, accompanied by friendly conversation, as always.

Raymond Federman refers to Samuel Beckett’s death as changing tenses. Gönül Hoca’s presence in another dimension does not diminish the love and respect we have for her, and it is not easy to use the past tense when talking about her life and achievements. I am honored to have met her, to have worked with her, to have become part of her academic family, and to carry the torch she has passed on to us. With my utmost respect, may she rest in peace.

Assoc. Prof. Bilge Mutluay Çetintaş

JAST

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Breaking the Anthropocentric Circle? Gary Snyder's Struggle with Language in *This Present Moment*

Abstract
Gary Snyder has a profound impact on various facets of the American ecological movement. His work bridges ecological consciousness with Eastern philosophies, challenging dominant human-centered worldviews through his ecopoetic vision. In *This Present Moment*, Snyder highlights the themes of interconnectedness, biocentrism, and agency for all sentient beings. His poetics foreground the idea that human beings are embedded within the fabric of the Earth along with all other sentient beings; nevertheless, while his language is inevitably grounded in human semiotics, his poems strive to strip themselves of anthropocentric expression. Snyder utilizes sparse, unembellished diction that resists symbols and abstraction; that is, he seeks to reflect the rhythms and flow of nature beyond the boundaries of human perception and meaning. His ways of overcoming linguistic constraints create a space for non-human presences to speak for themselves or to be present without being appropriated through an anthropocentric lens. By exploring these themes in *This Present Moment*, this article aims to demonstrate how Snyder reconfigures the web of relations between humans and the non-human world by generating a poetic practice that welcomes reciprocity and resists domination. The purpose of this study is to trace how Snyder's late poetry employs a biocentric mode of perceiving ecological relations and challenging human exceptionalism.
Keywords: Gary Snyder, *This Present Moment*, non-anthropocentrism, sentient beings, language and representation

Gary Snyder'ın *Şimdiki Zaman*'da Dil ile Girdiği Mücadele: İnsan Merkezli Döngüyü Kırmak Mümkün mü?

Öz
Snyder'ın şiir ve düz yazı külliyatı Amerikan ekolojik hareketinin birçok alanını etkilemiştir. Snyder ekolojik farkındalık ile Doğu felsefelerini birleştirerek egemen insan-merkezli dünya görüşlerine, ekopoetik bir bakış açısı ile meydan okur. *Şimdiki Zaman* (*This Present Moment*) isimli şiir seçkisinde, tüm türlerin birbirine bağlılığı, biyosantrizm (yaşam merkezcilik) ve tüm duyarlı varlıklar için eylem gücünün önemi temaları öne çıkar. Snyder'ın şiirsel anlayışı insanın ve diğer tüm duyarlı varlıkların yeryüzünün hep birlikte bir parçası olduğu fikrini vurgular. Şiilerinde kullandığı dil kaçınılmaz olarak insana ait bir göstergebilime dayansa da, şiirlerini insan merkezli ifadelerden arındırmaya çalışır. Snyder doğanın ritmini ve akışını insan algısı ve anlamlandırma sınırlarının ötesinde yansıtmayı amaçladığı için, şiirlerinde semboller ve soyutlamalardan mümkün olduğunca arınmış, sade, süssüz ve doğal bir dil kullanır. Bu şekilde, dilin sınırlarını aşmaya çalışırken insan olmayan diğer varlıkların kendilerini ifade edebilecekleri ya da insan-merkezli mercekten geçirilmeksizin var olabileceği bir alan yaratır. Bu çalışma *Şimdiki Zaman* (*This Present Moment*) isimli eserde bu temaları incelerken, Snyder'ın insanlar ile insan olmayan dünya arasındaki ilişki ağını yeniden nasıl kurguladığını, karşılıklılığı benimserken tahakküme direnen bir şiir pratiği geliştirdiğini göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu makale aynı zamanda, Snyder'ın bu geç dönem şiir seçkisinde, biyosantrik bir yaklaşımı benimserken insan ayrıcalıklığına nasıl meydan okuduğunu analiz etmeyi hedeflemektedir.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Gary Snyder**,** *Şimdiki Zaman,* insan merkezli olmayan bakış açısı, duyarlı varlıklar, dil ve temsiliyet

> Words are used as signs, as stand-ins, arbitrary and temporary, even as language reflects (and informs) the shifting values of the peoples whose minds it inhabits and glides through.
>
> (Snyder, *The Practice* 8)

> As the crickets' soft autumn hum
> is to us,
> so are we to the trees
> as are they
> to the rocks and the hills.
>
> (Snyder, "Little Poems" 51)

Introduction

Gary Snyder's poetry is pivotal in the canon of American ecopoetry and has responded to many of the planet's most crucial events for nearly a century. The type of reality Snyder was acting against was mounting concerns about human-induced environmental destruction, nuclear power, devastating earthquakes, tsunamis, and oil spills in many parts of the world. To overcome the current ecological crisis, Snyder calls for reevaluating the concepts of progress and Enlightenment as the telos of Western modernity, and he rejects the formation of a new anthropocentric reality prioritizing human concerns and benefits over those of non-human entities. For these apparent reasons, Nick Selby describes Snyder's poetry as "the most ecologically self-conscious of twentieth-century poets and as the poet laureate of deep ecology" (134). This places Snyder at the forefront of American ecopoetry, a diverse and evolving tradition that ranges from observational and pastoral modes to politically engaged environmental critique. Snyder's contribution is particularly distinctive in its fusion of ecological awareness with spiritual philosophy, bioregional practice, and a lived ethic of interdependence. Unlike strands of ecopoetry that merely reflect on nature as a passive backdrop or as a metaphor for human emotion, Snyder's work embodies an ontological shift, emphasizing that humans are embedded within a broader ecological field. In this sense, deep ecology aligns with Snyder's outlook, which is deeply in tune with nature and with Far Eastern philosophies and ideologies. Snyder mainly opposes anthropocentrism and the materialism of American capitalism that fosters the domination of humans over the non-human world, the rich over the poor, and the West over non-Western societies. He has also led a life deeply intertwined with nature, blending his roles as a poet, environmentalist, Zen practitioner, fire lookout in the Cascades, and Buddhist monk. He built his home, Kitkitdizze, in the Sierra Nevada foothills as a reflection of his commitment to simple, sustainable living. Snyder seeks identification beyond humanity through organic wholeness by rejecting the categorization of nature into human and non-human, instead viewing the self as open, alive, and interconnected with all entities.

As many critics would argue, the "tendency has been to read Snyder's poetry – largely because of his Buddhist beliefs – as untroubled by the gap between landscape and poem, world and word, and to see its profound environmental awareness as stemming from a sense of a visionary interconnectedness of life" (Selby 135). Snyder recognizes that he is part of nature; however, he

is also aware of the paradox between revering nature and the problem of referring to nature with language, human-induced semiotics. In other words, he navigates the tension between using human language and expressing a non-human-centric vision of nature with this semiotic system, and this strain lies in how he tries to counterbalance this limitation. Thus, as a human poet using language, a fundamentally human semiotic system, inevitably remains within an anthropocentric framework, despite his lifelong attempt to step outside human-centered perception. This paradox makes his poetry even more compelling. Instead of pretending he can fully step outside of human language, he wrestles with its limitations, using every tool at his disposal to get as close as possible to a more-than-human perspective.

In the framework of this article, *This Present Moment* by Gary Snyder often conveys a deep reverence for nature, where references to sentient beings seem to be not merely labels but acknowledgments of their presence and interconnectedness with everything else. His use of names reflects his understanding of the natural world, often rooted in his Buddhist beliefs and environmental ethics; he names things carefully, aiming to dissolve the boundaries between humans and nature. Snyder relates the beliefs of Buddhism to his poetry and lists them as follows: "The marks of the Buddhist teachings are impermanence, no-self, the inevitability of suffering, interconnectedness, emptiness, the vastness of mind, and the provision of a Way to realization" (qtd. in Fredman 203). With his recent collection, Snyder is responsive to this paradigm shift and paves the way for embracing all life forms with their autonomy and ever-existing harmony without establishing hierarchy among one another. This article analyzes how Snyder's poetry highlights sentient life forms, such as animals and plants, as entities that stand out with intrinsic poise and value of their own. It also explores how Snyder problematizes language's referentiality by de-emphasizing human dominance in representing all sentient beings while still being bound by the limitations of human expression. In this collection, Snyder uses strategies to resist anthropocentrism's dictations, like interweaving non-Western and Indigenous semiotics, direct naming as an act of reverence, fragmentation and minimalism, and being an active observer and listener instead of being a speaking agent.

Toward a Post-Anthropocentric Poetics: Against Modernity and Materialism

Snyder's collection *This Present Moment* (2015) consists of poems written since 1990 and is divided into four parts, each exploring traditions and experiences linked across time. The first section, *Outriders,* revolves around the Beat Generation's resistance against American economic materialism and focuses on spiritual pursuits, investigations into Eastern and Native American religions, and the unstructured flow of emotion and creativity. Mainly, non-conformity and spontaneous flow of feelings and creativity are celebrated. The Beat term *outrider* signifies a figure passing on a countercultural legacy, suggesting a continuum that links past, present, and future. In the second section, *The Locals*, which includes many nighttime stories, Snyder engages with figures like Thomas Jefferson, reimagined in a local context despite his Virginian roots, and Chiura Obata, a Japanese American artist associated with California, to explore the layered meanings of locality and cultural memory situating the present within a longer historical arc. The third part, *Ancestors*, reacts to anthropocentric thought by emphasizing the Earth's rhythms, suggesting that time is not linear but cyclical. Finally, in *Go Now*, Snyder bids farewell to his wife Koda, portraying death not as an end but as a teacher, a moment that connects to all moments before and after. The temporal layering in this section culminates in the collection's eponymous poem:

This present moment
that lives on
to become
long ago (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 67)

The poem dissolves distinctions between now and then. The deictic "this" universalizes the present moment, revealing how it is embedded in broader temporal flows that affect all beings.

Thus, *This Present Moment* becomes not just a reference to a single point in time but a critique of modernity's linear, progressive temporality. Snyder emphasizes instead the co-existence of temporal layers, how memory, change, and decay shape consciousness and character over time. This vision also surfaces in "Anger, Cattle, and Achilles," where the poetic persona reflects on fractured friendships. The invocation of Achilles, an ancient figure of wrath, complicates the present tension between two friends. In line with the collection's theme, one of the two best friends of the poetic persona in the bar advises him to leave himself uncontrolled and let himself be dragged by the spontaneous flow of feelings. As a musician playing music in a bar, his friend asks him to enjoy the moment there: "listen to that music. / The self we hold so dear will soon be gone" (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 11). The theme here resonates with the Beat Generation's revolt against extensive materialistic culture and focuses on the free flow of emotions and creativity. This poem depicts how the poetic persona's two friends stop seeing each other and how one compares his rage to that of Achilles. The trio has once shared great experiences and moments in nature, such as traveling on the desert, "awakened to bird song and sunshine under ironwoods / in a wadi south of the border" (11). However, for reasons not explained in the poem, the two best friends of the poetic persona "quit speaking" and "one said his wrath was like that of Achilles" (11). By drawing an analogy with Achilles, the poetic persona emphasizes the enduring impact of anger and pride on human connections. The reference links mythic time with modern emotion, underscoring how past narratives shape contemporary selves and how unresolved emotions persist across temporal divides. This layered sense of time reflects Snyder's broader resistance to Western modernity's privileging of the self, autonomy, and material progress over communal memory and natural rhythms.

Another antidote to American materialism or prioritization of the individual experience other than music might be poetry, which generates a freer space for the stream of emotions without letting them take a rigid form. The space generated with music or poetry will foster a transcendental type of experience that echoes the themes of Beat touch, like spontaneity, raw emotion, personal freedom, a rejection of conventional literary and societal norms, and a deep engagement with the countercultural spirit of the mid-twentieth century. In another poem, "A Letter to M.A. Who Lives Far Away" in the *Outriders* part, Snyder elevates poetic discourse and relates it to non-Western semiotics and to the Zen school, which emphasizes the value of meditation and intuition. He notifies his friend about the nature of poetry writing:

> Since real poetry is born
> From a formless place
> Which is our Original Face
> Zen Buddhists say,
> In play.
> So if this helps you to be a writer
> It will please your new friend
> Gary Snyder (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 12)

Snyder draws from Zen Buddhism and Indigenous semiotics, by which I mean the symbolic systems, sign-making practices, and communicative relationships found in Indigenous worldviews that recognize the agency and voice of non-human beings to emphasize a more integrated, less hierarchical view of humans and nature. These semiotic systems often involve reciprocal communication between humans, animals, plants, and landscapes, viewing meaning as emergent from ecological and spiritual interconnectedness rather than human-centered interpretation. Snyder uses these perspectives to challenge Western linguistic conventions that privilege human subjectivity. By writing poetry, he believes one could have contact with our deep emotions and achieve intersubjectivity with all the other entities on Earth. In line with his definition of ecology, Snyder emphasizes the importance of "the study of biological interrelationships and the flow of energy through organisms and inorganic matter" (qtd. in Williams 135). Nerys Williams, in her exploration of humanity's complex relationship to the environment, notes that Snyder underscores "the need to remain aware of local communities" (135). Thus, in the second part of the collection, Snyder gives voice to alternative semiotics to the Western tradition. In the poem "Stories in the Night," Snyder interweaves non-Western and Indigenous semiotics, and he puts a subtitle to the poem as follows: "In Native California the winter was storytelling time" (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 29). Although Michael Davidson's analysis in the article "The San Francisco Renaissance" primarily addresses Snyder's position within the postwar West Coast literary scene, his insights into Snyder's effort to balance "poetic rhythms with respect for nature, meditation, and physical labour … through explorations of Native American and East Asian religious traditions" (73) remain relevant. These efforts are particularly visible in "Stories in the Night," where Snyder draws on the collective oral traditions of Native communities, suggesting that telling stories at night "don't need much light" (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 30). This evocation of a non-technological, communal mode of meaning-making signals a rejection of Western modernity and telos, which emphasizes individuality, speed, and logic. In the same poem, Snyder further critiques the anthropocentric assumptions of Western epistemology and institutional religion, as he announces:

> I could never be a Muslim, a Christian, or a Jew because the Ten
> Commandments fall short of moral rigor. The Bible's "Shalt not kill"
> leaves out the other realms of life,
>
> How could that be? What sort of world did they think this is?
> With no account for all the wriggling feelers and the little fins, the spines,
> the slimy necks — eyes shiny in the night — paw prints in the snow.
> (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 30)

These lines serve as manifesto commitments to oppose the dictates of the anthropocentric rules imposed by institutionalized religions. For the poetic persona, these religions lack ethics and exclude non-human sentient beings from their grace. What is more, when the legal theorist Christopher Stone asked the question "Should Trees Have Standing?" and whether "lawyers should be allowed to represent their interests in court" the answer of Snyder together with other poets in ecopoetic tradition is remarkable: "whether or not the lawyers do, the poet will" (Ashton 10). Poets such as A.R. Ammons, Wendell Berry, and Mary Oliver similarly voice the agency of the more-than-human world, often giving trees, animals, and ecosystems narrative presence and moral standing within their poetry. This poetic commitment to giving voice to non-human entities is inseparable from Snyder's ethical vision, which calls into question the presumed moral superiority of human beings. Furthermore, Snyder thinks that when it comes to savagery or ferocity, human beings can be even more savage than animals, as he cites Henry Thoreau, the American transcendentalist who engages with the relationship between civilized existence and the natural world, in the poem "Artemis and Pan:" "The wildness of the savage is but a faint symbol of the awful ferity with which good men and lovers meet" (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 10). Snyder's depiction of the wild blends sensory detail and mythological resonance. Snyder realistically depicts the wild by showing how two squirrels, driven by instinct, behave. He contrasts them with Artemis and Pan, the goddess of the hunt and the god of rustic music and primal desire, respectively. In classical mythology, Artemis represents untamed nature and chastity, often shown hunting in moonlight, while Pan embodies animalistic sexuality and chaos. Their pairing in the poem is a symbolic union of disciplined wilderness and feral desire:

> The "field" of the wild
> Ainu, *iworu*,
>
> feeling the field; outback the ears;
> outside the eyes, faint whiff — loose knees
>
> Two fluff gray-squirrel tails whip round an oak's
> gray bark
> Wildly horny ferociously aloof
> the ferity of lovers (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 10)

The opening lines engage multiple senses like "feeling the field" "outback the ears" "outside the eyes" and "faint whiff" which builds an embodied sense of wildness that goes beyond sight alone. In this scene, Snyder combines various types of beings; "Ainu[s]" – a Japanese ethnic group, the squirrels' playful yet instinct-driven movements, and at the same time, there is the deep-seated, almost ritualistic hunting scene with the mythological presence of Artemis and Pan, which creates a layered experience of wilderness, blending the mundane with the mythic. Artemis and Pan

> bring down a deer
> and skin it together
> eat fresh liver
> cooked over embers
> In the silvery light of the moon (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 10)

By imagining Artemis and Pan hunting and consuming the deer together, Snyder blurs the boundary between divine, animal, and human realms. The act is primal, sensual, and ritualistic, suggesting that wildness is not merely an animal trait, but something intrinsic to existence itself, including human passion, survival, and even love. Thus, Snyder constructs a layered wilderness that is mythic, embodied, and deeply interspecies.

Naming without Claiming: Snyder's Paradox of Language and Nature

Another strategy Gary Snyder devises to break the anthropocentric discourse is to name animals, plants, and landscapes with a deep reverence for nature instead of imposing metaphorical meanings that center on human experience. He employs a poetic practice through which he names animals, plants, and landscapes not to possess or symbolize them, but to honor their presence and being. What Snyder questions here is the mimetic principle of metaphor, which operates by placing human action at its center. In *The Rule of Metaphor* (2004), Paul Ricoeur analyzes the working principles of metaphor from an ontological perspective along with linguistic, semantic, and hermeneutic dimensions and concludes that metaphor creates a new meaning or understanding that goes beyond a mere substitution. Metaphors are embedded within larger narratives that shape our understanding of the world, and they include "the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality" (Ricoeur 5). Ricoeur's understanding of metaphor is intriguing because he sees it as a way to reveal new meanings and reconfigure reality. The reality and meaning conveyed with metaphor are shaped by human perspective, according to Ricoeur. Ricoeur's view on metaphor is evident in Snyder's effort to decenter the human and adopt a more holistic, eco-centered worldview. In this sense, Snyder's metaphors do not merely translate non-human entities into human terms but instead strive to reveal and honor the intrinsic qualities and agency of those beings as they exist independently of human description. As Snyder aims to depict nature and creatures in a non-hierarchical manner, names may serve a metaphorical purpose for him, linking the literal and symbolic aspects of language. In his writing, Snyder problematizes the conventional understanding of metaphor that reflects human experience and prioritization of human-related concerns by renouncing an anthropocentric perspective. This is consistent with his Zen Buddhist philosophy, which accepts all sentient beings on their own accord without the need to relate them to human-imposed narratives. It can be concluded that Snyder's poetry resists the human tendency to give the natural world an anthropocentric meaning by incorporating a profound ecological consciousness. Yet, this approach presents a poetic and ethical tension, which is how a poet can name the world without appropriating it. This is precisely where Snyder's struggle with language lies, and his struggle is not only aesthetic but also ontological and ethical.

In the poem "The Names of Actaeon's Hounds," Snyder names all the hounds, but this naming is not merely cataloging; it functions in line with Paul Ricoeur's claim that metaphor creates "a new being in language" and reconfigures our perception of reality (Ricoeur 5). In this way, Snyder locates his poetry in a liminal space between myth and modernity, speech and silence, human meaning-making and animal otherness. The act of naming becomes a form of acknowledgment rather than appropriation: he names without claiming, resisting the mimetic urge to translate all experience into human terms. In the poem, Snyder engages with the myth of Actaeon, the hunter from Greek mythology who is punished for seeing the goddess Artemis bathing. In Ovid's

Metamorphoses, Actaeon is transformed into a stag not only as a physical punishment, but also this prevents him from speaking; his metamorphosis silences him, blocking him from revealing what he saw. This mythic loss of speech draws a sharp contrast to the poet's role as namer, a creator of language and meaning. Snyder reverses the silencing by offering a cascade of names for the hounds that tore Actaeon apart:

The Names of Actaeon's Hounds

Black-foot
Trail-follower
Voracious
Gazelle
Mountain-ranger
Fawn-killer
Hurricane
Hunter
Winged
Sylvan
Glen
Shepherd
Seizer
Catcher
Runner
Gnasher
Spot
Tigress
Might
White
Soot
Spartan
Whirlwind
Swift
Cyprian
Wolf
Grasper
Black
Shag
Fury
White-tooth
Barker
Black-hair
Beast-killer
Mountaineer (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 15)

With each name here, there is an emphasis on the speed, fury, and predatory nature of the hounds, which gives us a composite depiction of animals in the wild. The poem is made up of mere names rather than single labels; Acteon's dog names Black-foot, Trail-follower, Voracious, Hurricane, Glen, Seizer, Wolf, and Fury seem to evoke a sense of the wild. Like Ovid, Snyder also gives names to the hounds in line with their strength, behaviors, and unique features. Grounding the names in the hounds' physical traits: Black-hair, White-tooth, in natural incidents: Whirlwind, Hurricane, or their roles in the hunt: Hunter, Catcher, Grasper rings parallel with Snyder's goal of resisting metaphorical human-centric vision of nature. These names evoke an embodied presence and individuality for each animal. In doing so, Snyder reclaims language from mythic repression, shifting focus from the human who is silenced to the non-human agents who are named into presence. He refrains from using openly symbolic images in favor of concrete ones and labels them based on what they are rather than what they mean to humans. Rather than redescription through comparison to the human, Snyder's language seeks to let beings be**,** to name a thing in a way that gestures toward its distinct existence. He does not merely label nature, but listens to it, mimics its rhythms, and acknowledges its otherness. This is not a rejection of metaphor per se, but a recalibration of its use. The naming process imposes a framework that focuses on human vision despite the attempt at non-human-centric naming. While the titles of Snyder's poems may appear observational or respectful of non-human life, they are still filtered through human language, which inevitably categorizes and contains. Thus, Snyder's poetry occupies an interstitial space: it seeks to evoke the presence of non-human entities without subordinating them to anthropocentric frameworks, yet it remains bound by the semiotic and linguistic systems it attempts to transcend.

How Snyder tries to problematize the anthropocentric trap is not about eliminating language but changing how it functions. Fragmented syntax, minimal use of language, and resisting explanation are the arsenals that Snyder uses to delegate the individuality and presence of non-human beings on their terms while trying to minimize the human presence. He declines to describe the hounds' relationship to Actaeon, their human master, in this poem. The hounds' abilities, features, and roles in nature are foregrounded instead. The hounds are creatures with unique identities connected to the natural world, and their names neither humanize them nor reduce them to mere accessories to human narrative. They are sentient beings connected to the natural world, and how they are mentioned in the poem shows Snyder's deep respect for all sentient beings' individuality. By carefully selecting names that truly reflect the hounds' traits and features, he instills a sense of presence and dignity in them. The titles of Actaeon's hounds, such as Wolf, Swift, and Catcher, still classify them under a human logic of strength, mobility, and hunting. Even as he confronts anthropocentrism by letting nature *speak* through direct observation and little intervention, he recognizes that language will never be able to fully bridge the gap between the human experience and the wild, independent life of the non-human world.

"How to Know Birds" is another poem that once again turns the focus from human-centered experiences to a close relationship with the natural world, particularly birds (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 25). In this poem, knowing birds involves more than just knowing their names; it also entails comprehending their movements, figures, and links to their environment. Here, Snyder's repeated theme of resisting anthropocentrism can be seen as he emphasizes the birds themselves rather

than putting them in the framework of human issues. In "How to Know Birds," Snyder encourages us to perceive and observe all sentient beings according to their own terms and to question the human type of methods of knowing. As opposed to the human's reflex to first consider naming the bird, the poem emphasizes comprehending birds' movements, habits, and relationships to their environment in the first place. Snyder's strong sympathy for animals and his reverence for their autonomy can be seen in his problematizing of anthropocentrism and prioritizing biocentric knowledge. True understanding, for Snyder, comes from observing and appreciating the bird's presence in its natural environment instead of humans' attempts to classify or categorize them.

Snyder lays bare the mechanism that human beings know both human and non-human entities only when they name them. Only when human beings can refer to a being with language, is it assumed that this entity exists for the human. Yet, Snyder nullifies this illusion by trying to reveal that non-human beings do exist even if we do not give them names with their own unique features, styles, and/or routines. In the poem about birds, he shows some important expertise about birds' features, moves, and patterns. Starting with the first lines, depending on time and space, human beings reside in, birds can exhibit an infinite number of moves and actions:

> The place you're in
> The time of year
>
> How they move and where in the meadows, brush, forest,
> rocks, reeds, are they hanging out
> alone or in a group or little groups?
>
> Size, speed, sorts of flight
>
> Quirks. Tail flicks, wing-shakes, bobbing —
> Can you see what they're eating?
>
> Calls and songs?
>
> Finally, if you get a chance, can you see their colors,
> details of plumage — lines, dots, bars (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 25)

Snyder establishes his observation of birds in a biocentric context here namely the physical environment and seasonal timing. Rather than jumping to the act of naming birds as humans generally do, the poetic persona invites readers to pay attention to their natural surroundings, showing that location and time are factors for our understanding of animals, not names. This biocentric approach shows that animals are part of their ecological context but not simple objects for human identification with language. This poem can be said to affirm Snyder's aphorism-like statement that "language is, to a great extent, biological" (qtd. in Middleton 216). With the help of his poetry, Snyder exhibits the idea that "poetry itself is a manifestation of biology" (qtd. in Middleton 216). Readers are also encouraged to focus on how birds move through various

landscapes like meadows, forests, rocks, reeds, and they are fully integrated into nature, being autonomous beings. Just like human beings, birds also have some social patterns, like living alone or in a community. On close observation, one can be in command of their complex social dynamics and behaviors. Snyder's juxtaposition of birds to humans' patterns of interaction and behaviors acts as a challenge against the inclination to see animals solely through a human lens.

Each bird here is taken as an individual being; the term "quirks" refers to the individual, unique actions of each bird. This line especially emphasizes their distinctive habits and traits. By highlighting these small and quotidian realities about birds, Snyder keeps the viewer away from a generalized and objectified view of these animals, and he encourages a deeper and more personalized connection to all sentient beings. This detailed observation exhibits deep respect for their being and uniqueness. Their autonomy can be recognized in their behaviors such as tail flicks, wing-shakes, and calls, emphasizing that birds are complex creatures whose beings cannot be reduced to mere symbols or metaphors. This leads to a broader ecological philosophy in which every sentient being is linked to a larger and interconnected system. Snyder also shares auditory details about birds, like their songs, as well as sensory and visual features. Listening instead of speaking is another theme that emerges in Snyder's poetry to highlight that humans should listen more to the natural world rather than constantly describe or interpret it. Instead, he attempts to represent natural sounds, movements, and rhythms without subordinating them to a human meaning-making agenda. The very last two lines of the poem are a resolution, implying that it is time to share the name of the bird, as if the whole observation of the bird is for legitimizing the name, which is generally evoked by the features of the bird. However, with the last line, Snyder undermines this tendency and announces that naming can only be secondary to being: "That will tell you the details you need to come up with a name/ but/ You already know this bird" (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 25). These lines clearly show that knowing a bird and recognizing it go beyond the act of naming or categorizing it. On the contrary, knowing a bird comes from observing its essence, like its movements, behaviors, and place in the world. Naming is all about humans' reflexes and acts of control, which feel irrelevant in nature. It is observed that Snyder posits birds as subjects and that we humans are just observers of their place in nature; thus, in the poem, he avoids exploiting birds to reflect human experiences but focuses on emotions outside of human needs or narratives. The birds, like all sentient beings, are placed in a biocentric framework where they are taken as integral participants in nature, not as extensions of human perception.

