

## Abstracts

DONATELLA IZZO, Pursuits of Happiness: A Tentative Map

This essay offers an introduction to the section on “Pursuits of Happiness” by attempting to trace a genealogy of the philosophical discourse on happiness converging in the Declaration of Independence of the United States and unfolding in its later cultural interpretations. Through an investigation of the tension between the normative and the subversive inherent in the “pursuit of happiness” notion, the essay calls for a retrieval of its unsettling utopian potential. By its appeal to the imagination and its capacity to effect a mobilization of desire in the political domain, the “pursuit of happiness” might reveal as yet unthought-of ways of imagining the political “beyond the reality principle.”

LIAM KENNEDY, American Studies Without Tears

As Americanists, we commonly approach “America” with suspicion, fear, even anger; we view it as a powerful, duplicitous force to be denounced or demystified. This paper speculates as to why this might be so and in particular considers the troubled relationships at the heart of this dilemma – relations between pleasure and knowledge, and between sentiment and critique. This trouble is evident in the difficulties we experience in working through these relationships in our critical approaches, the difficulties in balancing intellectual comprehension and emotional apprehension of America. This is evident in the field imaginary of American Studies, which is posited here not only as a sphere of collective knowledge that is regulated by disciplinary practices, but also as a field of less-regulated desires. I consider what the construction of a field imaginary leaves out, what it represses or disavows, in producing America as an object of knowledge. In an attempt to illustrate some of these considerations in relation to critical practice, this essay concludes by looking at a photographic image.

ROBYN WIEGMAN, Outside American Studies: On the Unhappy Pursuits of Non-Complicity

This essay traces the affective and analytic investments that currently equate the internationalization of American Studies with the pursuit of an analytic and geopolitical “outside” to the habits and logics of “American American Studies.” By reading

internationalization as a discourse that challenges as much as it mimics the field imaginary of American American Studies, I explore the paradox of seeking an “outside” as the means to interrupt complicity with the global power of the field’s object of study.

GIORGIO MARIANI, Chief Seattle versus Sherman Alexie: How Useful is Ecocriticism When We Read American Indian Literature?

By juxtaposing the legendary figure of Chief Seattle to Sherman Alexie’s scathing remarks on the myth of the “ecological Indian,” the essay explores different ways of thinking about the relationship between Indians and the environment. The underlying argument is that there is no conclusive, stable, unalterable “Indian” perspective on the vexed question of how to best make use of reservations’ lands and natural resources. American Indian literature may be an important inspirational force in struggles to preserve the environment both on and off the reservation, but the question of what may be the distinctive contribution of an ecocritical American Indian literature to the functioning of native sovereignty remains unsettled.

ANNA SCANNAVINI, The Reception of Cooper’s *The Bravo*

The first book of Cooper’s European trilogy, *The Bravo*, directly engages problems of democracy, taking eighteenth-century Venice as a setting, and the Venetian government of that time as an instance of tyranny. Although the novel was actually aimed at comparing systems of government, investigating the dangers of oligarchic and mass mediatic power in a republic, it was received in Italy as bearing directly on the Italian situation. The choice of Venice, in particular, was resented as an attack on the memories of the Venetian independent republican rule. On the background of contemporary reception, the essay offers a parallel reading of the Venetian reviews that appeared immediately after the novel’s publication, and of the destructive article that “Cassio” famously devoted to *The Bravo* in the *New York American*. In both cases, it is argued, the agenda and political claims of the reviewers interpose themselves – although with diverse motivations and argumentations – in the reading of the novel, focusing too closely on somewhat marginal aspects. As a result, the overall structure of the book is partly devoid of content. The essay concludes by pointing out that such neglect could be a reaction to the text’s indeterminacy as to its reference in the real world.

MARCO SIOLI, *Repression in the Early Republic: John Adams, the Alien and Sedition Acts, and the Politics of Exclusion*

Using recent biographies of John Adams and the acquisition of *Redex*, Historical American Newspapers online, by the Library of the Università degli Studi di Milano, this essay explores the political history of the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 and the role of the American leadership in the implementation of these laws. Those policies derived from Adams's experience and political judgment, but at same time they were strongly supported by Secretary of Treasury Alexander Hamilton. Both feared a state of anarchy in the early American republic, but these acts against publishers, congressmen, and simple farmers were seen by the common people as a conspiracy against the young democracy. Considering two examples of people who suffered persecution – Benjamin Franklin Bache, grandson of Benjamin Franklin, charged with seditious behavior for his activities as a printer, and Congressman Albert Gallatin, a foreign-born French Swiss who settled in western Pennsylvania, charged as an illegal alien – the essay shows clearly the politics of exclusion orchestrated by the Federalist party, as well as the use of force to suppress Fries's Rebellion in Eastern Pennsylvania, which splintered the Federalist party and fractured the presidential cabinet. In the end the Alien and Sedition Acts misjudged the “genius” of the American people, ushering the Federalists out of power.