

Abstracts

DANIELE FIORENTINO, *The World and the New Frontiers of the U.S.*

This essay introduces the papers of the present monographic issue while dealing with the ongoing debate on the current role of the United States in the world. The author analyzes the scholarly discussion, complementing it with contributions from literature and the movies in order to give a general overview of the “identity crisis” afflicting the U.S. at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The generation of combatants in Korea and Vietnam, along with the young people now coming of age who did not live the Cold War experience and have childhood memories of 9/11, seem to be the best hope for the future of the country.

FRED L. GARDAPHÉ, *The American Connection: The Italian Link to American Studies*

This essay explains why Italian students should study Italian-American culture as an *entre* into American studies. It presents a viable beginning in the study of American culture through the Italian immigrant experience and the subsequent evolution of American identities as reflected through various historical moments and cultural developments fostered by Americans of Italian descent. This approach calls for nothing less than moving beyond the immigrant paradigm that for too long has been the major basis for entry into American culture, and into more careful analyses of what it is we so matter-of-factly call the process of assimilation. Earlier ideas for this process of assimilation that once was thought of as a simple melting pot were part of a national myth that we know never really happened, though if you limit your experiences to mass media images it's easy to see how this myth is propagated. In terms of America's Italians, the typical images do not reflect the reality below the surface of the media. The study of Italians in the United States has long been a function of social scientists, primarily the anthropologists, historians, and sociologists. To study Italian-American culture is to study both mainstream and margin. Italian-American studies begin in earnest in this country when the scholar, trained in America, begins applying a disciplinary focus to the phenomenon of Americans of Italian descent living in the United States. However, Italian-American studies become realized as a field of study only when the very subjects of earlier studies turn the interpretative gaze back on the scientists and begin studying them and when these encounters become the material for writing about their own experiences. Finally, Italian-American studies become legitimized as a serious field of study when institutions begin developing formal

programs of study at the university level. This paper presents some of the key factors in the development of this field of study.

LINDA ANN MALONE, *The Legal Dilemma of Guantánamo Detainees From Bush to Obama*

President Obama's decision to try Khalid Sheikh Mohammed in a military commission has been characterized as an "implicit confession" that military commissions are the "best balance of security needs and protections for liberty." In truth, over ten years of executive power-grabs, facilitated by a cooperative Congress and divided Supreme Court, have left trial by military commission the only available option. In this paper I review the evolution of the legal environment faced by the Guantánamo detainees. I show that the Mohammed's commission proceedings will take place ten years after 9/11 for two reasons: the Bush administration unnecessarily, immorally, and illegally engaged in torture of the worst perpetrators of terrorist acts, and the Bush administration repeatedly chose to advance its theory of an all-powerful executive branch at the expense of prosecuting these perpetrators expeditiously. The effects of this policy of torture include delaying justice for victims of the attacks on 9/11 and on the USS Cole for over ten years.

GREGORY D. SUMNER, *Kurt Vonnegut: Brokenhearted American Dreamer*

Sumner's essay deals with Kurt Vonnegut's most significant work of art, *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Long in gestation – says the author – the book oscillates between realism and science fiction, mordant humor and grief, relieved by moments of unexpected lyrical imagery to convey Vonnegut's experience as a young soldier in the Second World War. Vonnegut struggled for a long time to develop a language that could do justice to his "war story," and for years had no good answers for it. Cautiously, he moved toward the task, and it is possible to detect his first intuitions in his earlier works. Therefore, the author holds, *Slaughterhouse-Five* needs to be seen in a larger context, as an attempt to come to terms with the ravages of war. It is a commentary on Vietnam and at the same time a narration of the Dresden bombing as seen by someone who lived through it. But it is more universal than that. Like all of Vonnegut's work, *Slaughterhouse* needs to be "unstuck in time" from a conception of it as an artifact from the 1960s. It is an expression of humanist values by a self-described "child of the Great Depression." The author's ambivalence is captured perfectly in the phrase from the novel for which he today remains most identified. "So it goes" conveys a deep sense of irony and resignation in the face of defeat, but also a will, nonetheless, to carry on.

BIANCAMARIA TEDESCHINI LALLI, Revolution as an “Experiment” and Literary Experimentation in the Thirties: Europe and Mexico in the United States

This essay concerns the thematic and formal relationships between the so-called Red Decade and the artistic and literary experimentalism of the twentieth century. It deals with two revolutions, Russian and Mexican, devoting more attention to the lesser known influence of Mexico and to the Mexican muralists, most specifically to Diego Rivera. Among the U.S. writers cited are John Reed, Lincoln Steffens, Theodore Dreiser, and John Dos Passos.

CHRISTOPHER W. BOERL and CHRIS PERKINS, Reproductive Autonomy, Faith Outreach and the Democratic Party: How Democrats Can Better Protect the Rights of Women By Courting Evangelical Voters

Previous academic literature has demonstrated the pluralizing effects of the new media environment on the cultural and religious homogeneity of American evangelical Christians. The effects of this pluralization have already been shown to have significant political implications. Among them is a recent effort by the Democratic Party to court evangelical voters. One way Democrats have sought to win the evangelical vote is by running socially conservative candidates for traditionally Republican seats. Yet despite recent victories, not all are pleased by this strategy. In particular, concerns have been raised that in running socially conservative candidates, Democrats are placing in jeopardy reproductive rights. This article explores the validity of these claims, and concludes, ultimately, that such claims are without merit.

MIRJAM FRIEDIGER, “From the Writings of Aubépine”: Metafiction in Hawthorne and Hoffmann

Through a comparative analysis of Hawthorne’s tale “Rappaccini’s Daughter” from 1844 and two of the German romanticist E.T.A. Hoffmann’s most famous fantastic tales, “Der goldene Topf” (1814) and “Der Sandmann” (1816), the present study examines the stylistic and thematic affinities between the works of the two authors. The first part of the essay illustrates the limited extent of scholarship pointing to this transatlantic connection, while the second part presents a comparative analysis of the three tales with focus on thematic and formal similarities. A major parallel theme is the problem of distinction between real and imaginary, expressed both thematically and formally through ambiguity and indeterminable, limited perception. The protag-

onists and the narrators prove themselves to be unreliable, consequently producing a disorienting and uncanny reading experience. This study discusses how this effect on the reader in turn indicates the limited capacity of the narration itself to convey a true and distinct version of reality. In the last and more extensive part of the essay, this theme of the limitation of narration is approached from yet another angle: the literary technique of metafiction employed, albeit in different manners, in all the three tales.

UGO RUBEO, Rediscovering Zora's Contradictions

The recent rediscovery of five short-stories published by Zora Neale Hurston more than eighty years ago in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and virtually forgotten ever since, is a perfect occasion to take a fresh look at an African-American writer whose critical success has steadily subsided since the final years of the twentieth century. Together with a couple of interesting, previously unpublished letters, Hurston's short stories, all of them set in Harlem, essentially confirm her versatility with scenes of urban black life, while at the same time shed new light on the close relationship between her ambivalent, controversial personality and a number of characters created by her pen.