Snyder is critical of the potential of language to reflect the dynamics of nature and sentient beings, including human-related issues. Like Neil Goodman, Snyder is very much interested in the power of naming and how it shapes understanding and perception. Goodman, in his book titled *Ways of Worldmaking,* looks at epistemological categories like truth, reality, or meaning from a critical lens and adopts a more contingent philosophy. He lays bare that although language cannot convey any absolute meaning, it can still offer many, depending on the stance and/or context, as follows: "Countless worlds made from nothing by use of symbols" (1). Putting the emphasis on the "variety and formative function of symbols," Goodman proposes the term "worldmaking" to show that worlds, realities, and truths can be made for each context; that is, one single world or absolute truth/meaning is anachronistic (1). From this proposition, it can be inferred that shrewd

suggestions of Western anthropocentrism urge us to perceive sentient beings in the anthropocentric world around a single truth, which is also conveyed by anthropocentric language. By refusing to adopt this mindset, Snyder tries to make his world by problematizing the idea of identifying and naming anything following logos, the organizing principle. In another poem in the collection, the naming issue, this time, counts for human beings. The poem "Old New Mexican Genetics" offers a meditation on the historical categorization of race and identity in colonial Mexico presented through a list of racial classifications (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 16). Starting with the title of the poem, old but new, apparently, Snyder is complicating and putting the dualities at stake. It captures a historical moment when society's attempt to control and define people's identities by naming, depending on genetic lineage, was both reductive and complex. The poem points to issues of race, power, and identity in a colonized landscape, especially in the cultural fashion and hierarchical society of eighteenth century New Mexico. The poem is a critical exploration of the colonial racial caste system in New Mexico, exposing how identities were socially constructed to reinforce power dynamics. Snyder's use of historical categories emphasizes the fluidity of race and the absurdity of trying to confine human diversity within rigid definitions. Through this, he invites readers to reflect on how history, genetics, and culture intertwine to shape identities across time:

> *Español*. White. But maybe a Mestizo, or anyone who has
> money and the right style
>
> *Indio*. A Native American person
>
> *Mestizo*. One Spanish and one Indio parent
>
> *Color Quebrado*. "Broken color" —a rare category of 3-way or more
> mix. White / African / Indio
>
> *Mulato.* White/African ancestry
>
> *Coyote*. Indio parent with Mestizo parent
>
> *Lobo*. One Indio plus one African parent
>
> *Genizaro* (Janissary). Plains Indian captives sold and used as slaves
> (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 16)

By making use of fragmented and minimalist language and avoiding a symbolic tone again, Snyder aims to reveal the temperamental, arbitrary, and repressive character of colonial race classifications. Español, Indio, and Mulato identities are all socially and artificially constructed labels that are used to control and polarize people based on their heritage. In his critique of the colonial system that enforces these designations, Snyder highlights how identity is used to uphold colonial power and impose hierarchies. He draws attention to the ridiculous intricacy of colonial racial categorization, particularly with terms like Coyote and Color Quebrado. These classifications frequently become disarrayed, demonstrating the pointlessness of attempting to define human identity in strict, formalistic terms. So, the poem seems to imply that such fabricated labels and/or names are insufficient to capture the mobility of human identity. The first lines set the context

and specific timeline: "Santa Fe, at the Palace of the Governors, this 18th century listing of official genetic possibilities" (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 16). Santa Fe, New Mexico, Palace of the Governors is mentioned here as the site of colonial power and dominance. Dating back to the 18th century, Snyder refers to a list categorizing people by their racial or genetic composition, highlighting the constructed and arbitrary nature of this categorization.

Like how Snyder shows the difficulty of referring to Actaeon's hounds or birds with names or descriptions, he problematizes how classification or categorization fails to reflect the very essence of being for humans as well. How he tries to refer to Español, for instance, is a clear indication of how human semiotics fails to name some group of people accurately: "Español. White. But may be a Mestizo, or anyone who has enough / money and the right style" (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 16). As these lines suggest, these labels are not indeed inherent or absolute, but they depend on context and are fluid, which can be manipulated by wealth or influence. Anyone holding money and codes, even if their skin is not white, can exploit the privileges that come with the identity in colonial and post-colonial systems. Snyder critiques the social construct of race, where identity can be bent to suit economic or political purposes. Among these "genetic possibilities," there is a more direct and short description for "*Indio*" who is referred to as "A Native American person" (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 16). Unlike the definition of Mestizo Indio, Native Americans are categorized more simply and reductively within colonial systems; in other words, their identity is reduced to a racial or ethnic label that ignores the complexity of their cultures and histories. These labels are, as Goodman explains with the term he coined, "worldmaking," the reflections of a worldview created by a colonial mindset that viewed racial purity as ideal and any mix as a deviation of a "broken" state. In Snyder's poem, another genetic possibility is defined as follows: *"Color Quebrado*. 'Broken color' —a rare category of 3-way or more / mix. White / African / Indio" (Snyder, *This Present Moment* 16). Color Quebrado is a rare category, and its label "broken" reflects how society perceives certain racial mixes as unusual aberrations and outside the expected categories. Another intricate category might be "coyote," which again gives the sense that mixed-race individuals are associated with trickery or positioned in the liminal space between wild and domestic. Snyder critiques the colonial gaze that dehumanizes and exoticizes mixed-race people. This poem explores the colonial obsession with racial classification and the dehumanizing effects of such systems. At this point, the reader is encouraged to question the social constructs of race and identity, which conceal violence and control embedded in names and/or labels. These systems continue to shape our understanding of humanity today. In line with Snyder's broader philosophy, the poem rejects simplistic, anthropocentric views of identity and embraces the complexity and fluidity of human existence.

Conclusion

In *This Present Moment,* Snyder criticizes the anthropocentric view of Western ideology, which is reflected mainly in the use of language by drawing analogies or metaphors based on human-centered viewpoints. Instead, against the backdrop of ecocentric thinking, Snyder uses tropology by focusing on the uniqueness and performativity of sentient beings without referring to their relation to humans. In doing so, he questions and problematizes any narrative prioritizing human concerns and the ethos of modernity, encouraging human progress while disregarding the rights

and essence of non-human sentient beings. Resisting the dictations of the anthropocentric way of thinking, Snyder welcomes a paradigm shift towards a more biocentric approach, which emphasizes non-duality and interconnectedness, rather than dominance or human-centered hierarchies. In this collection, Snyder names animals, plants, or natural phenomena in ways that emphasize their autonomy and sacredness, free from human associations often rooted in his Buddhist beliefs and environmental ethics.

In conveying deep reverence for nature, where names are not just labels but acknowledgments of a being's presence, Snyder cannot escape the human lens, which is language, the human semiotics. Even in resisting metaphor, it can be concluded that his work still functions within human perception; after all, the initiative to avoid anthropocentric metaphor itself is an intellectual move. Complicating the referential nature of language, in many poems under scrutiny in the collection, Snyder uses sparse, fragmented lines in a way that these poems are an extension of the natural world rather than a structured and imposed human artifact. Although this technique might create an effect where language does not dominate the subject but exists alongside it, it concomitantly underlines the paradox of trying to represent non-human sentient beings through a human medium that pinpoints Snyder's incessant negotiation between ecological commitment and linguistic constraints. In a similar fashion, Snyder's problematization of the anthropocentric metaphor reflects a deeper concern with how human life is categorized or compartmentalized via language that serves systems of control or exploitation. Naming conventions, even for sentient human beings, frequently restrict people to roles, tasks, or identities that are influenced by socio-cultural hierarchy. By deconstructing these patterns in his depiction of all sentient beings, Snyder subtly encourages us to reevaluate our understanding and relationships with all forms of life, including our own, beyond the parameters of instrumental or dualistic thought.

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Rewriting the Medieval Framed Tale for America: Longfellow's *Tales of a Wayside Inn*

Abstract
Longfellow with his academic and literary training, his travels to Europe and long stay in Europe studying languages and literatures, was well rooted in European literatures and traditions. His *Tales of a Wayside Inn* is highly inspired by the medieval framed tale, especially Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Boccaccio's *Decameron.* Similar to these medieval framed tales, Longfellow brings together a group of narrators, who meet at a specific location and tell tales in keeping with their characters although there is no journey motif or a poetic competition. The tales are preceded by a prelude which serves as an introduction, similar to the medieval European ones; there are comments and interactions between the narrators. With his European heritage, Longfellow seems to be creating a literary heritage for America, with strong ties to Europe and European literary traditions. He borrows all his tales from Europe, except for the last one which is his original creation, his narrators are from America with real American citizens. Similarly, the setting is still an identifiable specific American setting.
Keywords: Longfellow, *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, medieval framed tale, rewriting

Longfellow'un *Tales of a Wayside Inn* Eseri: Ortaçağ Hikâye içinde Hikâye Geleneğini Amerika için Yeniden Yazmak

Öz
Longfellow, aldığı eğitim, edebiyat alanında yaptığı çalışmalar, daha sonraki akademik hayatı, Avrupaya yaptığı seyahatler ve orada kaldığı sure içinde Avrupa dilleri ve edebiyatları ile ilgili yaptığı çalışmalar dolayısı ile Avrupa dilleri, edebiyatları ve edebi gelenekleri ile ilgili geniş bir bilgiye sahipti. *Tales of a Wayside Inn* eserini yazarken özellikle Ortaçağ'da yaygın olan hikâye içinde hikâye geleneğinden, özellikle de Chaucer'ın *Canterbury Tales*'inden ve Boccaccio'nun *Decameron* eserinden esinlenmiştir. Bu eserlerdeki gibi, Longfellow şanseseri, bir handa bir araya gelen yedi kişiyi tanıtır, bu kişiler belli bir düzen içinde hikâyeler anlatırlar. Anlatılan hikâyeler karakterler ile uyum içinde olacak şekilde düzenlenmiştir. Ama diğer eserlerde gözlemlenen yolculuk motifi ve bir yarışma motifi kullanılmamıştır. Diğer Ortaçağ Avrupa hikâye içinde hikâye geleneği örneklerinde sıklıkla görüldüğü üzere, eserin başında bir giriş/Prelüd bölümü vardır, hikâyeler arasında anlatıcı ve dinleyicilerin konuşmaları, yaptıkları yorumlar bulunmaktadır. Longfellow, adeta geniş Avrupa edebi gelenekleri bilgisi ışığında Amerika için geçerli olacak ve Avrupa gelenekleri ile bağ kuracak bir eser yaratmaktadır. Hikâyelerden sadece sonuncusu özgündür, diğeri Avrupa edebiyatlarından alınmıştır, fakat anlatıcıların hepsi Amerikalıdır, çoğu da gerçek kişileri yansıtmaktadır, mekan da Amerika'da bilinen gerçek bir mekandır.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Longfellow, *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, Ortaçağ hikâye içinde hikâye geleneği, yeniden yazım

Introduction

Longfellow's background, upbringing, scholarly work and teaching positions he later held at educational institutions had a great influence on his poetry. He was born in New England Portland, Maine in 1807, to a well established and educated family who had immigrated to America from York, England, three generations before. As Arvin states, he was in the midst of "an early, expansive and culturally most vigorous period" and location (4). Portland was "a small, busy, active and prosperous sea port, its streets and wharves lively with the coming and going of sea captains and sailors" (Arvin 4). This setting is similar to Chaucer's childhood London which was not only the administrative seat and one of the biggest cities of its time in Europe, but it was also a very active port, where people of many different walks of life came together; it was a meeting place for people from different countries and backgrounds. This location with its hustling and bustling community, with its more than fair share of travelers must have provided very enriching and colorful experiences that Longfellow used in his poetry. The presence of the family library and the encouragement of his mother made his wide reading possible. He attended a private school in Portland and later Portland Academy. His schooling was primarily focused on literature and the classics (Arvin 11).

Longfellcu, studied as a postgraduate at Harvard till 1822, concentrating on general literature and gaining knowledge in French and Italian. When Bowgoin established a Chair of Modern Languages he was appointed there. He took this post when he was 18 years old. Upon this appointment he took his first trip to Europe, namely, France, Spain, Italy, and Germany (1826), where for three years he learned or improved his skills in these languages, and studied the literatures and cultures of these countries. During his stay at these countries he did not have a formal education but he attended lectures and he did not limit himself to learning the literature and the language but "immersed himself in the culture" (Arvin 24). Arvin emphasizes the fact that no other writer did this, and that this led to the "fusion of the native and the foreign" (22). On his journey back he visited London, and he was in contact with some literary figures and sailed from Liverpool to America.

In 1834 he was offered the Smith Professorship of Modern Languages in Harvard which he accepted a year later. He was offered a year and a half's study at Europe, in Northern Europe and Germany, studying German and Scandinavian literatures and languages (Arvin 30). He was familiar with some of the literary figures of his time and on his way back he stayed with Charles Dickens for a time.

Longfellow's Use of the Framed Tale

Longfellow was not only well read in English and European literatures but in various specific poems he expresses his admiration for the past and contemporary poets, for example he has written poems entitled "Chaucer" (315,322), "Shakespeare", "Milton", "Keats" (315-16), "Wapentake", "Tennyson" (323) from Britain and others from Europe, as well as referring to them in the *Tales of a Wayside Inn.* He refers specifically to the *Canterbury Tales* in "Woodstock Park" and states how inspiring it is:

> Here Geoffrey Chaucer in his ripe old age
> Wrote the unrivalled Tales which soon or late
> The venturous hand that strives to imitate
> Vanquished must fall on the Unfinished page. (*Complete Poetical Works* 322)

Although he shows great respect and admiration for the old masters in Europe, and with humility states that, in this case Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, they cannot be imitated, he succeeds in his venture in creating his version of the framed tale collection which was specifically designed for his time and audience.

In his Italian sonnet entitled "Chaucer" he depicts the poet in a medieval setting which is also his study, and states the master's important role: "He is the poet of the dawn, who wrote/ The Canterbury Tales, and his old age/ Made beautiful with song" (*Complete Poetical Works* 315). As both Calin (202) and Tenfelde (107) comment, Chaucer is depicted as a poet paving the way with his contributions that would provide a fertile ground for the future generation of poets by transmitting the poetic legacy. Longfellow felt that he also could be a poet of the dawn, that he could do for America what Chaucer had done for England by bringing in European culture-a literature and a past which were lacking in the New World. (Calin 202)

His wide reading and knowledge in various European literatures, and his roots in the classics and Western literature is clearly evident in his work. *Tales of a Wayside Inn* is a work in the tradition of the framed tale which Longfellow is well acquainted with. His work received mixed criticism. He has been accused of having produced a "dusty forgery" by the Italian critic Gabriele Baldini (qtd. in Arvin 204) and has been criticized for imitating the European poets by some American writers of his time (Kennedy 265). However, the work became quite popular in his time. In fact, he is writing in a well established European medieval tradition that stretches back not only to antiquity but even to Eastern sources such as the *Thousand and One Nights* and *The Seven Sages* (Katherine Slater Gittes "Arabic Frame Tradition" 237). The medieval practitioners of the framed tale tradition were not few, and if we are to name the most popular ones, they were Boccacio with *Ameto, Filocolo*, *Decameron* and Chaucer with his *Canterbury Tales*. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw the development of a new phase in the framed tale convention (Boitani 114, Cooper "The Frame" 1). Therefore, it would not be fair to label what Longfellow sets out to do as plagiarism or "forgery," because the tradition of the framed tales was based on bringing together of tales which were borrowed, translated or retold (Bryan and Dempster *passim*). Moreover, Longfellow is fully aware of this aspect of the well known tradition and he is rewriting the framed tale for America and an American audience of his time. As an anonymous critic stated "he was a mediator between the old and the new; he translated the romance of the past into the language of universal life" (qtd. in Kennedy 261).

His *Tales of a Wayside Inn* owes much to the two of the most well-known framed tales of the European Middle Ages, namely Boccacio's *Decameron* (Pratt and Young 9 ff) and Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales.* As Helen Cooper defines it, the framed tale convention embraced the following qualities, most of which are applicable to Longfellow's work (*The Structure* 9-10). She says it is:

> A collection of separable tales compiled or written, or more probably re-written, essentially by a single author; and it circulates in a recognizably coherent form. It is different, from an anthology or a manuscript miscellany, or from a collection of separate works by a single man, where the different items do not necessarily belong together. (*The Structure* 9-10)

She also classifies these stories under three groups according to their structural ordering: “those that consist simply of tales, with no enclosing material at all; . . . those that have a prologue and sometimes an epilogue but no linking material between the tales: . . . and some that have a fully developed framework enclosing and connecting the stories (*The Structure* 9-10).

Longfellow’s *Tales of a Wayside Inn* are of the third group according to this classification, and the work has a fully developed enclosing frame, a general prologue and introductory prologues to each three sections. There are connecting interactive sections between the narratives, and an epilogue. Longfellow’s work is a collection of verse narratives told by seven narrators, on three consecutive days which add up to twenty-two tales that are grouped under thee parts, one for each session. The work begins with a Prelude, and after each narrator tells his tale there is an interaction scene where a discussion or comment on the tale told is made by some of the narrators to lead to the next tale. These interactions not only are functional in leading to the next tale, but they also add variety and dramatic action and prevent the monotony that may be caused by the tales following each other. The work ends with an epilogue entitled “Finale.” Longfellow’s work is meticulously planned and follows the “complete model” of the framed tales. Boccaccio in the *Decameron* presents ten tale tellers both male and female, who narrate these stories over ten days, while seeking refuge from the plague in an Italian villa. Chaucer in the *Canterbury Tales* presents twenty-nine pilgrims who have come together at the Tabard Inn before they set out on a journey to Canterbury. Similar to Longfellow’s narrators, it is a group that has been formed by chance. They are entertained at the dinner in the Inn by the Host, and they get acquainted with each other. The story telling competition is designed by the Host Harry Bailly. According to this arrangement each pilgrim was to tell four stories, two on the way to Canterbury and two on the way back, and the Host proposes to reward the best moral tale with a free meal on their return to the Tabard Inn. As Helen Cooper points out, this poetic contest among the pilgrims is unique to Chaucer (“The Frame” 18). However, Chaucer’s work is open ended and incomplete in structure, and it has survived in fragments.

There is also another European framed tale, Giovanni Sercambi’s *Novelle* (Bryan and Dempster 33-81), where a group of male and female travelers set on the road from Lucca in Italy to escape the plague which was composed at a later date than Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* (Robert M Correale and Marry Hammel eds. Preface I, Helen Cooper “The Frame” 2). There is no clear evidence that Longfellow may have had access to it, but since he was studying the medieval Italian works in Italy he might have had access to it. In this framed tale for their journey, the group of travelers elect a leader and storyteller who narrates all the tales. The first two examples seem to have provided the main inspiration and model for Longfellow as they have multiple narrators. The narrators of Longfellow meet at “an ancient hostelry, The Red Horse Inn, in Sudbury, not far from Boston-as natural a gathering place for nineteenth century Americans as the inn at Southwark had been for Chaucer’s men and women” (Arvin 204). In fact, Longfellow at first had thought of entitling his work as *Sudbury Tales*, but later he gave up the idea as it would be too close to Chaucer’s title (Arvin 206). There is not a pilgrimage, travel or tale telling competition motif in *Tales of a Wayside Inn,* and the tale telling and other interchange of ideas, dialogues and activities take place mostly by the fireside. They have come to the Inn to spend some pleasurable time in a peaceful rural autumn setting, away from the busy life of the town and contemporary issues. The Red Horse Inn is very reminiscent of The Tabard Inn where Chaucer’s pilgrims meet and are greeted and introduced

by the Host. Similar to the Host, the Landlord in *Tales of a Wayside Inn* presides over the story telling and very similar to Chaucer's General Prologue, where each pilgrim is introduced in detail, the narrator in the Prelude introduces the seven story tellers (205-207). Although these portraits are not as colorful and detailed as the ones Chaucer depicts in detail, they present the characters sufficiently. The General Prologue was an invention of Chaucer that contributed to the framed tale tradition, although various character sketches were known in the Middle Ages such a presentation of a collection did not exist. As most critics point out, Chaucer provided quite a good sampling of almost all estates of medieval society in his portrait gallery. As Wimsatt aptly puts it, the General Prologue is a mirror of the society in Chaucer's time (163,165). Longfellow follows in his footsteps; however, he is not only setting the tales in America but he is rewriting it in a fashion more suitable to American values and customs. Boccaccio and Chaucer's works are the closest analogues to *Tales of a Wayside Inn* as these are the framed tales where the participants all narrate tales and interact with each other. In the other similar framed tales these qualities are lacking.

Narrators

In comparison to the framed tale of Chaucer, Longfellow in Calin's words is "more realistic" (200) as he narrows down the number of narrators, keeps the tale telling activity in the parlor, and casts the Landlord "not as a judge but democratically, as a fully accredited teller" (200). The narrators and the Landlord figure of Longfellow are all drawn from American associates and colleagues as the poet himself stated. The seven storytellers of Longfellow are the Landlord, the Student, the Young Sicilian, the Spanish Jew, the Theologian, the Poet and the Musician. The real characters that provided the basic model for the characters of Longfellow are as follows: Landlord- Lyman Howe was the owner of the Red Horse Inn in the seventeenth century, the Student was based on Henry Ware Wales who was a Harvard man, the Sicilian- was based on Luigi Monti who was exiled after the 1848 revolution, the Spanish Jew is said to be most probably Isaac Edrehi who lived in Boston, the Theologian was modeled on Daniel Treadwell- Rumford who was a professor of physics at Harvard, the Poet is said to be Thomas William Parsons (Arvin 208, *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, Introduction 204).

These characters who form the group and the narrators of the tales, have been fictionalized, and they roughly have similar social status. The Theologian, the young Poet, the Student and the Landlord are all Americans, and except for the Landlord the other three are literary or academic figures which results in most of their comments being quite academic and moral. The other three narrators who can be classified as the non-Americans are the Musician from Norway, the young Sicilian- a political exile and the Spanish Jew are quite likely to be in this American setting. The narrators of Boccaccio belong to the same class, and they all talk about love. The number being ten, three gentlemen and seven ladies. Each day one of them presides over the story telling, and in ten days the stories amount to a hundred. Chaucer's design shows more variation, some of the characters are reflections of real persons in his medieval community. Chaucer following the traditions and classifications of his time adheres to the three estate classification and its divisions, and provides samples from almost all the important sections of medieval society (Wimsatt 165). Moreover, he also makes use of the estates satire tradition and provides "a satiric representation of all classes of society" (Mann 1ff). The Knight is at the top of the medieval social hierarchy and the lowest rank of the society are represented by the Plowman and the Parson, which all add up to twenty-nine pilgrims both from secular professions and clergy, including three tale teller

female characters: the Wife of Bath and the Prioress and the Nun. The narrators of Longfellow are more limited, have less variety and there are no women participants. Longfellow draws his characters from American life and society, from the close community he lives in, and following the social mores of his times, he does not include any female participants or narrators as it would not be appropriate to include women into this framework (Arvin 207). As it can be deduced from this brief outline, although Longfellow stands in the long tradition of medieval framed tale, he is rewriting and remodeling it according to his time and the specific location. As Calin puts it, Longfellow "adopts him [Chaucer] to the horizon of expectations of a nineteenth-century English speaking public" (198).

Tale Telling

Although the method of variation in the tale telling is quite fixed in the *Decameron*, Chaucer has brought in a plan that is later disrupted very realistically and breaks the monotony of the flow and allows for lively interaction and dialogues. According to the initial plan set by the Host of the Tabard Inn, the story telling was to follow the medieval hierarchy of class and estate, and the Knight was asked to tell the first tale to be followed by the Monk to form a descending order. However, the drunken Miller intervenes and insists that he will tell a better tale and proceeds. Afterwards, the story telling continues in a fashion of interaction and response to the former tale. Moreover, the tale telling takes place on horseback, on the way to Canterbury and back. This setup brings variety and drama although most of the critics agree about "horseback narration" not being very realistic. As Calin presents in detail and very aptly puts it, the frame is very important in the *Canterbury Tales;* it is so weighty, so rich and problematic, and so meaningful in terms of psychology and human relations (including gender), that we have to acknowledge its importance and accord it the same attention that we grant to the tales themselves (205).

The conflicts between the tellers and their own statements and remarks in Chaucer's work provide not only dramatic action and break the monotony of the story telling, but also give an idea about the tellers' condition, social class and religion. Additionally, they provide insight into the tales as Calin emphasizes (205). Moreover as Helen Cooper asserts the "connections of theme and motif between the tales" is an efficient device to keep the diverse tales connected ("The Frame" 12).

Longfellow seems to be inspired by Chaucer's model, but he develops the application in a more organized and limited manner. *Tales of a Wayside Inn* consists of three parts, one allotted to each session, where every storyteller was supposed to tell one tale. The story telling is actualized according to plan the first evening; the stories follow each other as a confirmation of or as a reaction to the preceding one. The second part narrates the tales told on the second day which is a rainy and unpleasant autumn day. The narrators meet in the morning and after breakfast the story telling begins by the fireside. However, when they begin they see that the Landlord is missing, and the Student is asked to tell a second tale. Similarly, in the third section, the Jew is also allotted two stories. Hence, the rigidity of the finely constructed structure is broken. The monotony of the tale telling is also disrupted by various activities such as the reference to the sword on the wall of the Inn, the musician's playing of the violin and later his dismay when one of its strings are broken, the description of the story tellers that come down to the dining hall in the morning, each displaying a different personality and mood. There are also comments and discussions sometimes revealing conflict of ideas and opinions. These all add dramatic liveliness to

the work. In this aspect Longfellow comes closest to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, but as Calin has aptly illustrated, in Chaucer these activities are much more layered and functional, and form an essential part of the work, whereas Longfellow's interludes do not function in the same manner (204). In the *Canterbury Tales* the narrators interact more harshly and in an intense manner, they tell tales to discredit each other, and there are also passing remarks to specific locations on the way to Canterbury which breaks the monotony. Additionally, two new pilgrims the Manciple and his Yeoman join the group on the way. In the *Tales of a Wayside Inn* during the second evening the tale telling resumes and each teller narrates a tale, and the next day the tellers all part their ways never to meet again.

Tale-Teller Relationship

Another point that Longfellow follows the framed tale convention is the tale-teller relationship he sets up, and the suitability of the tales to the narrators. In a way, the tellers being allotted tales in keeping with the tellers' characters becomes an extension of the characterization, which is again reminiscent of Chaucer's method. The Landlord tells tales from New England which are stirring and sometimes humorous; the Theologian tells tales which are religious; the Musician, who is a romantic Norwegian narrates Norse sagas and a Danish ballad and plays his music in between; the Spanish Jew tells tales from the Talmud which have a dark mood; the Student tells well wrought entertaining tales from Europe (Arvin 208).

The framed tale model generally is a compendium of tales belonging to many different genres. Longfellow provides a great resource in this aspect. His tales are drawn from far and wide, geographically stretching from the East to Europe and to America as their sources. Genrewise, he provides almost more variety than his predecessors in medieval Europe including ballads, Nordic sagas, romance, fabliaux, horror stories, exemplum, parable, novella, colonial historic story, stories from the Talmud to name some. Chaucer is the medieval master who sets example for Longfellow. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales,* even in its fragmented and incomplete form, provides examples from almost all medieval genres. The genre represented are: romance, fabliaux, saint's life, exemplum, Breton lay, burlesque, beast fable, medieval tragedy, moral tale in prose, folk tale, fable, sermon. However, Longfellow chooses the tales that befit the values of his time, for example, when he writes fabliaux he avoids the bawdy ones but chooses the humorous, satirical more modest examples of the genre. In the interactions and activities referred to in between the tales in Longfellow's *Tales of a Wayside Inn* the only music heard is the dignified and romantic music played by the Musician on his violin, while Chaucer's pilgrims are led by the churl Miller playing his bagpipes with much sexual implications (Ross 39). The Miller leads the company of pilgrims in the world of temptations on their journey which is also the journey of life.

As for the art of versification, Longfellow provides the greatest variety among the practitioners of the framed tale. He varies the stanza format, the meter and the rhyme and rhythm, and skillfully varies the flow and the musical quality of each tale including the twenty-two short tales of the "Saga of King Olaf." He offers two types of ballad stanza, free verse, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 line stanzas, couplets and a variety of rhyme schemes. He almost provides an anthology of genre and versification techniques that were used in his time.

Five of the twenty-two tales in the *Tales of a Wayside Inn* are of America or of American origin (Paul Reeve's Ride, The Birds of Killingworth, Lady Wenworth, Elizabeth, Rhyme of Sir Christopher). The rest are drawn from various international sources; fourteen being from Europe and three from the East, interestingly enough as Calin draws attention Longfellow "turned to the continent, not to the Anglo-Saxon motherland", and he privileges the medieval as the age of a cultured past and story telling (202, 203). These aspects of Longfellow's work provoked a contemporary debate about what the duty of the poet in America is. Longfellow being aware of this, brings this issue up in three instances. He uses the Student, who seems to be closest to his heart, and is very similar to Chaucer's Clerk of Oxford, who is well educated and has a love of books and learning, to defend the "wide" approach. The Student defends the use and the necessity of former traditions and writers as a source of inspiration. When the Theologian criticizes the Student's Italian tale he replies by saying

> One should not say, with too much pride,
> Fountain, I will not drink of thee!
> Nor were it grateful to forget
> That from these reservoirs and tanks
> Even imperial Shakespeare drew
> His moor of Venice, and the Jew,
> And Romeo and Juliet,
> And many a famous comedy. (*The Complete Poetical Works* 213)

In the second part, the Musician tells a tale, and in the interlude the Poet says "These tales you tell are one and all /Of the Old World" criticizing their oldness and questioning their value upon which the Student replies by stating that the value lies not in their oldness but in their quality, and criticizes the unquestioning quest for the new regardless of the quality:

> …
> Be discreet;
> For if the flour be fresh and sound,
> And if the bread be light and sweet,
> Who careth in what mill't was ground,
> Or of what oven felt the heat,
> Unless, as old Cervantes said,
> You are looking after better bread
> Than any that is made of wheat?
> You know that people nowadays
> To what is old give little praise;
> All must be new in prose and verse;
> They want hot bread, or something worse,
> Fresh every morning, and half baked;
> The wholesome bread of yesterday,
> Too stale for them, is thrown away,
> Nor is their thirst with water slaked. (*The Complete Poetical Works* 255)

In part three, after the Musician's Tale, the Theologian comments on the tale, the Student in the interlude takes up the discussion of native tales and foreign tales. The Student again emphasizes the necessity of seeking inspiration from all sources and not limiting oneself to only native stories and culture:

… "Yes;
All praise and honor' I confess
That bread and ale, home-baked, home brewed,
Are wholesome and nutritious food,
But not enough for all our needs;
Poets—the best of them—are birds
Of passage; where their instinct leads
They range abroad for thoughts and words,
And from all climes bring home the seeds
That germinate in flowers or weeds.
They are not fowls in barnyards born
To cackle o'er grain of corn;
And, if you shut the horizon down
To the small limits of their town,
What do you do but degrade your bard
Till he at last becomes one
Who thinks the all-encircling sun
Rises and sets in his back yard?"

The Theologian said again:
"It may be so; yet I maintain
That what is native still is best;
And little care I for the rest.
'T is a long story; time would fail
To tell it, and the hour is late. (*The Complete Poetical Works* 284)

At this point the assertion of Calin rings true about the similarity of the function and intentions of both Chaucer and Longfellow. He summarizes Chaucer's mission as follows:

> One purpose (among many) of the *Canterbury Tales*, as of Chaucer's entire corpus, was to transmit French and Italian culture to England or, rather to English . . . to compose in English contemporary texts comparable to or mirroring the best of recent and contemporary literary production. (201)

Similar to Chaucer, Longfellow seems to have set out to provide a European legacy and literary heritage for America. As Longfellow had cast Chaucer in his sonnet as the "poet of the dawn", he expresses his wish to be a poet of the dawn also. The last two lines of the sonnet describe Chaucer's poetry, where he says: ". . . from every page /Rise odors of ploughed field or flowery mead" (315). In fact, Longfellow is employing the same metaphor in the sonnet also. The "poet of the dawn" has tilled the field ready to sow many "seeds" from diverse sources which will yield fruit and feed the people or the field has already bloomed with a variety of flowers. Calin, after analyzing in detail the work of Longfellow and his explicit medievalism and inspiration drawn from Chaucer, states the driving force behind Longfellow by stating that "He wishes to be the Father of American Poetry just as Chaucer had been the Father of English Poetry" (202).

Conclusion

Tales of a Wayside Inn is defined as the major achievement of Longfellow as a poet by some critics. Longfellow in this work not only displays his wide knowledge of the European and classical heritage but executes a very masterful rewriting of the medieval framed tale genre, adapting it to the American audience of his time. His work not only displays a very tidy and well worked out example of the genre, but it embraces a great variety in the types of tales narrated genrewise and in versification. He displays great skill in the art of brevity in skillfully turning long narratives into compact ones. His versification techniques in aspect of stanza format, meter and rhyme display great variety almost forming an anthology of poesy for his time. While he brings European heritage to the New World he also includes five American narratives, one being original, but he also makes his choices to suit the American morals and tastes of his time. In the words of Stephen Burt as very well illustrated in the *Tales of a Wayside Inn* "Longfellow undertook to make his poetry both international and American without trying to make poetry itself new" (191). The following observation made by a critic aptly summarizes Longfellow's position and contribution to American poetry: American life was prosaic; and, before it could feel the glow of its own poetry, it must know something of the poetry of the past. This was Mr. Longfellow's first service to his countrymen: he was a mediator between the old and the new, he translated the romance of the past into the language of universal life. (Kennedy 261).

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Between 'Good Migrants' and Redeemed Agents: Exploring Migrant and Border Patrol Portrayals in *The Line Becomes a River* (2018)

Abstract

Francisco Cantú's *The Line Becomes a River* (2018) is a commercially and critically acclaimed memoir. This article analyzes its portrayal of both migrants and Border Patrol agents. The first section draws on historical and theoretical frameworks to highlight how the "good migrant" trope—emphasizing whiteness, assimilation of American culture, and economic contribution—emerged and has persisted since the country's formation. It concludes that this trope deeply influences Cantú's portrayal of migrants and reflects on the consequences of this depiction. The second section examines the portrayal of Border Patrol agents and argues that, although Cantú can capture some nuances of his colleagues' actions and, to a certain extent, expose the institutional practices designed to dehumanize migrants, the text ultimately implies that true empathy and reform rely on an individual's personal experiences—like his own. This curtails the memoir's broader critical impact and limits its contributions to a deeper debate on the US government's institutional practices towards migration.

Keywords: Migration, US-Mexico border, border patrol, memoir

'İyi Göçmenler' ve Islah Olmuş Sınır Devriyeleri Arasında: *The Line Becomes a River* (2018) Adlı Eserde Göçmen ve Sınır Devriyesi Temsillerinin İncelenmesi

Öz

Francisco Cantú'nun *The Line Becomes a River* (2018) adlı eseri büyük beğeni kazanmış bir anı kitabıdır. Bu makale, eserde göçmenlerin ve sınır devriyesinin nasıl tasvir edildiğini analiz etmektedir. Makalenin ilk bölümünde beyazlık, Amerikan kültürüne uyum sağlama ve ekonomik katkı bağlamında tanımlanan "iyi göçmen" klişesinin nasıl ortaya çıktığı ve sürdürüldüğü vurgulanmaktadır. Bu klişenin Cantú'nun göçmen tasvirlerini derinden etkilediği ve bu tasvirler üzerinden bir değerlendirme yaptığı sonucuna varılmaktadır. İkinci bölümde ise sınır devriyesinin tasviri incelenmekte ve Cantú'nun meslektaşlarının davranışlarındaki bazı nüansları yakalayabildiği, belli ölçüde göçmenleri insanlık dışı kılmayı amaçlayan kurumsal uygulamaları açığa çıkarabildiği ileri sürülmekle birlikte, metnin nihayetinde gerçek empati ve reformun bireysel deneyimlere dayandığı izlenimini verdiği savunulmaktadır. Bu durum, eserin eleştirel etkisini kısıtlamakta ve ABD hükümetinin göçmenlere yönelik kurumsal uygulamalarına dair daha derin bir tartışmaya katkılarını sınırlandırmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Göç, ABD-Meksika sınırı, sınır devriyesi, anı

Introduction

The Line Becomes a River: Dispatches from the Mexican Border (2018) is Francisco Cantú's memoir, covering the period between 2008 and 2012, when he worked as a Border Patrol agent in Arizona and Texas. As Taylor observes, the Sonoran Desert, where Cantú served, is "the scene of the greatest wave of undocumented migrants" (306). Cantú had studied the US-Mexico border at university as part of his degree in International Relations. Feeling that what he learned was too theoretical, he decided to join the Border Patrol to experience the lived reality of the border. It is important to note that Cantú is a third-generation Mexican on his mother's side and that, as the reader learns throughout the book, Cantú's mother ensured that, while growing up, he remained connected to his Mexican roots.

According to Couser, the memoir "now rivals fiction in popularity and critical esteem and exceeds it in cultural currency" (3). This author adds that this popularity stems from the need people have to own their life stories, telling them on their own terms (8). The questions surrounding memoir writing are manifold and go beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, for the exploration of the themes addressed in this article, it is important to acknowledge that *The Line Becomes a River* is a memoir, written a few years after Cantú left the Border Patrol. Thus, the reader encounters a homodiegetic narrator, with Cantú as the protagonist of the story he is telling, granting the audience access to his personal memories. This only shifts in the final part of the book, when José, an undocumented migrant who Cantú meets while working at a coffee shop, becomes the narrator. Intertwined with Cantú's personal story are the results of his own investigation about the border, drawing on sources that range from Mexican government data, information from American foreign correspondents in Mexico to books by journalists and historians, documentaries, poems, among other sources.

The book is divided into three parts and includes a prologue and an epilogue. An author's note was added to later editions.[1] In the first part, Cantú starts the training program to join the Border Patrol as a field agent. The process the agents undergo before being deployed to the field contributes to a lack of regard for the humanity of the migrants they will encounter in the borderlands. The second part begins as Cantú takes a new role as an intelligence analyst in the Border Patrol office and ceases to be a field agent. In the third part of the book, Cantú has quit the Border Patrol and is working in a coffee shop. This part mainly focuses on José, a Mexican immigrant who works with Cantú and who has been living in the US for over 30 years without papers. When José's mother dies, he goes back to Mexico for her funeral, but when returning to the US, he is arrested by the Border Patrol. Cantú is unable to help José, despite his experience with the institutional practices that have created a pattern of incarceration, deportation, and death for mobile subjects on the US-Mexico border. In *The Line Becomes a River*, the border and the borderlands are represented as a space of multifaceted conflicts. In the book, Cantú introduces these conflicts as a result of the fostering of a continuum of violence since before the formation of the border between the two nations.

This article investigates how the identities of migrants and Border Patrol agents are depicted in Cantú's memoir and what the broader implications of these portrayals are for our understanding of

identity, power, and conflict along the US-Mexico border. The analysis is divided into two sections, the first section examines the portrayal of migrants and relates it to the so-called "good migrant" trope. The second section focuses on the depiction of Border Patrol agents and, most importantly, Cantú himself, reflecting how these representations reinforce or subvert current institutional practices. This article also ponders the broader impacts of the memoir, particularly in light of its portrayal of these two groups, and suggests that the implications are twofold: on the one hand, the migrants in the book seem to be absolved of their "crimes" if they fall under the category of "good migrants," a persistent trope in American discourse on migration; on the other hand, Cantú's portrayal appears to exonerate Border Patrol agents by depicting them not only as ruthless enforcers but also as victims of a system. Furthermore, Cantú's trajectory suggests that only a direct encounter with the Other truly reveals the violence of the border and migration system—a problematic premise, as will be discussed.

The "Good Migrant" in *The Line Becomes a River*

Francisco Cantú's *The Line Becomes a River* depicts the protagonist's encounter with migrants along the US-Mexico border. In this section, it will be argued that the narrative frames these individuals as so-called "good migrants"—a characterization that shapes how readers view their experiences and influences the broader public discourse on migration. Given the book's commercial success and non-fiction status, its portrayal carries added weight and underscores the need to examine the implications of perpetuating the "good migrant" trope. Nikesh Shukla and Chimene Suleyman demonstrate the importance of the "good migrant" concept in their prominent collection of essays *The Good Migrant*.[2] In the introduction to the essays, the authors explain how migrants are judged by different standards than non-migrants and how they have to achieve an extraordinary deed to be considered good, as their baseline is always that they are bad.

The concept of the "good migrant," in the American context, emerged almost in parallel with the birth of the country itself, appearing in one of the oldest federal statutes, the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 (Motomura 18), which already reflected the government's views towards the role of foreigners in the economic growth and settlement of the country. From the outset, it was expected that the prospective American citizens would not be a burden to the country and, in fact, would contribute to the growth of the newly formed country.

Notwithstanding this origin, scholars highlight that the development of this trope was closely linked to racial exclusion policies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly through the national origin quota system of the 1920s, namely the Immigration Act of 1924. This Act established a "racial hierarchy of desirability" (Ngai 45), given that different quotas were established for different countries, with the higher quota for Northern and Western European countries, i.e., white migrants. According to Mae Ngai, this racial desirability still influences immigration policies and the political discourse around it. In the US, the good migrant trope is intrinsically connected to racial background, meaning that a good migrant is a "whiter" migrant (Hackl 1002). Nonetheless, during this time period, migration from Mexico was encouraged by agriculturalists, who demanded access to cheap labor. The Federal Government responded with "a wartime guestworker program that allowed growers to recruit workers from Mexico for temporary employment as agricultural laborers" (Weber 61). A few years later, the interest in cheap Mexican

labor increased and the Bracero Program was created. This program, which lasted from 1942 to 1964, allowed the entrance of 4,000 Mexican agriculture workers per year, on a temporary visa, though many more entered and stayed after their visas ended. These undocumented workers were placed in an extremely vulnerable and precarious position (Alfaro-Velcamp 1725-1726).

In addition to racial desirability, the "good migrant" is characterized as migrating for "legitimate reasons: improving their lives and fleeing violence" (de Léon 2) and as pure sufferers who will greatly contribute to their new countries (de Léon 12). Thus, either the migrant shows that he or she is in great peril or that he or she will contribute to the economic growth of the country. Regarding the former condition, the idea that a migrant has to prove their life is in danger in their home country in order to be granted entry to the country is inscribed in the definition of the refugee status.[3] This excludes people who face economic hardships in their home country, are victims of natural disasters or are affected by the outbreak of military coup (Alfaro-Velcamp 1744). This has led primarily to the admission of political refugees from former communist countries, who are "usually well-educated and from middle- or upper-class backgrounds" (Daniels 383) and who will have better chances to be economically successful and contribute to the growth of the US. Further, this also shows how refugee policy emphasizes the political beliefs of individuals who are better aligned with the US.

The idea of contributing to the economic growth of the US is of the utmost importance when defining a good migrant: discourse about the benefits or perils of migration is almost always accompanied by discussions of labor, economic value, and growth. In this framing, the "good migrant" is not only someone who escapes dire circumstances—like violence or economic insecurity—but also someone whose productivity is clearly advantageous to the host nation. As a result, migrants' value is often reduced to their potential to enhance economic growth. Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp, reflecting on Bonnie Honig's contribution to this area, explains that there is a narrative linking capitalism and migration, in which the influx of migrants, who must be valuable workers, feeds the promise of upward mobility and reinforces the narrative of meritocracy. As she explains, "the hard work of a good migrant in a capitalist economy triumphs over the work of a less motivated national citizen. Thus, meritocracy prevails" (1717; my translation). Further, for a migrant to be an asset to the country's economy, he or she must be in good health. Alfaro-Velcamp exposes how, since the late 19th century, the admission of foreigners into the US has been intertwined with health and medical conditions, rules that reflected the nation's anxieties about foreigners becoming a burden on the state and nativist prejudices, as Americans were afraid of diseases foreigners might bring (1727-1731).

Also, there are dynamics of invisibility and visibility in place which, as explained by Hackl, "demand that immigrants and members of minorities fulfil certain stereotypes of behaviour and identity, while expecting them to make undesirable aspects of who they are invisible" (989). This is due to one of the arguments used in anti-immigration discourse: if newcomers differ too greatly in culture and social norms from the local population, they may not fully integrate, or, in a more extremist version of this argument, their presence could profoundly reshape a host society's demographics and cultural identity (Bloemraad et al. 2). Thus, "highly 'valued' immigrants tend to be those with

greater similarity in attitudes, values, and ethnicity to members of the destination community" (Bloemraad et al. 10). In the American context, stemming particularly from the "American melting pot"[4] myth (Gordon), it was expected that migrants absorb American culture, language, and values in such a complete way that they would become tantamount to people who have been living in the country for more generations (Bloemraad et al. 7). The question of language has been especially poignant as an entry criterion in the country since the early 1900s. Furthermore, the "good migrant" is also expected to have what Alfaro-Velcamp calls "the elusive concept of good moral character" (1711; my translation), which implies maintaining sexual purity by avoiding polygamy, prostitution, and adultery, as well as contributing to the prosperity of the country and its fellow citizens through the migrant's knowledge, skills, and altruism (1711).

To sum up, the "good migrant" trope, in the American context, is defined by whiteness,[5] migrating for "legitimate reasons" such as fleeing violence or improving one's economic conditions. To do so, the migrant must not be a burden to the country and must add economic value. Further, it is expected that he/she possesses a "good moral character," avoiding deviant behaviors and that he/she rapidly assimilates American culture. Furthermore, Alejandra De León emphasizes that this ideal is "perpetuated and co-created by those who help them" (12), as well as by "leading academic and journalistic arguments" (11). Thus, the "good migrant" trope is continuously reinforced by policymakers, academics, and the media, shaping both public sentiment and immigration policy to favor those who most closely align with US economic and cultural expectations. It also underscores how stereotypes and rigid categories ("bad" versus "good" migrants) not only shape individual migrant experiences but also reinforce a broader system that is lenient only toward "good migrants."

Literature offers an important venue to counter these hegemonic discourses. However, as will be addressed, *The Line Becomes a River* fails to do so. This is quite noticeable in the way Cantú chooses to present many of his interactions with the migrants he apprehends and deports. A clear example of this is the case of an unnamed man who, when brought to the detention center and while waiting to be deported, starts cleaning: "I just want to know if there is something I can do while I wait, something to help. I can take out the trash or clean out the cells. I want to show you that I'm here to work, that I'm not a bad person. I'm not here to bring in drugs, I'm not here to do anything illegal. I want to work" (Cantú 31). This migrant fully embodies the "good migrant" trope. Even though he knows he will be deported back to Mexico, he still wants to prove that he came to the US to work hard, and he uses the little time he has left in this country to do so. Moreover, this unnamed migrant shows how he equates being a good person with hard work, reflecting the deep-seated anxieties migrants often feel about having to prove their worth to the host society. Cantú reinforces this perspective by simply asserting that he knows this unnamed migrant only wants to work and is not there to do anything illegal (31).

Another encounter Cantú has with two migrants, a married couple sleeping in the town's church, is also illustrative of this (38-39). The wife, who is pregnant, speaks perfect English because she grew up in the US (despite never obtaining legal status) and wants their child to have better opportunities, as she once did. The husband is a good Catholic who prays and thanks God even after being found by the Border Patrol. The wife serves as a symbol of the power of American

culture: although she could not continue living in the country, she is so deeply molded by its values that she wishes the same fate for her child. The husband embodies purity and devotion, reaffirming his morality by expressing gratitude to God despite adversity, thus further aligning with the "good migrant" narrative.

The power of American culture is also illustrated in Cantú's encounter with Martin, a migrant who he apprehends but takes for a meal before deporting: "Before leaving town, I asked him if he was hungry. You should eat something now, I told him, at the station there's only juice and crackers. I asked what he was hungry for. What do Americans eat? he asked. I laughed. Here we eat mostly Mexican food. He looked at me unbelievingly. But we also eat hamburgers, I said. We pulled into a McDonald's" (46). Martin shows curiosity about "what Americans eat," even when he is on the verge of deportation, and the decision to go McDonald's—a symbol of American capitalism—further emphasizes the paradox of accepting American culture while being excluded by its political and legal framework.

The trope of the "good migrant" is most noticeable in the character of José, whose story occupies the third part of the book. He is described as a model citizen by everyone who knows him, including American friends, co-workers, and the local pastor. Many of them write letters to help his lawyers make a strong case and to raise money (Cantú 214-220). José's lawyer also explains to his wife that his case has a higher chance of success if he had "received death threats . . . if he's part of an ethnic or political minority" (197), or if they can show that "José is someone special or unique" (199). The way José's story is presented, particularly the last section of the book, when he becomes the narrator, encourages the reader to side with him and to understand the efforts made to bring him back, given that he is a "good migrant." This also exposes the power of this trope within the American legal system. Furthermore, Cantú's personal relationship with José becomes the final catalyst for his own inner reconciliation: grappling with his identity as a third generation Mexican, as a former Border Patrol agent and as someone directly involved in a migrant's attempt to return to the US. The consequences of this will be addressed in the second part of this article.

As explained by De León, "the good migrant trope remains problematic as it reinforces the idea that there is only one way to be perceived as deserving of help, trust, and compassion" (14). This means that only migrants who perform as "good migrants" have higher chances of being treated better by not only the Border Patrol but also all the institutions they encounter in the process, such as the courts. On the other hand, the ones who do not comply with this stereotype are more likely to be stigmatized and, consequently, to suffer from violence and abuse (De León 15). Furthermore, other practical implications of maintaining of the "good migrant" trope are that conditionality is imposed on migrants, which may upend potential citizenship claims and rights (Hackl 994). As such, this trope not only harms migrants when entering the country but also during the bureaucratic process they must undergo to obtain their papers, permanent residency, and even eventually citizenship.

Mabel Moraña proposes that border crossing produces "emancipatory connotations, since they transgress restrictive boundaries thus interrupting the discourses of power and empowering

the other in his/her struggle for reterritorialization" (95). Yet rather than looking into how these emancipatory connotations can be deployed, *The Line Becomes a River* deliberately chooses to side with current discourses that equate compassion with a performance of the "good migrant." By not portraying more complex migrant identities and by failing to offer a platform from which to question this trope, the book loses the chance to consider "irregular migration as civil disobedience . . . as a practical critique of the nation-state" (Moraña 95).

The Redeemed Border Patrol Agent in *The Line Becomes a River*

This section will argue that the portrayal of Border Patrol agents in *The Line Becomes a River* sheds light on the complexities of being part of a system that is designed to dehumanize the "other" and instigate violent behavior. Nevertheless, it suggests that the only possible redemption for these agents—one that Cantú achieves—is when there is a personal encounter with the "other," and this "other" is a "good migrant."

The novel begins by addressing how institutionalized practices around border control enforcement contribute to the dehumanization of migrants. This is demonstrated in the training Cantú receives before going into the field (19-20). This training indoctrinates him into a system where, at least for a time, he believes he is not liable for his actions: "Field agents don't write border policy. We just show up and patrol where we're assigned. My mother shook her head as if my words were those of an apologist or a fanatic" (Cantú 91). Cantú further conveys the idea that the blame lies with the system, not with the workers who are there only to enforce the law. At first, Cantú is critical of his colleagues' indifference, describing their lack of interest in the history of the border and its consequences for their work (16). He also notes that most agents are not able to speak Spanish (22), which he considers an important part of the job, and that they seem to show little regard for bureaucratic rules (28-30). This paints a picture of an uninvolved and, to a certain extent, apathetic workforce, which might deflect responsibility for their actions.

Nevertheless, Cantú also describes situations in which his colleagues are capable of committing terrible acts—such as Robles, who knocked a migrant into the water despite knowing the migrant could not swim. Still, Cantú manages to humanize Robles, who, a year after this incident, jumped into the Colorado River to save another migrant (18). He also depicts scenes where agents share moments with migrants, exchanging stories or sharing food (51). Furthermore, Cantú notes that many of them are Hispanics who grew up in border towns (17, 24), hold degrees, and have families (24), implying that they are, after all, regular people. Therefore, Cantú portrays his fellow agents as flawed human beings who commit cruel and sanctionable actions. Perhaps the most illustrative example for this tension between the agents' humanity and cruelty is the following:

> Of course, what you do depends on who you're with, depends on what kind of agent you are, what kind of agent you want to become, but it's true that we slash their bottles and drain their water into the dry earth, that we dump their backpacks and pile their food and clothes to be crushed and pissed on and stepped over, strewn across the desert and set ablaze. (33)

Cantú explains that all agents are different and have the agency to decide what to do, but he ultimately admits that, in the end, they all follow the same institutional practices, which are extremely cruel toward migrants. Still, Cantú offers a justification for this: "And Christ, it sounds terrible, and maybe it is, but the idea is that when they come out from their hiding places, when they regroup and return to find their stockpiles ransacked and stripped, they'll realize their situation, that they're fucked, that it's hopeless to continue, and they'll quit right then and there, they'll save themselves" (33). Cantú's justification—that the Border Patrol agents use these tactics to somehow convince migrants to go back to Mexico—is not convincing because migrants would still need these provisions to return through the desert. As Benesch puts it:

> Significantly, if also somewhat paradoxically, the very vigilance and attention they [Border Patrol agents] are drilled to muster towards the illegal alien from the South prevents them from seeing and understanding what is actually going on . . . Border Patrol officers, rather than deconstructing the negative force of the border, often engage in cynicism or, worse, the ethically dubious act. (7)

Such cynicism and ethically dubious acts are partly the result of the training that Border Patrol agents undergo, during which their identities are shaped by institutional practices that contrast them with migrants. Whitaker and Dürr explain that "in order to act as a Border Patrol officer, a particular body is required to correspond with the social and environmental conditions—a body that often contrasts with migrants' bodies" (5). This, combined with the institutionalized system of surveillance and violence, leads agents to experience moral injuries which alienate them and prevent them from empathizing with the migrants, much like what happens to soldiers on the battlefield.

Thus, *The Line Becomes a River* reveals how the system's ingrained practices shape human behavior, perpetuating violence and the dehumanization of migrants. This system also creates moral injuries borne by those who enact it, underscoring a profound tension between institutional mandate and personal agency. Nevertheless, this can be problematic, as Cantú positions the agents as victims of the same system that institutionalizes violence against migrants. He dedicates the book to "all those who risk their souls to traverse or patrol an unnatural divide" rather than the migrants who suffer from their cruelty.

Cantú is also personally affected by the tension between institutional mandate and personal agency, as he tries to reconcile three aspects of his identity: first, he is a law enforcement agent; second, he is a witness to the violence against migrants; and third, he is a third-generation Mexican. As Cantú's mother emphasizes, "The border is in our blood, for Christ's sake" (23). Voicing his Mexican identity, Cantú's mother accompanies the process of change he undergoes and serves as a moral compass, constantly questioning him. The first point of tension between Cantú and his mother arises when he tells her he wants to join the Border Patrol: "I'm tired of studying, I'm tired of reading about the border in books. I want to be on the ground, out in the field, I want to see the realities of the border day in and day out. I know it might be ugly, I know it might be dangerous, but I don't see any better way to truly understand the place" (22). Cantú is dissatisfied with his education and believes

he needs to experience the border in a more practical sense. Röder confirms that "the tension between theory and practice is one of the recurring themes of the novel" (12). The conversation between the two characters foreshadows other tensions that are further explored throughout the narrative, such as those that arise from Cantú's dual identity: I don't know if the border is a place for me to understand myself, but I know there's something here I can't look away from. Maybe it's the desert, maybe it's the closeness of life and death, maybe it's the tension between the two cultures we carry inside us. Whatever it is, I'll never understand it unless I'm close to it" (23). As a result, Cantú joins the Border Patrol believing he will be of great help to the migrants crossing the border because he speaks Spanish and has lived in Mexico (25). He even believes this job will be important if he wishes to become "an immigration lawyer or a policy maker" (25). This idealistic outlook initially reveals Cantú's naivety: he overlooks the reality that the Border Patrol is primarily an enforcement agency, designed to deter illegal crossings rather than to provide assistance. He does not seem to reflect on the most impactful and controversial aspects of the job, showing either a lack of knowledge or a misunderstanding of the system he is about to join.

Cantú's mother tries to warn him and insists that the Border Patrol is "a paramilitary police force . . . you must understand you are stepping into a system, an institution with little regard for people" (24). Cantú responds that "stepping into a system doesn't mean that the system becomes you" (25). Yet he immediately admits, "as I spoke, doubts flickered through my mind" (25), which shows that while he initially appears to be naive, it is now clearer that he has some inkling of what this job might entail and that he is, in fact, making a conscious decision. In addition, his upbringing in the borderlands and his four years studying the border at university have provided him with knowledge about the Border Patrol's role. In fact, Cantú recognizes from the start that the practices of the Border Patrol have failed to address the most pressing questions regarding migration, namely human and drug trafficking. Furthermore, he notices that institutional strategies have, in fact, contributed to the rise of these activities, whose consequences are felt by ordinary people.

As his time in the Border Patrol progresses, Cantú's fears about becoming part of the system are confirmed. This is shown in a scene where he finds the previously mentioned young undocumented migrant couple sleeping in a church. He speaks to them in Spanish and is moved by their border-crossing story. The man asks him: "Listen, he said, do you think you could bring us back to Mexico, como hermano? You could drive us down to the border . . . Like a brother" (40). But Cantú immediately answers that he cannot do that and that he must bring them in for processing and deportation: "I turned my head and then bolted the cage and shut the door" (41). Perhaps the most shocking aspect of this interaction is when the reader learns that Cantú quickly forgot the couple's names (41). Not remembering or attributing names to the migrants he encounters signals that Cantú has indeed become an active participant in the system and perceives them as a dehumanized "other," whose names are not worth remembering.

In another encounter with migrants, this becomes even more distressing. One of the main reasons Cantú gave for joining the Border Patrol was the fact that he could help more migrants because he speaks Spanish. However, when his colleague Mortenson asks him to translate a conversation with a woman who was picked up in the desert with two small girls, Cantú replies that he will

not be able to help. This swift decision leads Cantú to experience emotional isolation as he tries to distance himself from the situation but is unable to escape the psychological tool of his line of work, as made clear by his thoughts after this incident: "As I drove away from the station I tried not to think of the girls, and my hands began to shake at the wheel. I wanted to call my mother, but it was too late" (52).

Progressively, Cantú begins to realize he is changing, and he worries about the outcomes of his decision to join the Border Patrol. This culminates in a scene where, woken up in the middle of the night by one of the many nightmares that plague him, he acknowledges that, "for several minutes I stared into the mirror, trying to recognize myself" (117). He also feels the physical toll of his work, such as nightmares and teeth grinding and identifies these as symptoms of a "moral injury" (150), a PTSD-like condition.

This process of trauma and change culminates in Cantú leaving the Border Patrol and returning to university, working at a coffee shop to support his studies. It is there that he meets José. This last part of the book cements Cantú's position amid his personal conflicts. By bearing witness to José's attempts to reunite with his family in the US, Cantú recognizes his institutional role in the "machine" that continues to construct the border as a site of conflict, surveillance, and violence. As Cantú notices in court, when accompanying José's hearing:

> I had apprehended and processed countless men and women for deportation, many of whom I sent without thinking to pass through this very room . . . I realized, too, that despite my small role within the system, despite hours of training and studying at the academy, I had little inkling of what happened to those I arrested after I turned over their paperwork and went home from my shift. (186)

In the end, José's situation is the final catalyst for the resolution of the inner conflict. Cantú positions himself against the same institutional rules that had changed him: he fantasizes about bringing José "safely through the desert, past the sensors and watchtowers, past the agents patrolling distant trails and dirt roads, past the highway checkpoints" (229). This shows that Cantú's "proximity to the Other and their relational bond produce a transformative form of disturbance that nurtures both responsibility and the subject's sense of self" (Runtić and Drenjančević 154). Toward the end of *The Line Becomes a River*, we see this notion fully realized when José takes over as narrator, putting the Other at the helm of the narrative.

The protagonist undergoes a transformation, driven by the inner conflict between his identity and values, the role he had to play as a Border Patrol agent, and his position as a person directly involved in a migrant's trauma story. As Kate Mehuron explains, "his character's self-representation is unique: a remorseful perpetrator who discovers his moral injury as he enacts harm to others and seeks to make amends to those harmed by his actions" (33).

Unfortunately, the novel's conclusion seems to suggest that only through an encounter with a "good migrant" can views about the so-called border crisis be changed. Furthermore, it implies

that this change in perceptions is contingent on a personal relationship with the borderland, which, in Cantú's case, materializes through his heritage. Also, as Mehuron suggests, in this memoir, "material and collective reparation fall into the void of institutional acknowledgment of the harms done by Border Security policies, officers' conduct toward migrants, and collusions with terrorism at the border" (41), given it does not include those who have disappeared in the "intersectional violence occasioned by cartel terrorism and the anti-migrant policies of nation-states" (41). In addition, I argue that Cantú's approach suggests that only individuals positioned closer to the "other" can truly grasp the effects of the violent practices of an agency like the Border Patrol. This is problematic because it excludes all who do not belong to this category, which is itself volatile and problematic, and it fails to offer a path for any truly collective or systemic reckoning with the violent structures at play.

In other words, limiting critical awareness to those who have direct interpersonal connections with the borderland and traumatic first-hand migrant experience suggests that larger institutional reforms remain unattainable. While Cantú seems to gain a deeper understanding of the ramifications of his role as a Border Patrol agent, the same transformation does not occur among his colleagues, despite their portrayal as casualties of the system. Consequently, the memoir risks reinforcing the idea that empathy is contingent on proximity rather than advocating for a more inclusive, far-reaching mode of understanding and accountability. Furthermore, Cantú and José form a bond not only due to their proximity but also because José is portrayed as a "good migrant." Thus, proximity is also contingent upon migrants' performance of the "good migrant" trope, given that migrants who perform accordingly are more likely to be treated humanely by a system designed to deter them from accessing the United States.

Conclusion

This article contributes to the current research on US-Mexico border literature by analyzing Francisco Cantú's *The Line Becomes a River*. The memoir follows Cantú from joining the Border Patrol to his departure and subsequent personal involvement in helping a migrant he befriends return to the US. Several of Cantú's encounters with migrants are portrayed as interactions with so-called "good migrants." The "good migrant" trope dates back to the earliest waves of migration to the US and has persisted since the birth of the new nation. The "good migrant" is someone who moves to the US for legitimate reasons, either to flee a specific type of persecution and violence in their home country or to seek economic opportunities, and, most importantly, to be an asset to the country's economy rather than a burden. Also, the "good migrant" is preferably white, quickly assimilates into US culture, often by making his own identity invisible, and is characterized by a strong moral character. The "good migrant" is believed to have better chances of not suffering from the systemic violence that continues to be inflicted by the institutions that surveil, control, and legislate the US-Mexico border. This article has shown how problematic this trope is, starting with the fact that it is seemingly unachievable due to its ethereal and ambiguous nature. Therefore, though still a very powerful trope, it excludes most migrants, putting them in peril not only when they try to enter the country but also when they try to regularize their documentation. Moreover, the systemic violence suffered by migrants, whether physical or institutional, is broadly accepted by public opinion when migrants are not viewed as "good migrants."

In the case of the Border Patrol agents, the memoir shows them as flawed individuals capable of committing cruel and sanctionable actions, but above all, as human. Cantú stresses that they are also victims of institutionalized violence and deadly policies. This implies that, similarly to migrants who perform as the "good migrant," Border Patrol agents are also compelled to perform a role, and the characteristics of this role are constructed in opposition to migrants' identities, which have been framed as dangerous, criminal and illegal. Cantú himself epitomizes this process, as the reader follows his journey from a naïve recruit to an officer completely desensitized to the violence and cruelty he bears witness. Cantú is able to confront and dissect his inner conflict after meeting José and accompanying his deportation and subsequent attempt to return to the US. This process offers Cantú the opportunity to see the lived consequences of the border policies for the "other."

It has been argued that this focus on personal relationships narrows the possibilities for a more systemic critique, thereby underscoring the tension between individual empathy and broader structural responsibility in US immigration policies and raising questions about how lasting change might be achieved. Through Cantú's own transformation and José's story, the memoir suggests that true empathy and redemption are contingent on a personal bond with a "good migrant," which disregards explicit and far-reaching structural injustices and the myriads of migrants who do not fit this stereotype.

Future research should examine other first-person border narratives through a comparative lens, to investigate how memoirs either reinforce or challenge the "good migrant" trope and the perceived necessity of personal encounters for empathy. This necessarily involves incorporating a diverse range of perspectives, including those of migrants themselves. Only in this way can literature serve as a foundation for building a structural critique, helping to broaden our understanding of the US-Mexico border's complexities and potentially informing more comprehensive, equitable policy debates.

Notes

[1] According to Michel, in the author's note, Cantú "presents para-textual evidence not only of political intent, but also of the awareness with which he incorporates academic theory into his narrative" (9).

[2] A follow-up volume to Shukla's *The Good Migrant* (2016) which focused on the British context.

[3] 101(a)(42) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).

[4] For a complete analysis of the Myth of "Melting Pot," see Paul Heike (2014).

[5] Despite the undeniable importance of whiteness, the trope of the "good migrant" also evolved to accommodate a so-called "model minority:" Asians. For a thorough study of this topic, see Madeline Hsu.

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Louis Armstrong and Zora Neale Hurston: On the Re-Calibration of Time in Early Twentieth Century America

Abstract
This paper explores the re-conception of time in Modernist America's music and literary arts. The representation of time encompasses the organization of rhythmic elements that create motion and counter-motion, allowing the interplay of voices to express complex patterns and themes. Time can be seen as a flexible framework that outlines the possible movements of musical notes or narrative moments. Louis Armstrong established a model for musical phrasing that guided jazz soloists throughout the twentieth century. His solos challenged mechanical clock time by creating melodic conversations in a more fluid temporal shape. This resulted in a personal and unique voice, utilizing irregular measurements of time to achieve an unprecedented degree of expression. Similarly, Zora Neale Hurston restructured time in her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* through the use of musical cadences that reflect characters' inner experiences and the rhythms of life. Hurston diverged from canonical rhythm and form, drawing on the speech patterns of southern rural blacks to expand her rhythmic and expressive possibilities. This irregular speech introduced alternative rhythms, allowing Hurston to create new voices on both individual and communal levels. Together, Armstrong and Hurston illustrate how re-calibrating time in their respective arts created innovative and expressive forms, enriching the cultural landscape of early twentieth century America.
Keywords: Louis Armstrong, Zora Neale Hurston, time, rhythm, Dixieland Jazz

Louis Armstrong ve Zora Neale Hurston: Yirminci Yüzyıl Amerikası'nda Zamanın Yeniden Değerlendirilmesi

Öz
Bu makale, modern Amerikan edebiyat ve müzik perspektifinde zamanı yeniden değerlendirir. Zaman—temponun ötesinde—hareket ve karşı hareket yaratan ritmik ögelerin birleşimlerini kapsar. Bundan dolayı, seslerin birbirleriyle etkileşimine olanak sağlamış; karmaşık kalıpları ve temaları ifade etmiştir. Zaman, müzik notalarının veya yazılı anlatının hareketlerini ve devingenliğini içeren bir yapıdan oluşur. Louis Armstrong, yirminci yüzyılda caz solistlerine ilham veren müzikal bir geçiş modeli oluşturmuştur. Armstrong'un soloları, süreç içerisinde daha akıcı ve melodik bir söylem yaratarak mekanik zamana meydan okumuştur. Armstrong, dolayısıyla zamanın değişen kıvrımlarını işlevli bir hale getirmiş ve özgün ve benzersiz bir sesi keşfetmiştir. Benzer şekilde, Zora Neale Hurston da *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (*Gözleri Tanrı'yı Gözlüyordu*) isimli romanında yarattığı müzik sayesinde zamanı yeniden oluşturmuş, karakterlerin içsel deneyimlerini ve yaşamın ritimlerini başarılı bir şekilde yansıtmıştır. Hurston, ritmik olan ifade yapılarını farklı açılardan gözlemlemiş; kırsal alanda yaşayan Güneyli siyahların konuşma kalıplarını inceleyerek geleneksel ritim ve biçimden kopmuştur. Bir kurala uymayan bu konuşma tarzı, Hurston'ın hem bireysel hem de toplumsal düzeyde yeni sesler yaratmasını sağlamış ve farklı ritimler ortaya koymuştur. Sonuç olarak, Armstrong ve Hurston, kendi alanlarında zamanı yeniden değerlendirerek modern ve etkileyici formlar yaratmışlardır. Armstrong gibi Hurston da, yirminci yüzyıl Amerika'sının kültürel perspektifine olumlu katkı sunmuştur.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Louis Armstrong, Zora Neale Hurston, zaman, ritim, Dixieland Caz

Introduction

Time has fascinated philosophers and theorists from ancient times, whether it be conceived of as "an . . . image . . . of eternity, moving according to number" (Zeyl xiii) or "[o]ne of four coordinates in the continuum called 'world'" (Einstein 46). It is perhaps humanity's dearest construct, an intellectual concept that is developed with the intent of forming coordinates along a spectrum of being or perceiving. The concept serves to justify a particular arc of events, real or imagined, within a structure that allows for reflection or analysis. We all live by the fiction of clock time, an abstraction that allows us, among other things, to gather at our conference sessions at the same time. We have machines that measure and verify this abstraction scientifically and mechanically. In all cases, we confidently accept an idea that gives us a sense of control and directional flow by which we order our activities and meditations. Artists, in particular, depend on such structures in which they plot out harmonious and coherent stages within a composition. Musicians use the term "time" to describe the rhythmic divisions within a piece of music, the speed, and progression between the various elements of a performance. Similarly, writers of fiction imagine a narrative time that urges a story forward or lets it sit in retrospection. They organize it into meters and marshal individual articulations into phrases.

This article will attempt not a grand philosophical analysis of time, but merely a modest consideration of the way time is constructed in the arts in modern America. The particular focus here will be on the organization of time within musical and literary compositions during the period of the emergence of mass culture in the United States. It will be argued that artists such as Louis Armstrong and Zora Neale Hurston restructure, re-imagine, and re-calibrate the rhythm of African American arts and, by extension, that of the larger society with all the speed of appropriation, during the 1920s and 1930s. The two artists offer an expression of rhythm that breaks from the dominant culture's regular purposeful pace and metrical standards employed in the work of previous black artists. In the hands of such practitioners, time moves not in a point-to-point measurable gait toward conclusion, but in a spontaneous and experiential arc that makes possible new and speculative destinations.

A linear perspective of time authorizes cliches like "the march of history," implying a steady forward progress. Even within such a static concept, most observers are willing to admit that there is ebb and flow in the pace of events. For example, the advent of mass culture in the early twentieth century may be characterized as a kind of sprint. In this sort of reading, the pace of life has often been said to accelerate in many ways as the mode of life and economic models shift from agricultural to urban and industrial. The *velocity* of the martial gait is not entirely revealing when one considers the restructuring of time that occurred in the 1920s and 1930s in American public life. The march as a *musical genre*, however, is appropriate when we consider the origins of popular music in the early twentieth century. The Sunday bandstand concert provided the basic equipment–physically, in terms of musical instruments, and conceptually in the compositional qualities of the march–for the development of new musical genres.

The prominence of military music has been well established as a source of ragtime music in the late nineteenth century.[1] The regular rhythmic division of musical bars in this genre can easily be

discerned in the music of composers like Scott Joplin. The alternating bass notes and completed chords performed by ragtime maestros with the left hand form a steady framework from which syncopated melody can spring. The accompaniment is characteristically regular and mechanical. It suggests the time measured out by the clock, or by the metronome, the analogous device inflicted upon every music student in order to instill a clock-like sense of musical time. However, for musicians performing ragtime and related popular genres, it is significant that the right hand does not reflect what the left hand is doing. Indeed, the innovative quality of this music is expressed in the melody line, played by the right hand, which involves the strikingly accented notes we recognize as syncopation. In brief, this term refers to the practice of placing emphasis on prominent melodic notes that are delivered "off the beat," that is, between the strokes of the metronome.

From the latter decades of the nineteenth century until roughly the end of the First World War, this quality was indulged, often to comical extremes, by bands of musicians broadly characterized as syncopators. The rhythms in early street forms were perceived as "so ragged" that the style was dubbed Ragtime (Peretti 57). The rapidly commercialized ragtime, which was eagerly appropriated by white audiences and musicians, stands at the top of this hierarchy and, as such, offers a fairly restrained example of the practice.[2] Filtering down through the more folksy grassroots performances by syncopators, who often relied on inexpensive stringed instruments, the expression of this musical quality is much less restrained and results in a busy, exaggerated rhythm that suggests the frantic scampering away from the tyranny of the metronome.[3]

Louis Armstrong: Re-Winding the Dixieland Timepiece

The performance practice of Louis Armstrong, along with the innovators of Dixieland jazz in general, initiates a moderating impulse in the placement of musical emphasis in time, playing the regimented clock time of the accompaniment against the rhythmically freer sallies of melodic phrases. Dixieland injects an element of blues phrasing into the previous style that incorporates different increments of time in the melodic structure. The effect is a less frantic expression of time and produces a sprung rhythmic pattern that endures in jazz improvisation.

Ralph Ellison is an author who recognizes the significance of this era and its musical reconsideration of time. He indulges in a memorable meditation on Louis Armstrong and time in his prologue to *Invisible Man*. Ellison's narrator relates the quality of invisibility to living in

> A slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around. That's what you hear vaguely in Louis' music. (Ellison 8)

It is significant that Ellison's view is retrospective, harking back to the temporal experiments of the 1920s and 1930s. Tellingly, he does not propose a bebop musician contemporary with his 1952 novel as the exemplary practitioner of the unique time of invisibility; rather, he goes back a generation to cite the innovative figure of Louis Armstrong.[4] By the post-WWII epoch, jazz has emerged as "art" music revered in certain urban enclaves and on college campuses. Ellison's

reflections on time carry readers back to a time when soloists adapted a more humble idiom that quickly became the voice of the emerging mass culture.

Ellison's consideration of musical time seems to derive from his fascination with Henri Bergson's theories on the measurement and experience of time. Bergson distinguishes between clock time, or "common sense time," the abstract measurement of a linear and progressive flow, and "psychological duration," experienced time, or time in the moment (105). These two opposed concepts might be said to equate closely with the musical marriage that had been developing since minstrelsy, the folk syncopators, and ragtime. Clock time is a musical construction that equates with the pulse of the metronome and with the theoretical grid of possible note placement in a composition. The regularity of this structure is represented in the printed notation of musical scores and forms the basis for a range of musical motion. As demonstrated above, this regular and disciplined form of musical time is basic to the accompaniment in syncopated musical styles, whether it appears in the rhythm section of a Dixieland ensemble or the left hand of a Ragtime piano maestro.

Set against this regimented impulse is the melodic element that becomes supple and variable when subjected to the freer temporal mode of syncopation and blues phrasing. This second conception of musical time equates with Bergson's durée. Ellison seems to find a musical metaphor in the experiential quality of spontaneous impressions that equates with the improvisational characteristic of jazz, especially in the hands of a master soloist like Armstrong.

A phrase is a unit of meaning, whether in music or in language. It can be understood as the placing of significance in time. As we consider musical time, the element of shaping a phrase, designating the sonic spaces between the sounded note and the micro-silences that surround it, Louis Armstrong, the main exponent of the practice in the early history of jazz, has often been credited with setting the standard for musical phrasing that reigned for a generation. It can even be argued that, apart from a period in the 1950s and 60s when jazz styles branched into various experimental and artistic avenues, Armstrong's phrasing has been a unifying characteristic throughout the history of jazz music (Jasen and Jones 182). Armstrong's solos convey the rhythms not of regular musical meter but more nearly those of speech. In his recordings of the 1920s, Louis Armstrong emerged as the master of subtly shifting the tiny silences between sounded notes in a way that created the characteristic feel of the jazz soloist. Gary Giddens writes that Armstrong "manifested the rhythmic gait known as 'swing,' transformed a polyphonic folk music into a soloist's art" (273). Wynton Marsalis refers to this rhythmic quality as "bounce."[5] It should be noted that the bending of metronomic measure is not unique to the 1920s, to Armstrong, or jazz music. It is a staple of musical performance practice that no doubt stretches from Bach to Bootsy Collins and beyond. The effect of the allegro accompaniment of 1920s jazz, however, combined with the groove induced by the bouncy melodic statements, bestows an inimitable character to the music of the era that has been utilized by every creator of narrative or historical documentary representing this period. The jazz era possesses a characteristic time signature.

Bounce is created by starting phrases between the regular metronomic strokes and loosening the metrical regularity of melody. Gunther Schuller points out that African folk music arises from an

entirely different system from the traditions of Western classical music, the notation of which depends on a mathematical division of note values. He describes jazz practice as allowing the "democratization of rhythm values" (6). That is, notes may be emphasized that are not usually accented in a particular metrical scheme. Indeed, African musical time, deriving from polyrhythms, is often impossible to notate in sheet music using the mechanical standards of Western music. This flexible rhythmic quality is evident throughout the history of black American music, even down to soul and funk musicians "playing behind the beat."

But beyond the apparently casual nature of his melodic phrasing, the temporal structures in Armstrong's solos absorb rhythms from the aural culture around him. Schuller notes that "African native music and early American jazz both originate in a total vision of life, in which music, unlike the 'art music' of Europe, is not a separate, autonomous social domain." A jazz performance is thus not a separate type of performance from the speech acts of the surrounding environment, as "African music . . . is conditioned by . . . the entire social structure" (4). Patterns of spoken dialogue, laughter, anguished cries, and muted under-the-breath irony are all expressed by Armstrong's horn. In the same way, the instrumental quality of Armstrong's scat singing and the vocal quality of his horn solos demonstrate the African heritage of jazz in the "reciprocal relationship between language and music" (Schuller 5). The rise of Armstrong's post-Dixieland style may demonstrate a retreat from the more frantic syncopations of earlier decades, and his rhythmic innovation, rooted in African folk culture, creates a more vocal musical quality, one that engages more powerfully on an emotional level. Arising from the Dixieland practice of intertwining the voices of trumpet, trombone, and clarinet, Armstrong's style achieves a conversational effect, a responsive attitude that adopts phrasing from other speech performances from within the community as well as from the musical elements surrounding his improvisation. As Robert Palmer expresses, "the melodies found in music suggest words and sentences. By using generally understood correspondences between pitch configurations in speech and in music, musicians can make their instruments talk" (29).

In the 1920s, Armstrong recorded a succession of jazz masterpieces as bandleader and soloist in small ensembles. These recordings have been released in such compilations as Hot Fives and Sevens by the JSP label. A consideration of these recordings can help to illustrate Armstrong's development of phrasing during this period of incipiency. If we look at "Twelfth Street Rag" (Armstrong, *Hot Fives*, 2.8)[6] as a beginning point, indeed, as a retrospective exercise gazing back at the times before the solidification of Dixieland style, the soloist is revealed as a student who has mastered and bettered previous performances of Ragtime-inspired excesses. Armstrong's exposition of the melodic theme retains some of the chaotic energy of the syncopators' style and aggressively accents the offbeats, creating a polyrhythm that cycles back against the regular time of the accompaniment. It is a virtuosic performance that transcends the mere busy-ness of similar performances, but it only anticipates the future fullness of Armstrong's practice in its technical, as opposed to aesthetic, mastery.

When listening to the various exercises with musical time and phrasing established in these recordings, it is tempting to consider Armstrong as assigning roles and characters to particular instrumental solos. If his musical phrasing derives from voices and sounds within the community,

individuals may be represented by unique cadences and phrases. It is inviting for a sensitive listener to hear examples of Bergson's "psychological duration" in the extended moment of intensity evoked in Armstrong's musical phrases. Even while reposing on the inner time of duration, consciousness is aware of an "outer circle of psychic states which it uses as a balance-wheel (Bergson 126). It is possible to discern in musical utterances the unique time experienced by characters and expressed in their particular rhythms of lived time. For example, "Keyhole Blues," (Armstrong, 2.9) while it plays with time in a way as sophisticated as that in "Twelfth Street Rag," "Keyhole" does so by resisting the consistent exposition of melody in an extended musical phrase, using repetition and hesitation to create a stuttering effect. The four notes repeated at irregular intervals seem to resist the progression of the melodic statement. This rhythmic tic may suggest the irregular time experienced by a character who stands uncertainly outside the door listening or peeking in at the keyhole. It is impossible to know how Armstrong responds musically to the titles of traditional tunes or those produced by other composers, however, the phrasing in Armstrong's version of Jellyroll Morton's evocatively titled "Wild Man Blues" (Armstrong, 2.2) also suggests a marginal emotional state. The cadences in Armstrong's initial trumpet solo suggest frequent jitters of complaint and the impatient rush of speech outside conventional utterances. A phrase at the end of this first solo features a brilliant shift in octave that modulates between a breathy threat and a cry of abandon. In "Alligator Crawl" (Armstrong, 2.4), Armstrong's horn also simulates a cry of joy and ends in a swinging fanfare. We can hear these pieces as constituting a catalogue of speech types celebrated in the New Orleans musical dialect. By means of the irregular time of African musical shapes, Armstrong adopts such utterances and elevates them to a form of melodic declaration. Thus, a style of phrasing arises that becomes part of the musical vocabulary inspirational to many future jazz soloists.

While the previous examples demonstrate the breadth of spoken rhythms that make their way into Armstrong's musical imagination, the essence of Armstrong's style is perhaps achieved in "Potato Head Blues" (Armstrong, 2.5). The groove produced by Armstrong's bouncing rhythm in the initial trumpet solo exemplifies the joyful allegro of 1920s jazz that feels pleasant all along the backbone. Its syncopation converts the martial discipline of the march to a happy loose-limbed strut. Further, Armstrong's musical phrases answer each other in an elegant call-and-response suggestive of the interweaving voices of wind instruments endemic to Dixieland jazz. The clipped phrases suggest a yielding to another soloist but Armstrong incorporates the communal time of Dixieland into the single voice of his horn. It is this type of performance that sets the standard for musical phrasing in the jazz era.

"Melancholy Blues" (Armstrong 2.6) demonstrates a similar use of time in another mood. An adagio tempo is equally evocative of emotional state through its placement of musical emphasis in time. A slower tempo, in fact, allows more negative space within the grid of metronomic time and thus more varied moments for a melodic note to be struck. The low blues of "Melancholy" bends musical time by allowing notes to drag after the expected pulse of the tempo. One need only reference the Bach "Air" from Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D (BWV 1068)[7] to illustrate the malleability of musical time in slow tempos. Bach's famous descending bass line here is written as square eighth notes, but is usually performed by elongating the second, third, sixth and seventh

notes, thus carving into the negative space of sound and allowing these four notes to divide the intervening micro silences in an uneven but elegant pattern. “What Did I Do (To be So Black and Blue)” (Armstrong, 4.4) similarly makes use of a slow tempo to shape a melody in time. The number also demonstrates a vocal quality in Armstrong’s melodic imagination. Unlike many instrumental numbers inherited by jazz performers of Armstrong’s time, “What Did I Do?” is adapted from a Broadway musical written by Fats Waller and Andy Razaf. Armstrong sings the number as well, but only after an extended trumpet solo that runs through both chorus and refrain. Though abstract and brilliantly shaped, this trumpet intro seems to be inspired by the lyrical content of the number. The plaintively repeated and varied four-note figure that opens the trumpet solo seems to be asking “what did I do?” but in a melodic statement different from that which appears in the lyric at the conclusion of every verse.

Yet the dialogue produced in Armstrong’s solo technique is dynamic and new. It contains African American rhythms and style but allows an emotive range not available in other modernist compositions coinciding with the rise of black artists. We can speculate that its effect on the rhythms of American life in other expressions of art in later decades is discernible. For example, the hard-boiled dialogue of Hollywood’s noir films shares the rhythmic energy and call-and-response characteristics of Dixieland jazz, though it is delivered in a driving monotone and lacks the emotive range pioneered by Armstrong and the hot soloists of his generation. The charm of Armstrong’s style is in the warmth and measurement of its speech. It has an emotive dimension that is easily adapted into the larger community’s aural inventory. We can say that, in its most basic terms, Armstrong’s improvisation practice arises from the rhythmic patterns of black speech in the early twentieth century and creates a new sense of musical time that becomes an artistic standard. We can see this as the vernacularization of musical time, a process that can also be reproduced in literary and dramatic composition. Indeed, Amstrong’s adaptation of time spreads its influence throughout the American society. As Giddens states, “[i]n teaching America to swing, he liberated its vernacular voice” (286).

Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*:
On the Re-Calibration of Time in Early Twentieth Century America

What distinguishes Zora Neale Hurston as a novelist is her multidimensional expertise. Beyond being a novelist and playwright, she was also an anthropologist, folklorist, and artist. Hurston played a significant role in the Harlem Renaissance and the “new Negro” during the 1920s, contributing greatly to the literary and cultural scene of New York City. She was unique among the circle of Harlem artists theorizing on the proper form of expression for young black artists regarding rhythm, tempo and experienced communal time. Whereas contemporaries like Claude McKay and Countee Cullen presented black experience and themes in meters that closely aligned with canonical time, Hurston favored the rhythms of blues music and the people’s speech of the rural South. Langston Hughes likewise experimented with jazz rhythms in his work, but the effect is, appropriately, more “uptown” than the communal time Hurston finds in the rural southern dialect. Her second novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, remains a landmark in African American literature, capturing the journey of a young black woman through Hurston’s masterful storytelling, rich vernacular, and vivid character portrayals.

In the early twentieth century, the rise of African American racial consciousness paralleled the emergence of jazz, blues, spirituals, and visual arts. During this time, a new generation of African American writers produced groundbreaking works in poetry, novels, drama, and essays, marking a significant era of cultural and intellectual growth. The Harlem Renaissance became a vital space for these artists, writers, and musicians to express their identities and experiences, setting fire to a transformative shift in American culture.

In 1937, while conducting folklore research in Haiti, Zora Neale Hurston wrote the manuscript for *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in seven weeks. For many critics, the book became widely read and controversial, largely due to Hurston's bold use of African American vernacular by capturing the speech patterns and dialects of Black communities. This technique was radical for its time, as many Black intellectuals viewed rural folk culture as ignorant or embarrassing. It wasn't until the 1970s and 1980s that Hurston's contributions as both an author and anthropologist were fully recognized and appreciated after her death.

The novel places a significant emphasis on Black folks' life in Eatonville, Florida, the first all-Black town to be incorporated in the United States, highlighting the community's culture and dynamics. At the heart of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is Janie Crawford, a sixteen-year-old girl who dreams of love and wonders if marriage will bring it. She waits for love to blossom, like a pear tree in spring. The pear tree symbolizes Janie's ideal of a harmonious relationship, one that is both emotionally fulfilling and sexually liberating. To sum up, over the course of twenty-four years and three marriages, Janie endures pain and humiliation, while also experiencing resilience, love, and personal growth.

The exposition, written in standard English, has a poetic, almost biblical tone, setting a reflective and philosophical mood. Here, a formal and elongated rhythm is employed, evoking a canonical era, which perhaps operates as Bergsonian common sense time. In contrast, when Janie begins telling her story to Pheoby, the dialogue between the two women and the speech of the townspeople is delivered in African American vernacular. This contrast between the narrative voice and the dialogue is striking. While the narrator speaks in broad, philosophical terms, the characters' conversations are grounded in their personal experiences, expressed in the non-standard, vernacular of their community. The rhythm of this speech may suggest the melody of a musical piece, the time of emotional duration that springs from the canonical accompaniment. It is interesting to see that the narrative voice speaks in general and philosophical terms, while the dialogues remain personal and specific based on the characters' experience. This distinct narrative voice can be seen in the following quotation: "Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men" (Hurston 1). The voice heard here is a historical one, delivered in a slow tempo with weight and gravity, providing a past against which contemporary rhythms can be contrasted. Furthermore, Hurston's capture of vernacular enabled her to incorporate blues musical techniques in her novel in relation to African American experiences in early twentieth century America. It is clear that Hurston creates the music by depicting the characters' vernacular. As an anthropologist,

Hurston travelled to the South to study the local dialects of the black community. She recorded the unique phrasing that derived from a shared African culture. As a consequence, she managed to insert the vernacular on the page by improvising the musical speech form similar to the rhythm of a blues song.[8]

The novel charts Janie's journey of self-discovery, particularly through her evolving use of language. At the outset, Janie is silent, her voice overshadowed by others. Her grandmother, Nanny, forces her into a marriage with Logan Killicks, prioritizing material security over emotional connection. As a former slave, Nanny values protection and stability above love. In her marriage to Logan, Janie is treated as a worker, laboring in the fields alongside the mule. Unable to endure this life, she elopes with Joe Starks, a wealthy man who becomes the mayor of Eatonville, the first self-governing Black community in the United States. Yet Joe, too, controls her voice and public appearance, dictating what she should wear and forbidding her from speaking publicly. For example, he forces Janie to wear a head rag, seeing her beauty and voice as threats to his authority. To summarize, Joe's voice doesn't represent the liberating sound of blues but repeats the rhythm of oppression. In Eatonville, his "big voice" is an imitation of the hegemonic power structure.

However, Janie's relationship with her third husband, Tea Cake, marks a turning point. With Tea Cake, Janie's voice is no longer suppressed, and she experiences open and free conversation. Language becomes a source of empowerment, allowing her to express herself fully. By the novel's end, when Janie returns to Eatonville, she has achieved self-realization, having found love, fulfillment, and her own voice. Janie recounts her story to Pheoby, breaking free from societal expectations and completing her journey toward independence as a woman who has, in her own words, "been to the horizon" (182), used as a metaphor for future possibilities.

Time also plays a significant role in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and the novel's nonlinear structure frequently interwoven with flashbacks reflects this. The story is framed by a third-person omniscient narrator who uses standard English. In the opening paragraph, this narrator introduces a distinctive and virtuous voice. In contrast, when Janie begins recounting her life to Pheoby, their conversations, along with those of the townspeople, are delivered in African American vernacular. This contrast between the narrator's general, philosophical language and dialogue which are experience-based is striking.

Hurston's capture of vernacular enabled her to incorporate blues musical techniques in her novel in relation to African American experiences in early twentieth century America. Conveying the essence of the blues requires a mastery of "timing, . . . subtle variations in vocal timbre, [and the ability] to hear and execute . . . very precise gradations in pitch (Palmer 19). It is clear that Hurston creates the music by depicting the characters' vernacular. As an anthropologist, Hurston travelled to the South and collected games, chants, 'spells' and studied the local dialects of the black community that contribute to the rhythms of literary time in her developing literary style. In this novel she successfully managed to insert the local dialect on the page and improved the speech form in time to the rhythm of a blues song. Therefore, the characters' vernacular is very musical. Zimmerman states that "Hurston believed that music and literature grew from the art of

sound, and she used sound as a narrative structure to frame *Their Eyes Were Watching God.* Her understanding of music evolved from her dedication to sound studies; her use of the rhythm and rhyme of blues music allowed her to capture the vernacular of the South" (3).

Much like Armstrong's jazz solos, Hurston's dialogue captures the individuality of her characters and their genuine, unfiltered responses to life. The speech patterns of her characters, such as Janie, Tea Cake, and the porch talkers, are imbued with a musicality that mirrors the rhythms found in jazz and blues. Their conversations are tinged with pauses, overlaps, and interruptions, lending a natural flow to the dialogue. For instance, in Chapter 1, when Janie recounts her life story to Pheoby, the structure of her speech mimics that of a blues song, with its emotional depth and variations reflecting the sorrows and triumphs of her life. The repeated structure, reminiscent of blues, represents Janie's emotional journey through her struggles and moments of joy as can be seen below:

> Naw, 'tain't nothin' lak you might think. So 'tain't no use in me
> telling you somethin' unless Ah give you de understandin' to go
> 'long wid it. Unless you see de fur, a mink skin ain't no different
> from a coon hide. Looka heah, Pheoby, is Sam waitin' on you for his supper? (Hurston 7)

Tea Cake, Janie's third husband, deepens the connection between Hurston's novel and musical traditions. As a blues musician who plays both the guitar and piano, Tea Cake embodies the improvisational spirit of the blues. His first appearance at Janie's door, where he mimics the tuning of a guitar, captures his playful, spontaneous nature: "Tea Cake stood there mimicking the tuning of a guitar . . . Finally she smiled and he sung middle C, put his guitar under his arm and walked back to where she was" (Hurston 96). Through his music, Tea Cake entertains his community and brings people together, inviting Janie to participate: "Evenin', folks. Thought y'all might lak uh lil music this evenin', so Ah brought long mah box" (96). Tea Cake's connection to the blues mirrors Janie's journey. Just as Tea Cake embodies the spirit of the blues, Janie, after enduring the hardships of her first two marriages, emerges as a "blues woman" finding calm, vibrant energy, and emotional resilience in her relationship with Tea Cake, much like the healing power of blues music. In short, it is the music that allows Tea Cake to interact with Janie and introduce his true personality in terms of his charm and sincerity to Janie.

The musicality of Hurston's vernacular corresponds with the rhythms of blues and jazz, overlapping perfectly with the way a jazz musician improvises, repeating and playing with musical phrases to express emotions. Hurston's decision to write her novel in black vernacular was a deliberate political choice, much like Armstrong's improvisations within jazz and blues. In an era when standardized English was regarded as superior, Hurston preserved the authenticity of African American voices. Similarly, Armstrong's jazz solos kept alive the traditions of spirituals and slave songs, forms of cultural expression that had long been devalued by dominant white society.

In both cases, Hurston and Armstrong symbolized the freedom to break away from conventional rules, to experiment, and to create something uniquely personal. Both artists celebrated the

beauty of African American culture and the value of forms of expression that had been historically marginalized. While blues and jazz conveyed the stories and struggles of Black communities through music, Hurston used the vernacular of African American people to tell those stories in literature. Just as Armstrong's solos captured the individuality of each performance, Hurston's dialogue conveyed the spontaneous and unfiltered responses of her characters to the world around them.

Both Hurston's literary style and the musical traditions of jazz and blues share a deep connection to African American culture, relying on rhythm, spontaneity, and individuality. In both jazz and *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* there is an underlying theme of freedom to express oneself authentically, and to break away from societal norms. Janie's quest for personal freedom and her journey to find her voice mirror Armstrong's musical journey, as both forms of expression transcend racial and social boundaries.

Conclusion

Hurston's use of vernacular in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Armstrong's improvisation in jazz and blues share important similarities, particularly in their celebration of individual voice and rhythm. Both Hurston and Armstrong, through their respective art forms, embody the richness of African American culture and emphasize personal expression. Just as Armstrong crafts melody and rhythm through improvisation, Hurston's characters speak in a vernacular that flows naturally, with shifts in tone and rhythm reflective of their spontaneous emotions and experiences.

In conclusion, Armstrong's soloing demonstrated a mastery of improvisation, reshaping melodies in spontaneous and creative ways. He claims the inheritance of a hegemonic common-sense time, or clock time, and upon this ground expresses the more fluid and flexible time of personal emotional duration. This mirrors how Hurston weaves language and folklore into *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, using vibrant, unpredictable dialogue and storytelling patterns that feel fluid and organic. Ultimately, Hurston and Armstrong converge in their shared use of rhythm, phrasing, improvisation, and individuality. Both artists capture the vibrancy and diversity of African American life, celebrating its rhythms and unique voices. Through their respective art forms, they offer a form of resistance to dominant cultural narratives by emphasizing the power of individual expression. Hurston's use of dialect and Armstrong's improvisation embody the rhythm of Black life, highlighting the importance of personal voice within a broader cultural framework and offering liberation through art. Though Hurston's medium was literature and Armstrong's was music, both celebrated Black cultural identity and reshaped their art forms by focusing on personal style and innovation. Both brought the rhythms of the black vernacular to the mainstream of modern American culture and helped to shape subsequent expressions of American life and character. In doing so, these artists changed the way Americans experienced time during the transformative period of the early twentieth century.

Notes

[1] See, for example, David Wondrich's discussion of Ragtime in *Stomp and Swerve: American Music Gets Hot 1843-1924*. Wondrich cites musicologist Edward Berlin who delineates the stages of development from the march to the cakewalk to the rag (Wondrich 61).

[2] The popularity of Ragtime does not result entirely from the anonymous note poachers of Tin Pan Alley. See David Gilbert's discussion of the efforts of musicians like James Reese Europe to introduce African American musical styles to the Manhattan musical stage in *The Product of Our Souls: Ragtime, Race, and the Birth of the Manhattan Musical Marketplace*, especially pages 163-73.

[3] Paul Oliver catalogues a number of performers and recordings in his work *Songsters and Saints: Vocal Traditions on Race Records*. His chapter "Under the Chicken Tree: Songs from the Ragtime Era" traces rag-inspired performances during this period.

[4] Michael Germana has devoted a chapter to Ellison's critique of time in the Bebop era in his study *Ralph Ellison in Context*.

[5] Quoted in Ken Burns's documentary series *Jazz* on PBS.

[6] The recording referenced is a four CD set. The first number refers to the CD number and the second to the track number on that CD.

[7] The recording referenced here is from the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, which uses bowed basses to realize this rhythmic pattern. Other recordings may even make use of pizzicato technique which shortens the decay of the struck note and expands the temporal range in which the musical emphasis may be voiced.

[8] Here again Schuller's comments on the reciprocal relationship between music and language are applicable, as are Palmer's observations of the verbal priority of the blues.

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Re-Narrating the Feminine African American Experience in Contemporary Visual Arts: Exploring the Creations of Mickalene Thomas and Tschabalala Self

Abstract
Focusing on the artistic practices of Mickalene Thomas and Tschabalala Self, two contemporary African American artists, this article addresses the redefinition and re-telling of the Black female body in the visual arts. It analyzes the strategies they elaborate to revisit Western artistic traditions, such as the feminine nude or reclining figures, in order to create counter-narratives for the Black female body, away from customary destructive stereotypes. This paper will demonstrate that these women artists reclaim different cultural heritages, oscillating between tribute and pastiche, in order to build their own laudatory and playful imageries and offer dignified portrayals of Black modern women. It will also examine the scope of Mickalene Thomas and Tschabalala Self's creations, which combine painting, textile work, and public art projects.
Keywords: Contemporary visual arts, Mickalene Thomas, Tschabalala Self, black female body, historical revision, self-representation

Afrikalı Amerikalı Kadın Deneyimini Yeniden Anlatmak: Mickalene Thomas ve Tschabalala Self'in Çağdaş Görsel Sanatlardaki Yaratımlarını Keşfetmek

Öz
İki çağdaş Afrikalı Amerikalı sanatçı olan Mickalene Thomas ve Tschabalala Self'in sanatsal pratiklerine odaklanan bu makale, görsel sanatlarda Siyah kadın bedeninin yeniden tanımlanması ve yeniden anlatılmasını ele alır. Sanatçıların, alışılagelmiş yıkıcı stereotiplerden uzakta, siyah kadın bedeni için karşı-anlatılar yaratmak amacıyla kadınsı çıplak ya da uzanmış figürler gibi Batılı sanatsal gelenekleri yeniden ele almak için geliştirdikleri stratejileri analiz etmektedir. Bu makale, bu kadın sanatçıların kendi övgü dolu ve oyunbaz imgelerini inşa etmek ve siyah modern kadınların onurlu tasvirlerini sunmak için övgü ve pastiş arasında gidip gelen farklı kültürel mirasları geri aldıklarını gösterecektir. Ayrıca Mickalene Thomas ve Tschabalala Self'in resim, tekstil çalışmaları ve kamusal sanat projelerini bir araya getiren eserlerinin kapsamı da incelenecektir.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Çağdaş görsel sanatlar, Mickalene Thomas, siyah kadın bedeni, Tschabalala Self, tarihsel revizyon, öz temsil

Introduction

If we consider the recent political debates about women's rights in Western society during the 2024 presidential campaign in the United States, we realize that Black women are still prevented from speaking for themselves and see their integrity contested by other people. On July 31st, 2024, at the Convention of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), in Chicago, Donald Trump declared about Kamala Harris, his political opponent: "She was Indian all the way, and all of a sudden she made a turn and became a Black person." This insulting comment publicly devalued Harris's ability to express her own identity and also demonstrated how people, in particular white men, try to define the identity of African American women, on their behalf and without their consent. Trump allowed himself to commodify Harris in the same manner Black women have repeatedly been commodified and dispossessed of their true selves. The incident reminds us that being a Black woman means being "captive" to unlimited preconceived ideas (Wilson 204), but above all being captive to the "racialized white gaze" (Murell 17).

Hortense Spillers coined the expression "locus of confounded identities (Spillers 65), synthesizing the systematic marking of Black women by a society that relegates them to sexist and racist typecasts. The most infamous stereotypes imposed on Black women are probably the subservient Mammy, the antagonistic Sapphire, and the promiscuous Jezebel; these historical caricatures inherited from the age of slavery portray African American women as anti-role models for positive femininity because of their passiveness, hostility, or unrestrained libido. Patricia Hill Collins explains that the long-lasting systemic disparagement of Black women is an instrument of power in a generalized ideology of domination, which reuses existing symbols and creates new ones. Controlling images are designed to convince that various forms of injustice are "natural, normal and inevitable" and to perpetuate the vision of Black women as the essential social "other" (Collins 69-70). Black women have been maintained in subordination because they are too often refused a subject status and suffer objectification; they are being denied the right to define their reality and their identities (Collins 71). The idea of an overdetermined, fragmented identity resonates across the work of many Black women artists today, who not only challenge these inherited scripts but also employ creative strategies of reclamation. Their work invites us to think of identity not as a unified essence, but as a heterogeneous, layered construction: something built, contested, and assembled. My article will integrate multiple, interrelated paradigms (i.e., commodification, fetishism, intimacy, self-representation, and public visibility) not as isolated concerns but as intersecting lenses. This plurality is not a sign of fragmentation but of the complex cultural labor these artists perform. My goal is to show how the two artists' strategies and interests – especially their blending of public and private, sensual and political – offer a model of resistance that is, itself, heterogeneous.

Similarly, Western art history is characterized by a long tradition of representing Black bodies, whether male or female, as signifying something other than themselves and as being made invisible (Eshun 7). As Black people were objectified and alienated in a network of damaging caricatures, with Black women seen as lascivious or conniving and Black men imagined as thuggish and predatory, 1970s artists and intellectuals started calling for a revolution in vision, to create new visual politics challenging racist and patriarchal perspectives. Within this system of representations, Black womanhood has been inscribed in a never-ending struggle to achieve

self-determination (Wilson 204), self-knowledge, and self-representation (Murrell 17). Likewise, bell hooks called for the necessity to escape victimhood because it denied Black people, and in particular artists, the power of the imagination and the capacity to create. On the contrary, she asserted the need to "gain and sustain visibility" by breaking from white views regarding Blackness (hooks 117-118). This article considers recent options offered to African American women (the minority within the minority) to re-appropriate their identities and reimagine themselves through the visual arts. I am particularly interested in the way American contemporary visual artists, and more precisely Black female artists, produce counter-narratives infused with a sense of pride and dignity. By analyzing the practices of Mickalene Thomas (1971) and Tschabalala Self (1990), both committed to figuration, I will underline the visual strategies used to redefine the bodies and experiences of Black women along the topics of intimacy and domesticity. Inspired by techniques inherited from previous generations of Black women artists, Thomas and Self combine high art, craft, and folks' tradition to re-create an image of twenty-first-century Black womanhood rooted in transmission, liberation, and self-narration.

Reclaiming the narratives about African American women starts with who is in charge of representing them. Focusing on women artists portraying other women enables us to understand how a form of "corrective representation" (hooks 67) was introduced, in opposition to patriarchal and racist perceptions. Men have traditionally portrayed women because women artists were and are still far less numerous than their male counterparts, as they were prevented from pursuing artistic careers for centuries. The struggles of the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s led to an increase in women artists and their gradual acknowledgment by the art world. They introduced a shift in perspective by challenging the male gaze and escaping visual constructions dominated by the masculine viewpoint and fantasies. Black contemporary women artists even go further by inviting to a new shift: "from looking at the Black figure – via an external objectifying gaze – to seeing through the eyes of Black artists and the figures they depict" (Eshun 9). This is what Tina Campt calls "the Black gaze," recently introduced by artists to modify the way we see and understand a global society in the "midst of a Black artistic renaissance" (Campt 5). New networks, innovative formats, and artistic visions contribute to redefining Blackness away from a subordinate relation to whiteness or in an oppositional system of representations. Instead, it seems crucial to explore contradictions and interrogations regarding the Black subject, in order to build a visual environment fostering resistance and a critical posture (Campt 17-23). We are faced with a double transformation of the gaze, which debunks patriarchal and xenophobic approaches, under the influence of the social changes experienced by racial and gendered minorities. Using different mediums and formats, Mickalene Thomas and Tschabalala Self are "wom[e]n painting other women" and they affirm "an act that positions [them] within a lineage of feminist representational strategies, whereby women (as image makers) claim agency and control over the female body in an oppositional act of self-representation" (Murray 11). The fact that Tschabalala's surname is "Self" might sound like an intentional artistic pseudonym, encapsulating her commitment to self-representation. However, it is her real name—ironically perfect for an artist so concerned with the right to define one's own identity. The works of both artists respond to and challenge Eurocentric paradigms of beauty, technique, and subject matter to repair the cultural denigration and even erasure suffered by Black women in art history. Studying the creations of Thomas and Self will enable us to consider the evolution of portraiture, more specifically Black women's portraiture,

and how it departs "from a mark of otherness" to achieve "a self-empowering affirmation" (Mercer 15). These artists introduce forces of disruption and re-imagination as they push against the limits of reductive narratives.

A Visual Legacy Based on Re-using and Re-interpreting

In the introduction to the National Portrait Gallery's catalogue of the exhibition *Reframing the Black Figure*, Ekow Eshun underlines the significance of lineage and legacy in contemporary Black art, in other words, the importance of the lines of influence and inspiration between different generations of Black artists (Eshun 9). Testifying to an artistic continuum and resonances inscribed in contemporary art, Mickalene Thomas and Tschabalala Self's works are representative of the intertextuality and connections between different heritages. Both their practices combine painting, paper collage, textile assemblage, quilt, and crafts, and also mobilize references to European painting and the creations of African American artists from previous generations. We see that the Black representational space they propose is not intracultural but intercultural, and it incorporates diversified sources of inspiration rather than claiming a radical separation from assumed classic canons. This resonates with Kobena Mercer's explanations about the strategies used to construct the Black image: "what was once a monologue about otherness became a dialogue about difference" (Mercer 3). Indeed, Black artists are often wrongly perceived as an isolated group whose work is confined to a separate narrative, whereas, in reality, they intermingle and embrace a multitude of references. Mercer emphasizes the concept of cross-cultural dynamics, which illustrates the interdependence and ambiguity between different heritages, even when they seem to be in total opposition (Mercer 6). To deconstruct divisive preconceptions, Eddie Chambers's warning is even stronger as he rejects what he calls "the raced prefix;" he considers it an alienating label that segregates artists and does not render the artistic value of individual practices (Chambers XXII-XXIII). We will therefore analyze how Thomas and Self do not stand in a realm apart but adopt an integrationist perspective, reuniting artistic practices, both Black and white, male and female, which they endorse while also defying them with a sense of reverence. They participate in retelling a "shared history of art from a richer array of perspectives" (Mercer 30), rooted in the pluralism of the present.

This shared history is also rendered visible through gestures of homage and citation, revealing a strong sense of belonging to a larger creative ancestry. Whether through direct re-appropriations or subtle allusions, Thomas and Self inscribe themselves within an evolving lineage of Black female creativity, in conversation with foremothers like Faith Ringgold, Betye Saar, and Lorna Simpson. They thus reaffirm that Black women artists have never been absent from the art historical narrative, but have been systematically obscured. Both Thomas and Self challenge dominant models of authorship and originality by affirming collaboration across time. Their artworks embody a generational chain where influence is celebrated as a tool of empowerment. In a context where Black women's histories have often been fragmented or erased, this insistence on connection, both spiritual and material, serves as an act of historical reparation. It also reinforces the idea, emphasized by Eshun and Mercer, that Black artistic production is not marginal but central to the larger visual and cultural discourse, constantly evolving through mutual recognition and shared imagination.

Thomas is famous for her multiple reinterpretations of French nineteenth-century masterpieces, such as *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (1863) by Édouard Manet, *Le Sommeil* (1866) by Gustave Courbet, and for her tributes to Claude Monet's water lilies. Her approach is intriguing and amusing as she plays with the traditional visual codes and artistic canons imposed by white men to feminize and re-appropriate them. She produces duplications and variations of immensely famous paintings, substituting the original characters with those of African American women. This strategy echoes the work of Kehinde Wiley, who restages images from the Western canon of art history to incorporate Black subjects, as a way to transfer power and offer African Americans an elevated status they were previously deprived of.

Thomas created two versions of *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe, inspired by* Manet's work and Picasso's adaptation (1960), with *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe: Les Trois Femmes noires* in 2010 and 2022. The 2010 artwork was commissioned by the MoMA in New York City. If the original painting by Manet presented two men fully dressed in formal suits, conversing with a nude woman in a pastoral setting, while a bather plays in the river in the background, Thomas's work recreates a similar luncheon scene with three confident African American women. The absence of the Black body in Western art history was her incentive for this transformation of the classic artwork. She explained she wanted to fill a space about traditional representations of the white body: "I was concerned about that particular space and how it was void. I wanted to find a way of claiming the space, of aligning my voice and art history and entering this discourse" ("Figuring History"). In her new vision, sensuality is expressed away from nudity, as the three sitters are portrayed in colorful summer dresses and adopting a posture of self-esteem and independence, with no male companion participating to the get-together, thus departing from the patriarchal and heteronormative influences on gender relationships and on the codification of beauty standards. Manet's piece was first reinterpreted thanks to a studio photograph which borrowed the same composition with different characters, then adapted into a photographic collage, and finally transformed into a mixed media work combining acrylic, enamel and rhinestones into a puzzle-piece effect, celebrating 1970s style patterns and visual codes based on bold and bright colors. In 2022, Thomas continues her exploration of *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, with another version inspired by Picasso's adaptation but also by her artistic residency in Claude Monet's home in Giverny (France) in 2011. Once again, she explores photography, painting, textiles, and craft to interrogate collective portraiture for the community of Black modern women, connecting it with landscape elements that refer to the Impressionist experience in Normandy. Both the 2010 and 2022 works offer a shift in viewpoint as the eyes of the sitters strongly appeal to the viewer's gaze, in order to create a direct visual connection and encourage people to look at subjects that were long discarded from museums. Thomas also presents her modern picnickers as a joyful, casual group, enjoying a sunbath and a moment of leisure in a spirit of sorority.

The practice of Mickalene Thomas is based on the use of materials that are often imagined or fantasized as strictly or purely feminine, such as glitter, rhinestones, and lace, and integrates them into creations using collage. The aesthetics of collage help Thomas address the multifaceted and often fragmented identities of Black women. Initially, Thomas started using these recycled

or thrown away materials because they were accessible and more affordable than oil painting. She also became interested in materials associated with stereotypical visions of beautification and glamor. The rhinestones have even become her signature, and her pictorial identity is articulated around colorful and decorative images, playfully verging on tawdry and tacky. The question of adornments and decorations in her practice is also important because it raises the issue of camouflage and masquerade. This reminds us of Joan Riviere's famous 1929 essay entitled "Womanliness as Masquerade," which presents femininity as a kind of coded spectacle used by women to survive in a hostile male environment. Thomas plays with feminine gender performance by using shimmering materials, not as a way to comply with men's visions of what women should be or look like, but in order to capture the viewer's attention and bring light and illumination to subjects often ignored in traditional Western painting. The intense use of over-shinny elements may also evoke the exuberance of the carnival tradition, encouraging amusement, role reversal, and topsy-turvydom to create a space for rebelling against authority. Thomas makes renowned works her own and engages in an "intracultural dialogue" (Murray 11) around the way Black people wish to depict themselves and liberate themselves from socio-historical pressure.

As for Tschabalala Self, she reclaims the heritage of African American women artists like Faith Ringgold, who, with her famous quilt series, reintroduced textile as an art form, deriving from craft. Self blends paint with sewn scraps of found materials and cut-up pieces of her unfinished works. She explains: "I use materials in an unconventional way to subvert the status quo. You don't have to use paint to make a painting" (Rees). She also takes her inspiration from other African American artists like Romare Bearden, who articulated his artistic practice around collage of strips of wallpaper, posters, fabrics, or foils, or like Clementine Hunter, one of the key figures of Southern Folk arts who used readily available materials like discarded fabric, window shades, jugs, and gourds as her canvases. Working on recycled materials is a way to address the issues of producing art in a context of economic limitation and the importance of everyday objects as a new medium for artistic creation. Her practice, dealing with subjects who have been long excluded from validated art, Tschabalala Self, like Mickalene Thomas, introduces low-value materials to construct magnified representations of ordinary life. The combination of different materials and textures also allows the two artists to escape visual uniformity.

If we take the example of Self's most recent works, presented in a solo mini-exhibition entitled "My House," in the booth of Galerie Eva Presenhuber, at Art Basel Paris, in October 2024, we observe that the artist uses different patches of fabric to explore the representations of Black skin. Challenging the collective fantasies surrounding the Black female body, she interrogates the variety and richness of brown skin by using pieces of cloth from different shades of brown but also with hues of green, blue, pink, red, and orange. The juxtaposition of different colors, types of fabric with diverse designs and prints enables Tschabalala Self to reject the monochromic approach imposed on Black figures because it cannot translate the diversity of complexions and identities within the African American community and the people of African descent at large. The conversation around the representation of Blackness was triggered long ago by Faith Ringgold who, in her early works, used variations either of brown and orange or of blue and green to figure Black people and, more recently, it was continued by artists like Kerry James Marshall who uses only black pigments

to paint the characters in his paintings while Amy Sherald works with variations of grey. These experimentations with colors are a way to dissociate Blackness and darkness and to deconstruct stereotypical depictions of Black life. Self claims that, with "My House," she wants to debunk the myth of Blackness as "an island" and instead she tries to present it as a "lived experience that has many intercultural intersections"; her textile work patching together a multitude of clothes with elements of painting helps illustrating the multitudinous "Black femininity from a pan-Africanist perspective" ("Tschabalala Self, My House"). This new show is also rooted in a narrative based on the imagined adventures of a fictitious Black woman in Paris in her daily home activities, under the influence of famous Black icons such as Sarah Baartman (1789–1815) – known as the Venus Hottentot – and Josephine Baker. It is also borrowing from the post-impressionistic aesthetics of modernist French painters, such as Henri Matisse ("Tschabalala Self, My House"). The young artist honors several legacies, combining female and male, historical and artistic, Black and white, in order to create a shared imagination.

Revisiting Intimacy: Feminine Figures in Interior Scenes

For both Thomas and Self, reimagining everyday moments in the lives of ordinary Black women starts within their homes and deals with interior scenes. Black womanhood is depicted in intimate spaces, daily habits, and mundane actions, often in rooms such as the kitchen, living room, or bedroom. Welcoming the viewer into the interior spaces is also a way to give access to the interiorities of African American women and to address both personal and societal issues. For Tschabalala Self, the idea of the home – highlighted in her recent shows and museums: "My House" (2024), "Make Room" (2023), "Home body" (2022) – means absolute safety ("Tschabalala Self, Places and spaces"), because it as a space where the African American woman is not marginalized. The notion of intimacy is not only featured by rendering domestic life but by presenting subjects in vulnerable states – typically alone, often naked. The women portrayed are released from social pressure and can enjoy bodily freedom in nudity. The private tableaux that the two artists create encourage spectators to witness the naked truth exposed in front of their eyes. The scenes of intimacy also provide them with opportunities to re-interpret and renew the pictorial tradition of the feminine nude, one of the most conventional genres in Western art. Nineteenth-century painting introduced a form of liberation, exoticism, and eroticism in nude scenes, which fostered a sense of pleasure and scandal. Artists like Edouard Manet or Gustave Courbet, who are crucial references for Mickalene Thomas due to their avant-garde spirit, also disconnected nude scenes from any religious or mythological dimension and focused on nudity as a form of provocative realism, depicting inglorious aspects of daily lives and/or unglamorous social realities (such as prostitution). Western art is filled with reclining feminine figures or reclining nudes, evoking timeless ideals of beauty and offering underlying or explicit erotic implications.

Therefore, it is not surprising that Thomas and Self participate in the debate over reinterpreting and modernizing nude portraits by offering their own African American versions. The female Black body evolves from being abused, brutalized, and damaged to "becoming a healthy present" (Nelson 20) and an object of sensual but respectful desire. When discussing her latest show in Los Angeles ["All About Love"], Mickalene Thomas explained that African American women have been too often treated as maids, caretakers, mammies, etc., and were defined, within American

society, by their hard labor (Smith). Black women were excluded from the economy of desire because their lives were mainly driven by work and survival. Patricia Hill Collins explains that the archetype of the Mammy, the submissive and faithful domestic servant, "serves a symbolic function in maintaining oppression of gender and sexuality" (Collins 73). The Mammy is harmless and asexual and represents the very opposite of the so-called "true" white woman. She is the jolly embodiment of the silent and authorized economic exploitation of Black women (Collins 74). In her creations, Thomas tries to comprise the economic reality of Black women with their aspirations by representing "the women who are on the street, the women who are the laborers, the workers, but still exude this excellence of self-awareness and pride, and vulnerability and strength at the same time" (Smith) Her perception reminds us of W.E.B. Dubois presenting the transformations undergone by African Americans in the 1920s who experienced "a new appreciation of joy" (Dubois 290), and tried to self-define themselves away from experiences articulated only around suffering and trauma. The notions of joy, pleasure, and desire infuse the nude portraits made by the two artists who explore a new visual lexicon for the Black female body.

Tschabalala Self states that she is interested in exaggerating the forms of the body and playing with the stereotypes associated with the ideal female physique in the African diaspora. She uses preconceived ideas about sensuality to turn them into instruments of authority: "If the body is larger, having more weight to it and being more voluptuous, there is more material to build in and manipulate pictorially . . . and in my mind, [the figures] feel more powerful" ("Tschabalala Self, Ol'Bay"). She chooses to use collective fantasies and assumptions surrounding the Black female body by picturing exaggerated body parts, often the breasts and buttocks, as she wishes to "transgress the idea of a gendered and racialized body" (Buck). Her lone nude figures enjoy the solitary serenity of their bedrooms or living rooms without caring about others, and Self explains that they "exist for their pleasure and self-realization" (Buck). If we compare *Milk Chocolate* (2017) and *Chocolate Drop* (2023), we witness the artist's interest in hyperbolic depiction of breasts and buttocks. *Milk Chocolate* humorously evokes the relationship of the Black woman to her own body and the expression of an amused confidence as the character looks directly at the spectator, while showing her massive, sensual bottom. The artwork also combines the image of the Black female body with the iconic American candy (the Hershey's bar she holds in her hand) as a means of acknowledging the reality of Black objectification. The curvaceous body is real, but it also belongs to collective fantasies about Black women, inherited from Venus figurines that evoke fertility, such as the Venus of Willendorf. Nevertheless, they are often perceived as hypersexualized women rather than as mothers or child bearers, their bodies becoming more of a vehicle for visual pleasure than for reproduction. With *Chocolate Drop*, the prominent cleavage –another attribute of fertility and maternity– of the woman is emphasized while she is presented in a casual, lascivious pose, looking towards the viewer. This tempting gaze is the ultimate expression of her freedom and agency, rather than her submission to people's contemplation. Tschabalala Self plays with the archetype of the sexually available Black woman to discredit this negative oversimplification. Her creations lampoon the fantasy of the oversexualized Jezebel, imagined as deviant and fatale in order to justify the commodification of the black female body (Collins 83-84). The artist's visual treatment of ostentatious sexual organs can also be seen as a way to reconquer visibility; they become tools for channeling attention on people who are usually overlooked by society.

Mickalene Thomas underlines her interest in the reclining figures with her wish to represent moments of leisure, repose, and rest. Indeed, she considers leisure as an ultimate form of freedom because the body of Black women would not be a working body. She presents rest as "self-care" and "the privilege of luxuriating at any" For her, the notion of leisure and relaxation is to be seen as an "elevated state of pleasure." She adds that "rest is a radical act for Black women, who are known to be the caretakers of others" (Schaller). Curator Tahira Rasheed also insists on the value of rest as part of a system where respite was considered a privilege and a power only afforded to colonizers (Schaller). The artworks of Mickalene Thomas open potentialities for the redistribution of that power to those who were deprived of it, Black people and, more particularly, Black women. Other artists, such as the duo Black Power Naps, have interrogated what they call the "sleep gap" issue with an installation entitled "How can we dream if we don't sleep?" at the MoMA in 2023. They explained that the lack of sleep could be perceived as an instrument of oppression, utilized to break the will in the context of slavery, and which continued to afflict Black people afterwards. To reconquer the freedom of the mind, artists offer creations providing opportunities for rest and restoration ("Black Power Naps Asks, "How Can We Dream If We Don't Sleep?"). Similarly, Thomas engages in portraying Black women at rest, reclining on decorative sofas or colorful beds, surrounded by ornately designed duvets and pillows. She depicts the Black female nude in a seductive mode which combines elements of Blaxploitation aesthetics and orientalism (Murray 11), thus rearticulating and contesting racial fetishism in what is considered high art (Murray 12). For both artists, idleness also triggers moments of contemplation and reflection when the Black woman can think without being disturbed.

Thomas's *A Little Taste Outside of Love* (2007) offers an interesting reinterpretation of the absolute reclining figure, Ingres's *La Grande Odalisque* (1814). The artist recasts the Black female subject in a new role: instead of being the maid taking care of the white woman on the bed, as in Manet's *Olympia* (1863), the Black woman finds herself settled on the luxurious bed. She is also transferred from the Harem to an interior inspired by the taste of the 1970s, with large flowers, leopard, and tiger prints. Her Afro hairstyle is another tribute to the decade Thomas was born and to the Black beauty standards introduced during the counterculture era. Indeed, the Afro is a reference to the natural hair movement, which encouraged African American women to give up hairstyles that forced them to look like white women. Since the 1920s, Black women have been influenced by the idea that straight hair illustrated social and economic advancement, whereas natural hair was seen as a form of inferiority. Afros have been derogatorily labeled as "nappy" and "untamed" for centuries. On the contrary, in the 1970s, the Afro became a political weapon used by famous activists such as Angela Davis, but also a vibrant symbol of pride and self-respect (Griffin), also worn by icons of popular culture. *A Little Taste Outside of Love* opens a debate on racialized and gendered representations. With *Portrait of Mnonja* (2010), Mickalene Thomas continues her exploration of the reclining figure by adopting a different standpoint, as the woman depicted appears fully dressed with a frowny look on her face. Her femininity is expressed not by her nudity but by her sophisticated style, underlined by the use of rhinestones. Her somewhat sassy attitude seems to express a form of determination, revealing her wish to be proactive in the conversation about Black womanhood. Mnonja is actually a Senegalese friend of the artist. Her portrait,

commissioned by former ambassador Susan Rice, is supposed to celebrate African American women in high-profile positions and to express power and sophistication; it also demonstrates the fact that the sitter owns her space and is self-assured. Moreover, this artwork is designed to represent American feminine patriotism as the outfit of the model is composed of red, white, and blue to remind the viewer of the US flag. The artist questions traditional visions of Americanness to address the issue of multiculturalism inscribed in the DNA of the United States, especially at times when the founding principle of diversity is endangered. Besides, Mickalene Thomas underlines the self-reflexive dimension of this painting, explaining that the portrait both revealed aspects of Mnonja's strength and of Thomas's own fortitude; it became a kind of camouflaged self-portrait which provided information about herself, her struggles, and her aspirations ("Meet the Artist").

In both Tschabalala Self's and Mickalene Thomas's works, intimacy begins in the interiors –the literal rooms of a home–and extends to the interior lives of the Black women portrayed. The kitchen, living room, or bedroom becomes a stage where daily rituals and personal truths are enacted, shielded from the public gaze yet deliberately shared with viewers. These private tableaux invite us to witness the unguarded presence of their subjects, where nudity and solitude symbolize more than sensuality: They represent safety, autonomy, and relief from performative labor. In these domestic spheres, the Black female body is freed from service and surveillance and instead centered as a subject of agency, desire, and introspection. By placing Black women in poses historically associated with the European tradition of the reclining nude, Thomas and Self reclaim and radicalize this genre. Their figures are not idealized muses for male fantasy, but real, self-possessed women asserting their presence and pleasure. Their domestic nudes disrupt art historical conventions to declare that joy, rest, and erotic self-definition are not luxuries but meaningful acts of resistance.

New Spaces to Reimagine Trajectories for the Black Woman

In addition to the solo exhibitions devoted to their works and the collective shows they partake in, Mickalene Thomas and Tschabalala Self have taken their message beyond museums and art galleries. The final part of this article will discuss recent initiatives they have both led to reach new audiences and expand their redefinition of the future of Black women in new spheres of influence and public spaces. Nowadays, as more and more controversial monuments are decommissioned throughout the South of the United States, a passionate national debate is taking place about who and what should stand or be withdrawn from the public space and which new monuments could be imagined featuring current narratives about multicultural Americanness. Monuments and memorials erected in the public space offer an interpretation of a shared past, and they are anything but neutral, because they are utilized to shape public memory. In 2021, the National Monument Audit led by the nonprofit Monument Lab stated that the American monument landscape is misrepresenting the history of the country ("National Monument Audit"). Consequently, Black artists –men and women– are willing to produce public art and step forward to build new visions and messages about national identity, outside the walls of cultural institutions. Modupe Gloria Labode reminds us that Black artists partaking in public art is not something new, as they played a role in various New Deal programs in the 1930s and 1940s, but since the 1960s, they have received more sponsorship from local authorities than federal support for their public creations. However,

she underlines the fact that public space is an ever-evolving notion, which depends on the accessibility of people to the public sphere and on who is allowed to be represented in the public sphere. American history has proven its capacity to exclude minorities from this public sphere or to limit them to restricted areas (Labode 289-295). We will discuss the projects elaborated by Thomas and Self, outside of the United States –in France and in the UK– to address the need to create projection spaces for Black womanhood and interrogate the difficulty for younger Black women artists to conquer the American public space.

In January 2023, Mickalene Thomas was invited by Dior's artistic director, Maria Grazia Chiuri, to collaborate with the couture house on how Dior now nurtures creative conversations with artists in Paris. The scenography was handed over to Thomas, and she created thirteen photo collages of exceptional Black matriarch figures who inspire her, which lined the walls around the runway. She selected Black female role models from different continents; women who broke racial barriers, among which Josephine Baker, singers Eartha Kitt and Nina Simone, supermodels Donyale Luna, Naomi Sims, Ophelia DeVore, and Helen Williams, actresses Dorothy Dandridge, Diahann Carroll, Marpessa Dawn, Lena Horne, and Josephine Premice, and jazz pianist Hazel Scott. Thomas explained that "in choosing these thirteen exceptional Black and mixed-race women from different continents, the idea was to create a diverse and eclectic group of outstanding personalities" (Musée Rodin). They appear as a kind of new feminine pantheon, worth being remembered, and this resonates with Josephine Baker's actual transfer to the French pantheon on November 30th, 2021, where she now rests in power with other national heroes. The artist promotes the memorialization of non-white women who share the same spirit of perseverance and resilience embedded in a collective consciousness of Black womanhood. These women also represent an experience based on stories of personal fortitude as they were faced with difficult journeys to make a name for themselves, thus embodying combativeness and self-determination – ideals dear to US culture. Thomas mentioned that young generations of Black women owed much to these trailblazers: "It is because of their determination and sacrifices that I am able to make this work and be the artist that I am today" (Moss).

The show took place in the gardens of Musée Rodin, in downtown Paris. After the event, the sets with the monumental, embroidered works created by Thomas remained open to the general public for a week, extending the experience outside the happy few invited to attend the fashion show. The gigantic portraits in purple and gold were embroidered by the Chanakya School of Craft in Mumbai. The massive size of the portraits matters because large-scale formats are traditional instruments used for shaping cultural memory, by creating striking and awe-inspiring impressions on viewers, for instance, in portraiture and historical paintings in Western art. The size of these artworks can be interpreted as a meaningful statement on who deserves to be revered and looked up to for inspiration. Working on large-scale formats in the Dior installation is an interesting experience because it also enables the artist to play with the spectacular dimension of the Fashion week. The artworks were embedded within the larger performance of the fashion show, which serves as a platform to both display and interrogate beauty canons. Outstanding Black women were offered a giant stage to stand as models for the next generations and represent the artistic and intellectual achievements carried by women of color. Away from images of Black women

associated with trauma, Thomas also wanted to celebrate a community of creators, and the Paris fashion week appeared as a new moment and medium to influence public memory, because of its international impact and its potential for showcasing upcoming trends.

The multi-layered collaboration between the museum, the haute couture house, and Mickalene Thomas is an initiative that proved extremely advantageous for all participants. It enabled Dior to engage in a powerful and lucrative storytelling about femininity, diversity and inclusion, Thomas being widely acknowledged for foregrounding her lesbian identity and queer activism in her work. It is particularly noteworthy how the luxury industry strategically aligns itself with prominent contemporary artists and engages with current socio-political debates, not only as a form of cultural endorsement, but also as a sophisticated marketing strategy. These brands enhance their cultural capital, demonstrate social awareness, and appeal to younger, more politically engaged consumers who expect ethical and inclusive narratives from the institutions they support. An initiative almost similar was repeated in June 2024, when Dior decided to feature a scenography inspired by emblematic paintings from African American artist Faith Ringgold, and invite people to reflect upon the empowerment of women and minorities. Luxury brands use these opportunities to stress the artistic dimension of their trade and demonstrate that they represent not only commerce but culture, thus attaining more significance. The collaboration between Dior and Mickalene Thomas also illustrates the new strategies used to achieve broader visibility for artworks dealing with and made by women from minority groups. In both its form and message, this collaboration exemplifies how heterogeneity functions as a deliberate strategy in her work. By layering embroidery, photography, and collage, and collaborating across continents, she assembles a transnational, intergenerational chorus of Black womanhood. This assemblage resists monolithic representations and instead insists on fragmentation, fluidity, and plurality as sources of beauty and power. The monumental format of the portraits, traditionally reserved for historical patriarchs, is here co-opted to celebrate complexity rather than uniformity, offering a radical revision of who deserves cultural reverence. This embrace of multiplicity not only disrupts established hierarchies of art and fashion but also provides an expanded, inclusive model for public engagement. Thomas's installation blurs the boundaries between haute couture, memorial art, and social commentary – between public spectacle and private reverence. She constructs new visual spaces where Black women are not confined by stereotypical narratives but instead multiply, diverge, and reimagine their future trajectories. In doing so, she transforms the runway into a temporary but potent monument, like a space of possibility for rethinking the aesthetics and politics of public memory.

As for Tschabalala Self, she has been involved in several public art projects, fueling stimulating discussions about women in public spaces in multicultural societies. In 2022, she produced her first public sculpture, *Seated*, which was installed next to the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea, in the United Kingdom. The statue was three meters high and made from patinated bronze, representing a Black woman taking a seat. According to the artist, this was a universal act of leisure and calm, as well as a form of empowerment. This work enabled Self to interrogate public art as an exploration of the significance of taking up space. In May 2023, *Seated* was vandalized and covered in white paint to erase the original skin color of the character. This defacement was clearly an attempt at whitewashing the statue of a proud, quiet Black woman, and it illustrated a larger

anxiety around who is allowed or not allowed to stand in public space. The attack, both racist and misogynistic, translates the numerous abuses suffered by women and women of color whose worth is scorned. In response to this provocation, three hundred volunteers spent an entire weekend helping clean the sculpture out of solidarity. The episode reminds us of the conclusion of the Monuments project, led by the Mellon Foundation: the public realm is used for demonstrations of power, disproportionately celebrating white men, and collective memory is shaped by this biased occupation of memorial space ("The Monuments project"). As a result, the practice of Tschabalala Self challenges the domination of white masculinity by creating sculptures and monuments that offer new perspectives on the markers of twenty first century collective identity.

In March 2024, Tschabalala Self was selected to be the next artist to showcase a sculpture on London's Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square in 2026, titled "*The Lady in Blue*." After remaining empty for centuries, the Fourth Plinth now stands as a significant landmark for public art, giving visibility to contemporary artists whose works address social and political issues. The self is then allowed to erect a monument to Black femininity in full sight, in one of the most iconic places in London, just in front of the National Gallery, where British national identity has been and is still visually defined. The artist presents her *Lady in Blue* as the "young, metropolitan woman of color" and "a symbol of our shared present and future ambitions – the aspiration of equity through representation, recognition, and action" ("Fourth Plinth Winners for 2026 and 2028"). She envisions her statue of a Black woman walking dynamically in a blue dress towards an unknown direction as a collective projection space for women, explaining that her creation is "not an idol to venerate or a historic figurehead to commemorate [but] a woman striding forward into our collective future with ambition and purpose" ("Fourth Plinth Winners for 2026 and 2028"). Her artwork will be erected in the square alongside the statue of Admiral Nelson, at the top of the famous column, and other classic statues of British generals and kings, thus defying gendered, racial, and social hierarchies. Not only does *Lady in Blue* celebrate Black womanhood, but it also praises ordinary citizens, to whom anyone can relate. Tschabalala Self adopts a bottom-up approach to memorial projects, encouraging new remembrance strategies that favor minorities and redefine visual culture in public space. This project underlines the sense of togetherness and communion that the Self is trying to build. If the 1920s were the age of the New Woman, fierce, bold, independent, but mainly white, the 2020s witness the advent of the New Black Woman, who existed at the margins of society for many centuries and is now redirected to the foreground. Rather than presenting a single, idealized icon of Black femininity, Self is *The Lady in Blue* fosters movement, ambiguity, and individuality. The figure is dynamic—not static—evoking motion toward a shared but unwritten future. Her ambiguous identity, untethered to any singular historical figure, intentionally resists being fixed into a predefined legacy. In doing so, Self favors the personal over the monumental, the fluid over the fixed, inviting viewers to see in *The Lady in Blue* a plural subjectivity that can reflect many possible selves. The statue becomes not only a projection space for Black womanhood but a space for imaginative identification across lines of gender, race, and class. This departure from heroic monumentality toward human-scale, everyday presence signals a shift in the values embedded in public memory toward inclusion, nuance, and the celebration of lived experience.

Despite the stimulating discussions about past and future contributions of Black women to shaping international history raised thanks to these projects, neither Thomas nor Self has succeeded in taking over the American public sphere. We may wonder if American public art isn't the preserve of some more experienced artists and if there is a (visible or invisible) hierarchy between different generations of Black women artists. Indeed, among the statues and monuments representing Black women that have recently multiplied in public spaces, in international metropolises, other works have reached a greater magnitude. We can think of Simon Leigh's *Brick House* standing on the New York High Line from 2019 to 2021 to portray the strength of Black women from different countries or her *Sentinel (Mami Wata),* replacing the statue of Robert E. Lee in New Orleans, in 2020-2021. For instance, the power of *Brick House*, a statue that combines a Black woman with a Mousgoum dome house, lies in its capacity to deconstruct histories of imperialism and provide alternative models to traditional Western representations of femininity. The artistic strategy of Leigh uses elements of ethnography to build the woman's body, away from white visual codes or fantasies, and to reconnect it with African craftsmanship (Nelson 20-21). Installing the statue on the Highline, in one of the poshest neighborhoods in the city, encouraged people to consider the experience of Black women who provided domestic service in the area and the fact that they are now reclaiming a space where they were exploited and discredited.

Another example could be Alisson Saar's *Salon*, a 2024 statue commissioned by the Olympic committee in Paris in order to encourage people to open a dialogue about interconnections between cultures. Referring to Gertrude Stein's famous salons in Paris, where she would invite artists, writers, intellectuals, and musicians, Salon is designed like a gathering space, under the supervision of a Black woman. Saar explains that she wanted to challenge traditional monuments, which are designed to be quite overwhelming and be looked up to, by creating a humble monument at human scale, encouraging people to participate in an exchange (Cascone). Paris is not the United States, but the international scope of the Olympic Games created a more expansive projection space, with a transnational appeal. Vested with a powerful universal dimension, these public artworks offer new trajectories and a real social acknowledgment of Black women. Indeed, public art is free, accessible to all; it triggers debates about what we want to display to the people and what we consider worth memorializing. Black women who experienced gender and racial discrimination for ages also suffered a lack of representation within public space, and they are now reintegrated both in national and international visual and historical narratives. These monuments and sculptures are not merely aesthetic interventions but acts of resistance and reclamation, reshaping collective memory through the lens of self-definition. By embracing heterogeneity and celebrating the complexity of Black womanhood, these projects echo the core principles championed by Thomas and Self: empowerment through visibility, subversion of dominant tropes, and the reimagining of Black femininity as both plural and powerful.

Conclusion

The practices of both Mickalene Thomas and Tschabalala Self contribute to uplifting and redefining Black femininity, as well as transforming collective consciousness. Through their hybrid visual languages – combining collage, painting, photography, and fabrics– they generate a heterogeneous vision of Black womanhood rooted in intimacy and dignity. Keeping in mind that self-definition

is a means to achieve empowerment, they reclaim authorship over the Black female body and create figurative rooms of their own, where Black women can exist, away from racial and gendered stereotypes. Creating a safe space for representing people who have been repeatedly exploited and marginalized, the artists open an honest debate about subverting and reinventing the norms of beauty, social interactions, and pictorial representations to provide Black women with more acknowledgement and agency. These safe spaces are not isolated retreats but charged sites of public engagement. They resist not only historical stereotypes but also contemporary threats.

The rollback of diversity programs under the newly reinstated Trump administration can be perceived as an assault on what is disparagingly labeled "woke culture" and considered suspicious and undignified; it underscores that the struggle over representation remains ongoing and unresolved. The suppression of equity initiatives in federal museums since January 2025 jeopardizes both the visibility of marginalized voices and the institutional support that sustains them. However, precisely in this hostile climate, where the words "diversity, equity, and inclusion" are now considered outrageous by some, the work of artists like Thomas and Self becomes all the more vital. As they challenge visual, cultural, and political norms, these artists model a form of creative resistance grounded in complexity. They do not simply oppose dominant paradigms, but they cleverly reimagine what visibility, beauty, and power can look like. Their art enacts a refusal to be simplified, objectified, or erased, and instead asserts a vision of Blackness and womanhood that is multifaceted, defiant, and enduring. In this ongoing transformation of the gaze, heterogeneity is not a weakness or a lack of focus; it is the method, the message, and the means of liberation.

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Paradise or Wilderness? Conflicting Perceptions of American Geography in Early Colonial Times

Abstract

This article is primarily concerned with the early colonial reaction to American geography, particularly that of early trans-Atlantic English explorers and the first colonists of Virginia and New England. On the one hand, American geography was mythologized as a utopia in terms of the myth of the classical Golden Age and Arcadian pastoral *otium* (carefree life). It was also idealized as an earthly paradise, concerning the Christian myth of the Garden of Eden. Yet, on the other hand, it was described in dystopian terms as "a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men" (Bradford 62), with hardly bearable climatic conditions. Therefore, early colonists' ambivalent or, more aptly, conflicting perceptions of American geography as such, which became a recurrent discourse in their writings, will be discussed in the article based on primary sources (original spellings and archaic usages of English have been retained as they appear in the sources).

Keywords: American geography, colonial writings, Virginia, New England

Cennet mi, Yaban mı? Erken Sömürge Döneminde Amerikan Coğrafyasına İlişkin Çelişkili Algılar

Öz

Bu makalenin başlıca konusu, erken sömürgecilik döneminde, gerek Atlantik ötesi İngiliz kâşiflerin gerek Virginia ve New England'a yerleşen sömürgecilerin Amerikan coğrafyasına ilişkin yaklaşımlarıdır. Amerikan coğrafyası, bir yandan, mitolojik altın çağa özgü ve düşsel bir pastoral yaşamı içeren ütopya olarak algılanmış ve Hıristiyan inanışı bağlamında Cennet Bahçesi kavramı ile ilişkilendirilerek yeryüzü cenneti olarak betimlenmiştir. Öte yandan, aynı coğrafya, dayanılmaz iklim şartları ile "yaban hayvanlar ve vahşi insanlarla dolu korkunç ve ıssız boş bir arazi" (Bradford 62) olarak distopya biçiminde de anlatılmıştır. Makalede, erken dönem sömürgecilerin, Amerikan coğrafyasına ilişkin anlatımlarında yer alan bu çelişkili, daha doğrusu zıtlık içeren, ifadeler, birincil kaynaklara dayanılarak irdelenecektir. Metindeki alıntılar kaynak materyalde yer aldığı şekliyle korunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Amerikan coğrafyası, kolonyal anlatılar, Virginia, New England

Introduction

By way of introduction, one may recall that historically, initial European trans-Atlantic explorations, undertaken in early modern times, were primarily motivated by a predominant desire to discover a safe and feasible westward passage to reach the lucrative markets of India and the Far East. Yet, contrary to expectations, these explorations ended up with the so-called "discovery" of a new continent, a vast *terra incognita*, evidently unknown and previously unimagined by the European mind, and, hence, was duly called "America." It was, among others, the geography of this new continent with its diverse and somewhat unusual anthropic, climatic, and economic aspects that impressed and intrigued every explorer from Columbus onwards, including the early English colonists from Sir Walter Raleigh and John Smith to the New England Puritans. In their accounts, descriptions, and imaginings, this geography was presented through ambivalent or, more aptly, conflicting perceptions. Indeed, on the one hand, it was presented in terms of the myth of the classical golden age and Arcadian pastoral *otium* (carefree life) and was also idealized as an earthly paradise with reference to the Christian myth of the Garden of Eden. Yet, on the other hand, it was described in dystopian terms as "a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men" with hardly bearable climatic conditions (Bradford 62). The early English colonists' idealization and romanticization of colonial American geography were part of their colonization policy. As will be further argued below, their basic aim was to motivate and encourage, especially the rural and artisan population in England, to emigrate to Virginia or New England for colonial settlement.

This article attempts to demonstrate, based on early English colonial writings, how the geography of early colonial America was initially perceived, observed, and depicted in both fact and fiction. The article is also an effort to be concerned with cultural geography that, I would emphasize, cuts across the early colonial representations and imaginings as regards the American natural and human geography of Virginia and New England. Indeed, it was a vision blurred, or put more plainly, dichotomic. This dual vision was absent at the outset from the writings of early European and English explorers and colonists. Only after pioneering colonial settlements got underway did colonists come to experience concretely and painfully rather than romantically the natural and human conditions of their new geographical environment. They faced an alien geography, which they regarded "as a force to be contended with [and] to be adapted to" (86), to borrow David Adjaye's words used in the context of a totally different subject.[1]

The American Geography Mythologized as a Terrestrial Paradise

Originally, the early English explorers' idealization of the Virginia and New England geography was a re-expression of a much broader vision of the American continent, or, more commonly, the New World that had obsessed the Renaissance European mind ever since Columbus and thereafter. Indeed, through their extensive descriptions of the natives, climate, and geography of the New World, Columbus and his contemporary explorers had aroused "in the mind of Renaissance Europe a popular and romanticized vision of America, which . . . essentially amalgamated the Christian myth of the Terrestial Paradise and the classical [or Hesiodic] myth of of the Golden Age" (Umunç 147). In other words, the anthropic, climatic, and geographical reality of the New World was often overshadowed by their fantastic or mythical re-imaginings. For instance, in his letter, dated 18 October 1498, and concerning his third trans-Atlantic expedition to the Indies, Columbus reported to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain his observations and impressions of the land with a sense of extreme idealization as follows:

> When I made to the island of Trinidad . . . I found the temperature there and in the land of Gracia very mild, the ground and the trees being very green and as beautiful as the orchards of Valencia in April. The people there are of very handsome build and whiter than any others I have seen in the Indies . . . I do not find and have never found any Latin or Greek work which definitely locates the Terrestrial Paradise in this world, nor have I seen securely placed on any world map on the basis of proof . . . But I am completely persuaded in my own mind that the Terrestrial Paradise is in the place I have described. (286-87)

Given such idealized and economically enticing descriptions, the initial aim of the Columbian explorations, which was the discovery of a new trade route to India and the Far East, was soon replaced by an increasingly strong desire in Europe for the conquest and colonization of the New World.

It was indeed this new aim for conquest and colonization that also inspired and motivated Tudor and Elizabethan English explorers. Various colonizing projects were undertaken and put into effect by them. For the success of their projects, their main geographical focus was the eastern shores of North America, especially what was to be called "Virginia." Accordingly, it was Elizabeth I's favourite courtier, Sir Walter Raleigh, who was liberally authorized by a royal Charter (letters patent), dated 25 March 1584, for the exploration and colonization of this geography. Thereupon, he generously sponsored five trans-Atlantic expeditions from 1584 to 1590 for the fulfillment of this mission. The expeditions were undertaken in different years by several captains, whom he had personally hired and commissioned, and whose names were Philip Amadas, Arthur Barlowe, Ralph Lane, Sir Richard Grenville ("Greeneuill"), and John White. It is in the initial reports and accounts, written by these captains and submitted to Raleigh, about Virginia's fauna, flora, landscape, natives, and natural resources that one witnesses a recurrent discourse of mythologized and idealized imaginings concerning the new geography. For instance, in the anonymous report on the first expedition in 1584 to Virginia, written by Captain Arthur Barlowe,[2] the preliminary impressions about the land are expressed in a florid discourse that metaphorically recalls a popular Renaissance poetical trope, which is the garden of delights: The second of July, we found shole water, wher we smelt so sweet and so strong a smel, as if we had bene in the midst of some delicate garden abounding with all kinde of odoriferous flowers, by which we were assured, that the land could not be farre distant. (Hakluyt 3: 246). This Edenic imagining of the geography is further elaborated in the same report when the natives of the land are compared to the people of the Hesiodic Golden Age for their civility and peaceful way of life:[3]

> We were entertained with all loue and kindnesse, and with as much bountie (after their maner) as they could possible deuise. We found the people most gentle, louing, and faithfull, void of all guile and treason, and such as liue after the maner of the golden age. The people only care howe to defend themselues from the cold in their short winter, and to feed themselues with such meat as the soil affoordeth. (Hakluyt 3: 249)

Similarly, Ralph Lane, who, as a member of Raleigh's exploration and colonization team, took part in the second Virginia expedition undertaken in 1585 by Sir Richard Grenville, described Virginia

as a land of plenty in his letter[4] of 3 September 1585 to Richard Hakluyt.[5] In his description, Lane elaborated on the exotic fertility and inexhaustible economic resources of the land. His manner of description recalls a mystifying evocation of the traditionally imagined Terrestrial Paradise: "We haue discouered the maine to be the goodliest soyle vnder the cope of heauen, so abounding with sweete trees, that bring such sundry rich and pleasant gummes, grapes of such greatnesse, yet wilde . . . so many sorts of Apothecarie drugs, such seuerall kindes of flaxe, & one kind like silke (Hakluyt 3: 254). Moreover, in his further geographical imagining of Virginia, Lane reiterated the paradisiacal image of Virginia as follows: "It [Virginia] is the goodliest and most pleasing Territorie of the World . . . and the climate is so wholesome" (Hakluyt 3: 254). Clearly, for Raleigh's exploration and colonizing team in the 1580s, Virginia was not considered or visualized as an inhospitable wilderness but, on the contrary, as "[the] paradise of the world" (Hakluyt 3: 265).

A constant paradisiacal emphasis, as such, put on the representation of Virginia geography, continued to be reiterated in the pamphlets and narratives of the next generation of English explorers and colonists after Raleigh, that increasingly began to grow in number. Especially, during the intensive and enthusiastic process of colonization in the early decades of the seventeenth century, not only the colonists in Virginia but also those in New England again and again resorted in their descriptions of the new geography to traditional tropes of idealization and mythologization. For instance, just as the anonymous author of the pamphlet *Nova Britannia*, published in 1609, called Virginia "this earthly Paradice" (8), similarly Thomas Morton, the founder of the Merrymount colony in Massachusetts in 1622,[6] was so impressed by the rich and varied geography of New England that, as he put it, it all "made the Land to mee seeme paradice, for in mine eie, 'twas Natures Master-peece" (42). He further elaborated this Edenic vision by attributing to New England's geography a new Biblical identity and calling it "New English Canaan or New Canaan" (10).[7] For him, New England was a land, flowing "with Milke and Hony" (63), promised for colonization and settlement to "my Countrymen" (42), that is, the people of England, whom he called, with a Biblical allusion, "the Abrams and Lots of our times" (62-63). Accordingly, in his account, he presented New England as metaphorically the New Canaan of the colonizing English Abrams and Lots, rich in its innumerable species of flora, fauna, and inexhaustible natural resources (41-65): "A Country whose indowments are by learned men allowed to stand in a paralell with the Israelites Canaan, which none will deny to be a land farre more excellent than Old England in her proper nature" (42). Like Morton, also John Wintrop, one of the founding leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630, was so impressed at first sight by the geography of New England that, in a letter dated 29 November 1630 and sent to his wife back in England, he wrote: "My dear wife, we are here in a paradise. Though we have not beef and mutton, &c. yet (God be praised) we want them not; our Indian corn answers for all. Yet here is fowl and fish in great plenty" (1: 379). It was also with a similar sense of idealization that the adventurer and colonist John Smith described Massachusetts as "the Paradise" of New England (15-17).

Clearly, the primary aim of all these and various other similar extensive mythologizations and paradisiacal idealizations of the colonial geography[8] was to publicize and launch a process of colonization and settlement. In this context, the people in England were encouraged to emigrate to the newly established colonies or establish their colonies. The public mood in Stuart England

in the 1620s and 1630s was favourable for the success of this colonial process. In fact, during the early Stuart era, England was embroiled in increasingly paralyzing political and religious conflicts, which ultimately led to the devastating Civil War between the Royalists and the Parliamentarians (Morrill 286-324). Consequently, due to the Civil War's collateral social and political effects and to the harsh economic conditions in the country, more and more English people looked forward to a new life of prosperity, peace, security, and freedom in colonial America. In this regard, for instance, Beauchamp Plantagenet, the founder of the New Albion colony in North Virginia in 1648,[9] stated that he had left England in order "to escape the Civil War, which was raging in England, and to set up a new plantation in the West" (4). Moreover, for the success of his colonization enterprise, he also pointed out that he had taken with him 128 settlers, including servants, farmers, and craftsmen, as a workforce for his colony. As the idea of a new and prosperous life in America became increasingly a public obsession in politically unstable early Stuart England, especially the underprivileged and rural population ("Morton's Abrams and Lots"), along with adventurers and fortune seekers,[10] were extremely motivated to settle in the emerging new colonies. Their motivation was further fuelled through what one would call intensive geographical romanticization and economic propaganda that exhorted and encouraged them to colonization. Consequently, throughout the seventeenth century and thereafter, the number of colonies and colonial settlers increased enormously, leading to the rise of the original thirteen colonial states before the Revolution (Norton et al., especially 33-67).

American Geography Viewed as a Wilderness

However, contrary to the recurrent paradisiacal vision of colonial American geography and also despite widespread propaganda for economic and commercial benefits to be gained, one can also witness a growing number of plainly factual and somewhat negative geographical descriptions in the writings of early colonial settlers. Such descriptions were largely informed by new colonists' own experiences and actual observations of the colonial geography that they encountered. In this regard, for example, the anonymous author of the pamphlet *New-Englands Plantation,* who called himself "a Preacher of Truth" (5), apologetically emphasized the factuality and objectivity of his observations and descriptions:

> I haue beene carefull to report nothing of *New-England* but what I haue partly seene with mine owne Eyes, and partly heard and enquired from the Mouthes of verie honest and religious persons, who by liuing in the Countrey a good space of time haue had experience and knowledge of the state thereof, and whose testimonies I doe beleeue as my selfe. (5)

The new geography that the early colonists faced, contrary to the familiar homeland they had left behind, presented a wide range of physical, climatic, cultural, social, economic, and political uncertainties for their environmental adaptation and survival. Essentially, through various descriptive pamphlets and narratives embodying propaganda and publicity for colonization, the colonists had been highly motivated by dreams and expectations of enormous material gains and great prosperity in this new environment and geography. However, in most cases, their dreams were shattered upon their encounter with this geography, which clearly subverted their harboured paradisiacal vision and had a traumatic impact on them. Indeed, as quoted above, Bradford's reaction to the climatic and natural conditions of the geography of New England plainly summarizes the psychic trauma that he, together with his fellow Plymouth colonizers, felt at the outset before settlement:

> . . . it was winter, and they that know the winters of that country know them to be sharp and violent, and subject to cruel and fierce storms, dangerous to travel to known places, much more to search an unknown coast. Besides, what could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men . . . The whole country, full of woods and thickets, represented a wild and savage hue. (62)

Virginia, contrary to its recurrently publicized Edenic representation in early explorers' accounts, came to be regarded by the new settlers that began to increase from the 1610s onwards, as "[a] strange and heatenous . . . country" (*For the Colony in Virginea* 37). In a more explicit manner, for instance, Plantagenet painted a somewhat dystopian picture of Virginia, whose geography he said he "disliked" (4) because it was full of "Saltmarches and Creeks, where thrice worse . . . for agues and diseases, brackish water to drink and use; and a flat Country, and standing waters in woods bred a double corrupt air, so the elements corrupted no wonder as the old *Virginians* affirm, the sickness there the first thirty years to have killed 100,000 men (5).[11] However, by contrast, he depicted the geography of North Virginia for the purposes of colonist propaganda in an Edenic and idealized discourse. For publicity and settlement, he extolled its climatic and economic features by presenting it as a land of "excellent temper, and pure aire, fertility of soile, of hils that sheltered off the North-west windes, and blasts, vallies of grapes, rich mines, and millions of Elkes, Stags, Deer, Turkeys, Fowl, Fish, Cotten, rare fruits, Timber, and fair plains, and clear fields (6). For Thomas Dudley, on the other hand, who was another leading founder of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, New England's geography was inhospitable because of its frost and "sharp winter" (5-6).[12] Moreover, it was infested by mosquitoes (*New-Englands Plantation* 11) and deadly snakes that kill a person "within a quarter of an hour" (*New-Englands Plantation* 12). In another anonymous pamphlet, *A Perfect Description of Virginia*, its author highlighted the miseries of life in New England and pitied the wretched plight of the colonists for not having originally settled in warm southern Virginia:

> But for matter of any great hopes but Fishing, there is not much in that Land [i.e. New England]. . . . there is much Cold, Frost and Snow, and their Land so barren, except a Herring be put into the hole that you set the Corne or Maize in, it will not come up; and it was great pittie, all those people being now about twenty Thousand, did not seate themselves at first to the *South of Virginia,* in a warme and rich Country. (12)[13]

As more and more settlers arrived in early colonial America, the representation of colonial American geography came to be based on actual personal experiences that, whether favourable or adverse, were expressed in a vast range of narrative variety and publicity. The fundamental issue that cut across these narratives was the colonization of this geography, and the policies adapted for this purpose.

The American Geography Appropriated and Colonized

Whether paradisiacal or inhospitable, the geography of colonial America was commercially and economically perceived by early explorers and colonists as a vacant land with untapped and inexhaustible natural resources. Therefore, they believed that this vacant land had to be fully appropriated and exploited. For Bradford and his fellow Puritan colonists, for example, in their search for a new homeland to settle and establish their own state, the New World seemed to offer

the most suitable and perfect opportunity (Bradford 25-27). Consequently, they decided to remove to "those vast and unpeopled countries of America, which are fruitful and fit for habitation, being devoid of all civil inhabitants" (Bradford 25). In fact, Bradford's reference to American geography as "vast and unpeopled" was a reiteration of the colonization aim and policy that both Elizabeth I and James I had stipulated in their charters issued to Raleigh and the Virginia Company respectively. For instance, in Charter to Sir Walter Raleigh, it was clearly stated that Raleigh was fully authorized to "discover, search, finde out, and view such remote, heathen and barbarous lands, countries, and territories, not actually possessed of any Christian Prince, nor inhabited by Christian People, . . . and the same to haue, horde, occupie and enjoy" (Charter).

Virginia at the time was unowned by any Christian or Eurpoean power and, hence, uninhabited, despite its indigenous and "heathen" natives. Therefore, politically and legally it was clearly admitted that the colonization ("to haue . . . and occupie") of this geography was fully justifiable. Moreover, following the acquisition of Virginia on this principle of justification, Raleigh was also charged with a political mission "there to build and fortifie . . . the statutes or acte of Parliament" (Charter). Thus, he was required to prepare the administrative, judicial, and social conditions and infra-structure fundamentally necessary for the settlement and colonization of the land (Charter). Obviously, the fulfilment of this mission not only signifies the extension of the Elizabethan political power to the New World but also implicitly gestures to the dawning of what is today holistically termed "British imperialism."

It was with The First Virginia Charter, granted by James I, that a more comprehensive and ideologically motivated policy for colonization was introduced and detailed out. The First Virginia Charter*,* issued on 10 April 1606, contained a series of legal and colonizing privileges for the Virginia Company and other associate entrepreneurs.[14] The privileges were further extended to "sundry Knights, Gentlemen, Merchants, and other Adventurers, of our Cities of Bristol and Exeter, and of our Town of Plimouth, and of other Places" (First Virginia Charter). Yet, in establishing their own colonies, these other non-Londoner entrepreneurs were required to "join themselves unto that Colony" [i.e. the Virginia colony] and that their colonies were to be subsidiary colonies, functioning under the jurisdiction of the Virginia colony itself (First Virginia Charter). The Virginia Company, as the main joint venture, was therefore put in primary charge to undertake and manage the colonization of "VIRGINIA, and other parts and Territories in America, […] situate, lying, and being all along the Sea Coasts" (First Virginia Charter). Geographically this meant the appropriation and colonial occupation of the native territory along the Atlantic seaboard, stretching from the shores of what is today South Carolina all the way to New England. As in Charter to Sir Walter Raleigh, so in The First Virginia Charter the basic principle was that the geography designated as such for settlement and colonization was not to have been "actually possessed by any Christian Prince or People" (First Virginia Charter). It was apparently with this principle in mind that, for instance, Bradford and other Puritan colonists in New England considered a land to be "devoid of all civil inhabitants" [i.e. Christians] and "unpeopled" (25). As for the natives, the Puritan colonists hardly thought of them to be human beings but more truly "only savage and brutish men . . . little otherwise than the wild beast of the same" (Bradford 25).

In addition to the primary aim of his colonization policy "to make Habitation, Plantation, and to deduce a colony of sundry of our People" (First Virginia Charter), James I also stipulated an ideological aim, which was the conversion of the natives to Christianity. Accordingly, the colonists were required to fulfil this mission of evangelization by "propagating of Christian Religion to such People, as yet live in Darkness and miserable Ignorance of the true Knowledge and Worship of God, and . . . in time [bringing] the Infidels and Savages, living in those parts, to human Civility, and to a settled and quiet Government" (First Charter). Although no explicit mention of a mandate was made in Charter to Sir Walter Raleigh about the conversion of the natives, Thomas Harriot ("Thomas Heriot"),[15] a member of Raleigh's Virginia colonization team, had the conviction that the natives could be converted to Christianity and civilized (Norton et al. 30). It was with the Stuart colonists of Virginia that, by James I's mandate in The First Virginia Charter, a policy of evangelization was put into effect to bring "the Infidels and Savages . . . to human Civility." Indeed, as pointed out by Norton et al., the colonists "believed unwaveringly in the superiority of their civilization . . . They expected native peoples to adopt English customs and to convert to Christianity. They showed little respect for traditional Indian ways of life" (44). This solipsistic and culturally colonizing attitude was an underlying fact of the early colonization process. Accordingly, besides the fundamental colonial policy for territorial appropriation and dominance, evangelization became a political strategy to create a colonial Christian geography and, thereby, disrupt and transform the native self's socio-cultural identity. In this regard, The First Virginia Charter may be interpreted as a deliberately imperialistic declaration for the subjection of the colonial American natives to the territorial, political, cultural, and religious hegemony of the early colonists.

Moreover, James I's mandate for the conversion of the natives may also be interpreted as a significant argument for the justification of early American colonization. Indeed, as John McLeod states, as a policy and practice, colonization essentially relies on "the existence of a set of beliefs that are held to justify the possession and continuing occupation of other peoples' lands. These beliefs are encoded into the language which the colonisers speak and to which the colonised people are subjected" (37). Indeed, in their initial encounter with the natives, the colonists were increasingly motivated to civilize them, so to speak, through evangelization and cultural transformation. Although on the one hand, they continued to display their racist, solipsistic, and Othering attitude towards the natives, on the other, they increasingly set about to evangelize and assimilate them. For instance, in the anonymous pamphlet *Nova Britannia,* the evangelical dimension of the colonization policy for Virginia was explicitly stressed as "to aduance the kingdome of God, by reducing sauage people from their blind superstition to the light of Religion" (12). Therefore, the early colonists were keen to emphasize recurrently the justification of their colonization policy not only in terms of economic benefits for the natives but also in terms of a civilizing project through evangelization:

> And as for supplanting the sauages, we haue no such intent: Our intrusion into their possessions shall tend to their great good, and no way to their hurt . . . Wee propose to proclaime and make it knowne to them all by some publike interpretation that our coming thither [i.e. Virginia and else where] is to plant our selues in their countrie: yet not to supplant and roote them out, but to bring them from their base condition to a farre better: First, in regard of God the Creator, and of Jesus Christ their Redeemer, if they will beleeue in him. And secondly, in respect of earthly blessings, whereof they haue now no comfortable vse, but in beastly brutish manner, with promise to defend them against all publike and priuate enemies. (*Nova Britannia* 13)

The early colonists firmly believed that their civilizing project for the natives was indispensable for the enduring success of their colonization of American geography. Along with evangelization, the civilizing project also aimed at a cultural transformation of the native self. In this regard, such a transformation was considered to be a vitally important mission, which was to be achieved effectively for the process of colonization. For instance, the following excerpt from *The New Life of Virginia* is a relevant example of the methodology to be used in the process:

> Take their [viz. Indians'] children and traine them up with gentlenesse, teach them our English tongue, and the principles of religion; winne the elder sort by wisdome and discretion, make them equal with your English in case of protection, wealth and habitation, doing justice on such as shall doe them wrong. Weapons of warre are needfull, I grant, but for defence only, and not in this case . . . You must haue patience and humanitie to manage their crooked nature to your form of ciuilitie . . . If by way of peace and gentlenesse, then shall you alwaies range them in love to your words, and in peace with your English people; and by proceeding in that way, shall open the springs of earthly benefits to them both, and of safetie to your selves. (18-19)

The sociological, cultural, and political significance of the methodological proposition made in this excerpt is a further reiteration of the colonization policy that prioritized the establishment of colonists' solipsistic supremacy and, consequently, the ultimate elimination of the indigenous native identity and culture. So, when one reads across early colonial American writings, it becomes clear that the colonists increasingly followed a colonization policy, which, asserted to be a civilizing project, was motivated by their own internalized hegemonic self. Consequently, their appropriation and possession of American geography for colonization also came to embody their political and cultural imperialism, in accordance with which they believed the natives of this geography were also to be *civilized* and thereby hegemonized.

Moreover, from an economic and ecological perspective, all the early colonists shared the common conviction that American geography offered an opportunity to amass enormous wealth and build a new life. They firmly believed that this new life would be completely free from economic deprivation, political oppression, ideological conflicts, wars, and destruction that, in their view, characterized England in particular and Europe in general. Therefore, in this new geography, they were primarily preoccupied, despite their social, cultural, political, ideological, and religious differences, with the accomplishment of their own economic and commercial objectives for the exploitation of the land's resources. Conceptually, in their vision of the land in utilitarian terms, as such, they shared the traditional conviction about the uses of the natural environment. As Keith Thomas points out (17-20), this utilitarian idea concerning nature is fundamentally derived from a Biblical axiom, justifying man's extensive exploitation of natural resources:

> And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of ther earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your handa re they delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat to you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. (Genesis 9. 1-3)

What Thomas calls "[this] Old Testament charter" was commonly accepted in Tudor and Stuart England as a divine approval that "the world had been created for man's sake and that other species were meant to be subordinate to his wishes and needs" (17). Accordingly, one may confidently state that this anthropocentric perception of nature was a significant and universally shared fact in the social and economic culture of the time and constituted the essence of all early colonial descriptions of the American geography.

Conclusion

What has been discussed so far within the context of early colonial texts is an analytical demonstration of early colonists' encounters with the geography of colonial America and their conflicting perceptions of it and its natives. In this regard, the early colonial texts are most valuable and extremely informative in providing the early colonists' dialectical relationship with their new environment and newly-appropriated homeland. The discourse used and maintained by them in their books, pamphlets, letters, journals, and memoirs provides a full sense of their encounter with American geography and the natives of this geography. While idealizing the new geography as a paradisiacal land of plenty for appropriation and colonization, they also regarded it as an inhospitable wilderness, which they firmly believed they had to convert into a habitable and civilized human environment. So, they regarded it as their natural right to own and fully exploit this wilderness. Indeed, as Thomas points out, "when seventeenth-century Englishmen moved to Massachusetts, part of their case for occupying Indian territory would be that those who did not themselves subdue and cultivate the land had no right to prevent others from doing so" (15). In other words, for the early colonists, the use and cultivation of the land, which they believed had been neglected by the natives themselves, was of primary importance for the creation of a civilized life they anticipated and dreamed about in the vast wilderness of American geography. Yet, though admittedly anachronistic, one would also point out that, ironically, in subduing, clearing, settling, and fully utilizing this geography, they had no evident awareness of environmental conservation and ecological sensitivity. However, one may suggest in passing that such an awareness concerning American geography was to rise and to be demonstrated much later in American frontier fiction. For instance, among others, James Fenimore Cooper's "Leatherstocking" novels, especially in *The Pioneers, The Last of the Mohicans, The Prairie, The Pathfinder,* and *The Deerslayer* in the early nineteenth century, may be recalled for illustration.

Notes

[1] The subject Adjaye is concerned with in his article is the relationship between geography and architecture in terms of geography's impact on architectural design.

[2] See Hakluyt (3: 246-51) for a full text of the report, entitled "The first voyage made to the coasts of *America*, with two barks, wherein were Captaines M[aster] Philip Amadas, and M[aster] Arthur Barlowe, who discouered part of the Countrey now called *Virginia*, Anno 1584." Although at the beginning of the report it is stated that the report was "written by one of the said Captaines [i.e. Captain Philip Amadas and Arthur Barlowe], and sent to Sir Walter Ralegh [sic]" (Hakluyt 3: 246), the reference "my selfe" in the expression "Captaine Philip Amadas, my selfe and others" further below in the report (Hakluyt 3: 247) is an obvious indication of Barlowe himself.

[3] See Hesiod's *Works and Days* (11 [Greek text lines: 109-20]) for his myth of the Golden Age.

[4] See Hakluyt (3: 254-55) for a partial text of the letter, entitled "An extract of Master Ralph Lanes letter to M[aster] *Richard Hakluyt* Esquire."

[5] At the time Hakluyt was an eminent geographer in Elizabethan England and had much popularity for his extensive and widely-read compilation, in three volumes, of Elizabethan trans-Atlantic and other overseas exploration narratives.

[6] See Morton's detailed account (1-128) of the establishment of the colony, and also his economic and political conflicts with the Plymouth colony administration.

[7] For Canaan in the Bible as the promised land for the Jews migrating from Mesopotamia into Judea (modern Israel and Palestine), see *The Holy Bible,* Gen. 10.19, 11.31, and 12. 1-7.

[8] Among further examples of a paradisiacal idealization of colonial American geography, see *A True Declaration of the Estate of the Colony in Virginia* (12-13, 22 and 25); *New-Englands Plantation, or, A Short and True Description of the Commodities and Discommodities of that Countrey* (7-11); *A Perfect Description of Virginia* (10); Shrigley 3-5; Smith, *The Generall Historie* (25-28 on Virginia, and 208-209 and 215 on New England); W[illiams] 11-13, 15-16 and 50-51, who also claimed that Virginia had "an affinity with Eden . . . an absolute perfection above all but Paradize" (50).

[9] See his pamphlet (4-7) for an account of his efforts to establish the New Albion colony.

[10] For instance, the Royalist colonel Henry Norwood points out in his pamphlet that, together with two comrades Major Francis Morrison and Major Richard Fox, he came to Virginia in August 1649 "to seek our fortunes" (3).

[11] Also see his further account and elaboration of natural resources of his New Albion colony (20).

[12] Also see *New-Englands Plantation* 11.

[13] See Clayton 5-8, and Hammond 7-8 and 13, for their adverse colonial descriptions.

[14] See *The First Virginia Charter* for the names of the Virginia entrepreneurs and some members of the Virginia Company.

[15] This original spelling of Harriot's name appears in the title of his report on Virginia: "*A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia: of the Commodities There Found, and to be Raised, aswell* (sic) *Merchantable as Others: Written by* Thomas Heriot [sic]." The report, dated February, 1587, was submitted to Raleigh. For a full text of the report, see Hakluyt 3: 266-280.

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***On Savage Shores: How Indigenous Americans Discovered Europe* (2023)**
By Caroline Dodds Pennock (Knopf, 2023, pp. 320. ISBN: 978-1-5247-4926-2)

The writings of white authors regarding Indigenous-colonizer relationships have historically focused on Europeans who went to the Americas, such as Hernán Cortés, John Smith, or John Winthrop. These narratives have helped establish a certain viewpoint for these relations, with the white colonizers and their actions being the focus of the narratives. *On Savage Shores,* Caroline Dodds Pennock decides to focus on the Indigenous people who were brought from the Americas to Europe between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. It offers a fresh new look that challenges the readers to rethink some of their preconceived notions about European-Indigenous relations throughout the first few centuries of European colonization and invites them to reconsider Indigenous agency and how some of them viewed the "discovery" of the Americas. As Pennock notes:

> This is the story of the people who traveled the other way. For tens of thousands of Native people voyaged to Europe from the very moment of first encounter . . . This book belongs to people like them: to the earliest Indigenous people who crossed the great water between Europe and what we now call 'the Americas' and found themselves confronting strange people in unfamiliar lands. (16)

Throughout the book, Pennock looks at many Indigenous people who were taken from their lands to serve Europeans in many different parts of the continent, including France, England, Portugal, Italy, and Spain. Indigenous peoples written about in the book include Taínos, Tupis and Tamaios, Guaranís, Roanokes, and Wampanoags, as well as natives from current-day Brazil and Newfoundland. The abductees included men and women of all ages, including children (31). The book is divided into six chapters, each tackling one aspect of the slave trade. The first chapter, "Slavery" is about how Indigenous people were made to be slaves. "Go-Betweens" details those who visited the European courts as traders and interpreters. "Kith and Kin" delves into those who were made to be wives and children of European nobles. "The Stuff of Life" examines how European-Indigenous contact affected the daily lives of Europeans, like the introduction of the tobacco and cocoa plants to the continent. "Diplomacy" covers the Indigenous people who acted as diplomats

representing their peoples, and "Spectacle and Curiosity" portrays how many Indigenous people were made to be objects of curiosity for European populations. With these categories, a wide array of Indigenous interaction is covered, and the effect the Indigenous peoples who have visited Europe had on the continent is shown.

One of the purported goals of the book is to correct some misconceptions regarding Indigenous arrivals in Europe. With this objective, Pennock seeks to dispel the centuries of entrenched narratives that have hindered meaningful discourse surrounding the arrival of Indigenous peoples in Europe. As the interactions between Indigenous peoples and the Europeans increased in both frequency and scope, many mischaracterizations about Indigenous people were made by the Europeans, some of which survive to the present day. An example of this is the myth that Indigenous people saw white people as their gods (93). Pennock clearly states that this myth appears only in "retrospective sources looking back on events" (93), showing how it is a fabricated fact that has affected the historiography regarding Indigenous peoples for centuries. Through these corrections, Pennock demonstrates that many widely accepted beliefs about Indigenous–European relations, such as the idea that Indigenous people were passive observers of colonization or rarely present in Europe, are rooted in longstanding myths. She argues that dispelling these misconceptions requires meticulous scholarship grounded in careful analysis of authentic Indigenous accounts, travel records, and archival materials.

As previously mentioned, although the book details Indigenous peoples forcibly taken from their lands, these are not the only subjects that it examines. The cases of Indigenous diplomats or traders who have traveled to Europe of their own volition are also told. An example of this is Aj Pop B'atz,' a Mayan king-diplomat from modern-day Nicaragua who refused to bow in front of the King of Spain when he traveled to Madrid in the 1540s (157). Pennock argues that some of the Indigenous people who have gone to Europe were not just "victims" but agents with free will, with unique stories and experiences. She notes:

> We need to invert our understanding of encounter to see transatlantic migration and connection not just as stretching to the west, but also as originating there. Indigenous peoples did not need to cross the Atlantic to have interests which bridged it and yet, as we will see, many Native people – mostly young men – would travel east in pursuit of their ambitions, and those of their families and communities. (Pennock 91)

In a way, the book also tells the story of how these people "discovered" Europe. In this context, the book paints a vivid picture of these travelers, providing details on where they served and their impressions of Europeans. The views and attitudes of Europeans towards these people are also featured.

Pennock also includes the remaining fragments of these travelers by examining the tragic fates many of them experienced. She mentions how the graves of these Indigenous people lie across European cemeteries; one example being the grave of an Inuit baby "who was put on show in a London pub before dying and being buried at St Olave's church, on Hart Street in the City" (15). Many of the stories presented in the book share a similar grim tone. An example is the story of

"Raleigh," an Indigenous man taken to England after a 1586 supply run to the Roanoke Colony (108). The Indigenous man is baptized and takes the name of "Raleigh" or "Rawly," dying a year after his baptism. Pennock comments how "[l]ike so many others, his remains lie unmarked in foreign soil" (109), emphasizing how little was left behind regarding his voyage. As Hele asserts: "Many stories end in tragedy as travelers fell victim to European pathogens, or in silence as individuals vanished after a brief appearance in the written records." These stories reveal the harsh realities of colonial encounters, leaving behind only fragments of lives that were cut short or forgotten. With them, the author underscores the tragic consequences of colonialism, showing how Indigenous travelers were often reduced to brief mentions in European records.

The book offers a rewarding and informative reading experience that dispels many misconceptions for the common reader and the academic alike in an area that deserves to be studied more rigorously. Although Pennock delves into many sources, including archives, diaries, letters, and court records, she keeps a simple yet engaging tone throughout the book. Her tone enables readers of all backgrounds to follow the stories and the developments surrounding the narratives. By focusing on some of the narratives that have been overlooked in previous studies, she presents a more nuanced view of European-Indigenous relationships. Overall, *On Savage Shores* offers a rich reading experience that enriches the area of study around these individuals with great care and responsibility.

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Spielberg and Hanks' *Masters of the Air* (2024): A Critical Review

Spielberg, Steven and Tom Hanks, producers, *Masters of the Air.* Apple Studios, 2024

Introduction

Based on the novel *Masters of the Air* (2007) by Donald L. Miller, the Apple TV+ mini-series *Masters of the Air* (2024) is created by John Shiban and John Orloff, whose executive producers are Gary Goetzman, Steven Spielberg, and Tom Hanks. The series marks the third installment of a long-term Spielberg-Hanks World War II series, following *Band of Brothers* (2001) and *The Pacific* (2010). Consisting of nine episodes, the mini war-drama series recounts the bombing missions of the 100th bomb group from their headquarters in East Anglia, UK during the World War II. The airmen are faced with the extremely hazardous duty of bombing critical targets in Nazi Germany in broad daylight. In nine parts, *Masters of the Air* takes a closer look into the quests of B-17 pilots Gale Cleven, John Egan, Robert Rosenthal, and navigator Harry Crosby.

Throughout the episodes, American soldiers exhibit heavy drinking habits and constant disciplinary breaches. They smoke in the presence of their commanding officers, engage in fights amongst themselves and even hold a bicycle race inside their headquarters. Drinks flow freely and apparently without limit in every episode, due to the high amount of deaths, with over 80% of the soldiers dying in the missions. As much of the action takes place in the air, on board the B-17s, the series makes extensive use of CGI effects. While these CGI effects are executed effectively, in some scenes their use is excessively exaggerated. This is the case in Part 7 (28:03-28:13) when the screen is cramped with planes as some of the smaller fighter jets even appear as flies buzzing through the sky. According to *IndieWire*, 3,447 visual effects were employed in total and completed at 5K (Hemphill). The deliberate emphasis on delivering action sequences to the audience is a defining feature common to both predecessors, *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*. Thus, these series aim to place the viewer "right on the battlefield," offering a glimpse into and a sense of what the experience of combatants might have been like, while avoiding mention of any reference to the diplomatic, economic, social, or domestic political stakes that were nonetheless significant during

World War II (Piketty 2). Within the framework of media studies, this critical review contends that *Masters of the Air* reaffirms themes of American exceptionalism and heroism while offering a superficial representation of women and African Americans.

American Exceptionalism and Heroism in *Masters of the Air*

Masters of the Air (2024) depicts a manifestation of American exceptionalism and heroism, observable from its first episode to the very last. The series portrays Americans as the sole heroes/saviors of the World War II despite the involvement of many other countries, mainly the Soviet Union and the UK. The Soviet troops do not appear until the last episode when Major Rosie is saved by Soviet troops and escorted back to US troops. Additionally, the British are depicted in a negative manner at the beginning of the series. In Part 2, while drinking in a pub, American pilots start arguing with RAF pilots which ends with a fistfight. The argument springs from the difference in bombing policies between the British and Americans, with the Americans bombing in broad daylight vs. the British preferring nighttime bombing. These scenes portray conflicts between US and British forces, which are often portrayed in terms of conflicting military strategies, objectives, and personalities, rather than broad condemnation of British soldiers as a whole. The antagonism directed towards British forces stems from strategic differences in bombing policies, frictions over authority, cultural and military tradition differences. The British are depicted as hesitant or dismissive of the high-risk American strategy, positioning the Americans as more willing to sacrifice for victory while the British are seen as more pragmatic and less willing to push the boundaries of warfare. These depictions are not primarily targeted at disdaining the British efforts but rather to highlight the perseverance, ingenuity, and unyielding spirit of the American soldiers to overcome external and internal challenges, thus complementing American exceptionalism.

American exceptionalism refers to the notion that "there is (a) something different about America or (b) something special about America" (Ceaser 6). According to Natsu Taylor Saito, American exceptionalism is an ideological instrument used to convey and establish a specific narrative about the United States which is based on the assumption that human history follows a linear progression, with Western civilization representing the pinnacle and the US representing the most advanced stage of this civilization and thus human history (229). Thus, American exceptionalism is mainly based on a constructed narrative, a rhetoric that is deeply rooted in American culture and history. Its origin can also be traced in other closely associated myths such as "manifest destiny," "the free enterprise" and US acting as God's "chosen nation" (Sirvent and Haiphong 29). Moreover, American exceptionalism is profoundly ingrained in the country's economic, political, and cultural institutions. Even at universities, the belief in American exceptionalism is often taken for granted (25). America and its citizens are considered exceptional due to their perceived duty to rescue the world from itself, a responsibility that requires a constant and profound commitment to this purpose (Edwards and Weiss 1). The commitment to rescue the world is clearly observable in *Masters of the Air*. The pilots regard themselves as the chosen ones who will change the course of this bloody war. Since Woodrow Wilson, exceptionalists have declared that the US has a mission and a responsibility to spread its power and influence through its institutions and ideas, until it dominates the globe (Hodgson 10). In brief, American exceptionalism incorporates the various myths outlined above, and whether expressed as exceptionalism or heroism, it ultimately remains intrinsically linked to nationalism.

In Part 9, as Stalag VII prison camp in Moosburg is being rescued by American troops, prisoners gain control of the camp and overpower the guards. Upon this, Major John Egan finds an American flag in a hurry and lowers the Nazi flag from the pole, raising the stars and stripes in a heroic style. This scene openly reflects American exceptionalism and heroism as there are also many other soldiers of different allied countries in the camp. Though many other flags appear in the following frames, it seems that the American flag is the one and only that truly deserves to be risen on the pole. The fact that a white American soldier rises the flag is an overt indication of the recognition of "white American exceptionalism". After all, despite the presence of many African Americans in the camp, it had to be a white soldier that elevated this patriotic moment. The raising of the American flag, as visible in many other mainstream productions, is not only a symbol of freedom and salvation but also another indication of American exceptionalism. The waving American flag on the pole marks the symbolic recognition of America as the dominant liberating power within the Allies.

The series also has some discussion-provoking scenes. In Part 5, the Bloody 100th is given the mission to bomb the city center of German city Münster on a Sunday, where a cathedral is located nearby. Upon the statement that they will be targeting civilians, John Egan responds with: "For Christ Sakes Crank, this is a war. We're here to drop bombs. [Other soldier] On women and kids? [Egan] This won't end till we hit 'em where it hurts" (Spielberg and Hanks 12:05-12:16). Major Egan offers a brief "justification" for the killings of civilians they are about to cause. The discussion created around this causes some of the airmen and the spectators to question the moral implications behind this mission. Another similar "justification" is observed in Part 9 with Major Rosie uttering the following words: "The things these people are capable of. No, they got it coming. Trust me. They got it coming" (41:59-42:07). This is a reference to the Holocaust and Rosie's interpretation of the atrocities committed by the Nazis. The emphasis on the Holocaust of the Jewish people is saved for the last episode when Rosie's plane is shot down as he opens his parachute to land in Berlin, lucky enough to be rescued by Soviet troops. The Russians escort him to a camp where he witnesses the horrors inflicted upon the Jewish people. Upon talking to a Holocaust survivor, Rosie says: "Go with God" and the man responds with: "If God exists, he has forgotten me. Not even the earth that covers our bones will remember us" (Part 9, 29:22-29:41).

Compared to other major war films and series, *Masters of the Air* largely conforms to the established conventions of American-centered war narratives. Like many mainstream productions, it employs themes of American exceptionalism and heroism to a considerable extent, without significantly diverging from similar portrayals. *Masters of the Air* amplifies themes of American exceptionalism and heroism, presenting the war predominantly from an American perspective and attributing a savior-like role to American forces while overlooking the significant accomplishments of the British and Soviets. Additionally, the series falls short to adequately depict the broader scale of wartime atrocities.

Portrayal of Women and "Romanticizing" the War

Women are notably underrepresented in *Masters of the Air*. The series features three women characters throughout all episodes. They do not get substantial screen time in the series and their only function seems to be providing the soldiers comfort and (sexual) companionship. Sandra Westgate is a British intelligence officer who Harry Crosby falls in love with in Oxford (Part 7, 16:50-

17:10, 32:45-33:05). Marge is the lover of Gale Cleven, who patiently awaits him at home (Part 1, 00:40-04:40). In addition, Paulina is a Polish widow John Egan meets and has a short relationship with in London (Part 4, 23:40-28:52). Overall, women do not get substantial screen time in the series and their only function seems to be providing the soldiers romantic and sexual comfort. This superficial depiction of women undermines the hardships and suffering they experienced during the war. Moreover, women serve the classic purpose of "romanticizing the war" in the series, as commonly observed in mainstream Hollywood war-movies. They are predominantly mentioned in relation to romantic and/or sexual relationships they have with American soldiers. Other than this, they seem to have no other significance in the series. Sandra Westgate, despite being a British intelligence officer, is portrayed more as the lover of an American soldier (Crosby) than as the dedicated soldier she truly is. (Parts 6, 7 and 8). This tendency of romanticizing women in *Masters of the Air* is mediocre and serves no actual purpose in context of the storyline. In addition, the stereotypical depiction of women as lovers and sexual companions not only undermines the sense of realism but also falls short to deliver a detailed exploration of intriguing characters and the prominent roles women played during the war.

The Tuskegee Airmen: African Americans in World War II

As a mainstream production, *Masters of the Air* centers on the bombing missions of the Bloody 100th airmen, the majority of whom are white-male Americans. With the exception of Sandra Westgate and Paulina, the series makes no mention of women or people of other ethnic/racial origin. However, in Part 8, the story suddenly shifts from its original setting in East-Anglia to a US base in Italy, which consists of an all-African-American group of pilots entitled "The Tuskegee Airmen." Founded and trained in Tuskegee, Alabama, these airmen (mostly lieutenants and 2nd lieutenants) were given the strategic duty to fly P-51 Mustang fighter jets, which had a profound impact on the course of the war in Europe. In 1943, the 8th Air Force faced mounting losses during deeper raids into Germany, as radar-guided German fighters destroyed bombers and crews faster than they could be replaced; however, the situation improved significantly in December with the introduction of long-range escorts like the P-51 Mustang, which ensured protection throughout missions and enhanced their success (Sion 47). The spectators are introduced to three pilots, Lt. Robert Daniels, 2nd Lt. Richard Macon and Lt. Alexander Jefferson but because of their late inclusion, they do not receive enough screen time to have their characters explored in-depth and this is a missed opportunity for the series. Moreover, their inclusion in the series comes too late and evokes an artificial impression. It gives spectators the impression that the producers decided to include them after reconsideration or a change in the script. The quest of the Tuskegee airmen intertwines with that of the 100th in a rather unnatural and unconvincing manner. However, the racial segregation these pilots faced is dealt with rather superficially. In Part 8, a Tuskegee colonel and captain engage in a dialogue at the bar. Upon the question, "What do you see?" The colonel responds with: "I see too many second-lieutenants, first-lieutenants. On this mission counts alone, they should already be captains, majors. And we both know why they're not and we both know why they may never be" (Spielberg and Hanks 17:05-17:14). Thus, the colonel highlights the obstructive role of racial discrimination in the US Army. This discrimination reaches its peak in the same part after the Tuskegee airmen are captured by Nazis and transferred to the Luftwaffe prison camp, Stalag Luft III. Upon the entrance of the Tuskegee pilots to the camp filled with white American soldiers, African Americans, referred to as "red tails" by others, are subject to racist

insults by their own men. Some of the men shout: "You gotta be kidding me, they're negroes, they all belong somewhere else" (31:52-32:20). Despite these racist remarks, they're also welcomed by others who appreciate them for fighting alongside their ranks. This demonstrates the divided nature of American society during the 1940s. Just before this scene, Tuskegee airmen Alexander Jefferson and Richard Macon are interrogated by a Luftwaffe officer in Dulag Luft prisoner transit camp in Frankfurt. During this interrogation, the Nazi officer asks Lt. Macon: "Why do you fight for a country that treats you like that?" (31:08) Macon responds: "Do you know any other country that does better? I know what my country's shortcomings are. And I know it's trying hard to become what it's supposed to be. And when I get back, I'm gonna help 'em do that a lot faster" (31:25-31:51). Macon's emphasis on the struggle for equal rights does not go unnoticed but is not elaborated beyond these short dialogues. The issue of racial discrimination is only superficially depicted in *Masters of the Air* and this is an example of the series' lack of social depth. Rather than appearing in the last two parts, African American airmen could have been introduced much earlier, and, thereby, their characters explored in a more detailed manner. This is by far the major missed opportunity in the production. In reality, the war created ample possibilities for African Americans as they achieved unparalleled advancements in economic and civic spheres, ultimately overthrowing barriers of racial segregation and discrimination in American society (Moye 14). African American characters appear in only two episodes (Parts 8 and 9) and this ascribes them an impression of serving as a sideshow rather than being in the spotlight. Thus, giving the Tuskegee Airmen more screen time and attention would have created substantially positive effects throughout the series. *Masters of the Air* acknowledges the presence of African American pilots, via the Tuskegee Airmen, yet does so without fully developing their narratives. While their participation is a step toward representation, the series mainly ignores them, providing limited examination of their experiences, challenges, and contributions. This superficial portrayal parallels a larger tendency in mainstream war media, in which marginalized people's roles are often referenced but rarely fully examined. Such narrative choices contribute to historical erasure or simplification by supporting a dominant worldview that glorifies conventional heroics while disregarding the complicated nature of racial interactions in wartime. According to *Collider*: "*Masters of the Air* skims over the experience of Black pilots, does not give their characters closure, and misses the opportunity to tell a full history of the war". *Collider* concludes that "The Tuskegee Airmen are important to the story of the war, and important characters deserve endings" (Molinari).

The inclusion of the Tuskegee Airmen in *Masters of the Air* reinforces American exceptionalism by highlighting their skill, discipline, and bravery, showcasing the idea that the nation's strength lies in its diverse talent. Their heroism aligns with the series' broader themes of sacrifice, resilience, and the fight for democracy. However, their presence also exposes the racial hypocrisy of a country that championed freedom abroad while discriminating against African American soldiers at home. By depicting both their combat successes and the systemic barriers they faced, the series acknowledges the contradictions within American ideals. In doing so, *Masters of the Air* celebrates American exceptionalism, depicting the Tuskegee Airmen as heroes while stressing the injustices they endured.

A Comparison of Spielberg & Hanks' World War II Trilogy

According to Guillaume Piketty, all three series; *Masters of the Air* (2024), *The Pacific* (2010), and *Band of Brothers* (2001) are heirs of *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) (13). *Band of Brothers* (2001) chronicles Easy Company of the 101st Airborne Division from D-Day to the end of the European war, focusing on friendship, fraternity, and traumatic ground combat experiences. In contrast, *The Pacific* (2010) follows three Marines' lives throughout the harsh island-hopping battles against Japan, capturing the intense and often degrading realities of Pacific fighting. *Band of Brothers* has received favorable reviews for its extremely compelling storyline, strong character development, and realistic representation of troop camaraderie. *The Pacific* offers a grittier and more realistic portrayal of the horrors of the Pacific theater, reflecting the psychological toll of combat. However, its non-linear storytelling and shifting character emphasis might make it feel less unified, and some viewers might find it challenging to relate emotionally with the characters. This is also the case for *Masters of the Air*, which does not explore characters in depth and does not provide a realistic depiction of the war. In terms of realistic depiction of the war and hardships, *Band of Brothers* takes the lead whereas *Masters of the Air* comes last. The following table presents a detailed comparison of the trilogy from various key aspects.

Key Aspect	***Band of Brothers* (2001)**	***The Pacific* (2010)**	***Masters of the Air* (2024)**
Plot Summary	Focuses on Easy Company, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, from D-Day to the conclusion of World War II in Europe.	Traces the wartime journeys of three US Marines from diverse backgrounds through the Pacific setting.	Centers on the airmen of the 8th Air Force's 100th B-17 bomb group, highlighting their significant role in the European aerial campaigns of World War II.
Character Depth	Provides an in-depth examination of individual troops, emphasizing the dynamics of friendship and personal growth under combat conditions.	Emphasizes the psychological burden of warfare, with a particular focus on trauma, isolation, and the individual tolls of conflict.	Investigates the psychological impact of high-casualty aerial combat on bomber crews, delving into themes of courage, loss, and duty. Provides limited in-depth exploration of characters.
Veteran Testimonies	Includes compelling interviews with surviving members of Easy Company in every episode, introducing each episode with firsthand testimonies.	Incorporates personal memories and testimonials from Pacific veterans, grounding the series in historical authenticity.	Does not include veteran testimonies, only photos of actual veterans at the end of the final episode.

Portrayal of American Heroism	Emphasizes the valor, endurance, and resilience of Easy Company with a particular focus on the camaraderie formed in combat.	Highlights Marine soldiers' perseverance and sacrifices, using a more somber tone to emphasize the harsh reality of the Pacific War.	Portrays the valor of bomber crews within the context of World War II air raids, while idealizing and prioritizing American heroism and exceptionalism.
Romanticizing Warfare	Avoids excessive idealization of battle, preferring a balanced representation that reflects the hardships and challenges of conflict.	Employs a controlled heroism, emphasizing the persistent harshness and psychological difficulties of the Pacific setting.	Adopts a heroic portrayal of air combat, presenting the stark realities of high-risk missions in a romanticized context.
CGI and Visual Effects	Primarily utilizes practical effects, complemented by limited CGI to enhance large-scale battle sequences.	Relies on extensive CGI to render naval and jungle warfare, balanced with practical effects for realism.	Excessive use of CGI for aerial combat and bombing sequences. Exaggerated in some scenes.
Depiction of Women	Women appear minimally, primarily in supportive or caregiving roles in civilian scenes.	Women are more visible, often in civilian interactions; some focus on relationships.	Portrays very limited depiction of women, mostly in their personal relationships with men.
Portrayal of Ethnic and Racial Diversities	Limited portrayal; primarily focuses on a white, male unit with little diversity shown.	Asian populations depicted due to the Pacific setting, but little focus on racial diversity within US troops.	Portrays African American pilots in its final two episodes, including depictions of the Tuskegee Airmen but does not explore their characters in depth.

Table 1. [Comparison *of Band of Brothers*, *The Pacific* and *Masters of the Air*]

Compared to the larger body of mainstream World War II films, it can be asserted that each of these films and series presents American exceptionalism and heroism in different ways, shaped by their tone, historical accuracy, and thematic focus. The following presents a comparison of *Masters of the Air* to a selection of mainstream World War II films, in particular: *Saving Private Ryan* (1998, Dir. Steven Spielberg)*, Pearl Harbor* (2001, Dir. Michael Bay), *Fury* (2014, Dir. David Ayer) and *Midway* (2019, Dir. Roland Emmerich). All these mainstream productions engage with American exceptionalism and heroism, but in distinct ways. While *Saving Private Ryan*, *Pearl Harbor*, *Fury*, and *Midway* all depict American heroism, *Masters of the Air* embraces American exceptionalism by highlighting the strategic importance and immense sacrifices of the US Air Force in World War II. While *Pearl Harbor* and *Midway* highlight American triumph via better tactics and pure courage, *Saving Private Ryan* balances patriotic devotion with realism, depicting both the cruelty of battle and the sacrifice of the American soldier. *Fury* adopts a grittier tone, portraying US forces as tough but morally superior fighters. *Masters of the Air*, however, merges these elements, portraying the airmen of the 100th Bomb Group as emblematic of American resilience, innovation,

and righteousness. Despite acknowledging the war's hardships, the series ultimately affirms the indispensable, exceptionalist role of American air power in securing victory and reinforcing the idea that the US was not just a participant but the ultimate force in defeating tyranny.

Both *Saving Private Ryan* and *Masters of the Air* apply differing interpretations to the American idea of exceptionalism and heroism. *Saving Private Ryan* endorses the idea of American exceptionalism by depicting the US war effort as morally correct and the soldiers as embodying sacrifice, duty and camaraderie. Heroism is defined as noble self-sacrifice implying that American lives and ideals have to be earned. Whereas heroism is celebrated in *Masters of the Air*: it considers the psychological toll of war, the brutal reality of the nature of aerial combat and internal disputes within the US military. That type of heroism is no longer concerned with clear-cut moral victories-but with making it through-endurance and heavy burden of leadership.

Conclusion

Masters of the Air forms another example of mainstream Hollywood war-series where American exceptionalism is praised and soldiers hailed for their heroism. The series embraces the classical rhetoric of American heroism that saved Europe and determined the course of the war. It falls short to properly represent and do justice to women, African Americans and to provide a realistic depiction of the war. While the production has visually satisfying action scenes coupled with CGI effects to illustrate the horrors taking place in the B-17s, it does not evoke the sense of realism that was prevalent in *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*. In my view, among the four protagonists, Harry Crosby, portrayed by Anthony Boyle, is the first-person narrator and the most thoroughly developed character in the series. In the final episode, he quotes from Nietzsche: "Whoever fights monsters should take care not to become monsters themselves" (Spielberg and Hanks 40:58-41:07) stressing the danger of becoming what one opposes. In overall, acting skills are satisfying but characters are not explored in-depth.

Furthermore, the series reaffirms its mainstream orientation by neglecting to offer a thorough examination of women and African Americans, reducing them to mere sideshows. The lack of a thorough examination of African American pilots in *Masters of the Air* is noteworthy as it displays the marginalization of African American contributions to World War II, promoting a selective historical narrative that emphasizes white heroism while neglecting the complex issues of race and segregation. By recognizing the Tuskegee Airmen without fully addressing their challenges, such as prejudice and the quest for recognition, the series contributes to a simplified version of history. The mainstream media plays an important part in crafting this narrative by frequently emphasizing white experiences and heroics, concealing the obstacles encountered by African Americans. This exclusion has an influence on the larger cultural narrative by promoting an incomplete representation of World War II, sustaining an idealized, unified perspective on the war that excludes African American experiences. In conclusion, while *Masters of the Air* reinforces prevailing themes of American exceptionalism and heroism, it concurrently highlights the underrepresentation and superficial depiction of women and African Americans. This critical analysis exposes that, despite its engagement with exceptionalism and heroism, the series does not adequately address or authentically portray the experiences of marginalized groups, thus providing a limited perspective on the complexities of heroism and identity within the broader narrative.

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Table of Contents

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