

Abstracts

Cinzia Schiavini, Questioning the Borders of Contemporary US Fiction: H.M. Naqvi's *Home Boy*, 9/11 and the American Novel

This essay investigates the margins of twentieth-century American novel in the light of the increasingly deterritorialized status of US culture and literature – a literature whose borders need to be reconfigured not only in terms of reception, but of creation as well. In particular, the essay focuses on the Pakistani-born author H.M. Naqvi and his first novel, *Home Boy* (2009) – part immigrant narrative, part *Bildungsroman*, part 9/11 novel. Rooting *Home Boy* deep in the American grain and at the same time investigating the construction of Otherness through the protagonist's "inoutsider" status and perspective, Naqvi explores the potential and the limits of what can be considered as "performative Americanness," defined not by genealogical or geographical belonging, but by cultural and literary affiliations in the politically and socially unstable scenario of the post-national world.

Cristina Iuli, Extinction, Rememory and the Deadly Work of Capitalism in Valeria Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive*

Valeria Luiselli's 2019 novel, *Lost Children Archive*, attends to the inherited repressions, silences, and erasures around the official chronicling of the current migrant and refugee crisis at the Southwestern border between the US and Mexico by developing in a very original narrative format a literary space of personal "re-memory" that encompasses that specific crisis and extends to the geopolitical history of the United States. In the novel, fictional and non-fictional references shape an American landscape that appears as the space of both unfinished colonization and incomplete representation. The novel's project is to make the disappearances it traces readable, by evoking them first and by re-enacting them later, in its twin sections delivered by two different narrators. In inscribing absences from the present and from the past, the novel both delivers several narratives of "lost" children, lost people, lost sounds, lost landscapes and lost species,

and interrogates our conceptual preparedness for the prospect of extinction and for the dis-imagination of the future. It does so historically by linking colonial violence to capitalism's expansion, and formally by highlighting the affective and archival power of writing vis-à-vis digital narrative and the quantification of information.

Ian Jayne, *Queer Realities: Disidentification, Utopic Realism, and Contemporary American Fiction*

In the wake of James Wood's 2001 decrial of a supposedly "hysterical" realism, critics have debated the continuation and possibilities of post-postmodern realism. During the same two decades, theorists have considered queer lives in relation to normativity, futurity, and possibility. I bridge these twinned inquiries by turning to José Esteban Muñoz's concepts of disidentification and the queer utopia as a way to elucidate the workings four critically-acclaimed novels: André Aciman's 2007 *Call Me by Your Name*, Hanya Yanagihara's 2015 *A Little Life*, Brandon Taylor's 2020 *Real Life*, and Sam Lansky's 2020 *Broken People*. These novels oscillate between the "real" and the "utopic," a persistent negotiation which playfully collapses temporal, spatial, and affective dimensions as vectors of realism. From Aciman's neo-melodramatic, first-person narration of American expatriates in northern Italy during the 1980s, to Yanagihara's and Taylor's excavations of physical and sexual trauma, and to Lansky's revision of bourgeois self-invention, these texts demonstrate Muñoz's assertion that queerness is "a temporal arrangement in which the past is a field of possibility." This new queer realism is a flexible, crucial, and utopic facet of contemporary American fiction, foregrounding the novel as the site of the possible, and realism as perpetually "not-yet-here."

Chiara Patrizi, "We Ain't Going Nowhere. We Here": Survival and Witness in Jesmyn Ward's Fiction and Nonfiction

Jesmyn Ward's *oeuvre* belongs to an area of the American literary canon that has notable antecedents in the novels of William Faulkner, Zora Neal Hurston and Toni Morrison, and her themes and style show also a polyphony and a sense of the tragic explicitly reminiscent of Ancient Greek tragedy. My article employs Christina Sharpe's concept of *the wake*

to analyze how – in her novels, memoirs, and nonfiction – Ward manages to work within that literary tradition and with the burdening history (both past and present) of Black people and to produce narratives in which there may be no space for redemption, but which nonetheless show a peculiar sense of hope, grounded on the concepts of survival and witness. In Ward's writing, survival and witness become the elements that allow an unexpected radiance to shed among the desolation of her stories, thus involving readers in the act of becoming, they too, witnesses. These two means of resistance and resilience have shaped Black people's identity from the very beginning. A resilience that may appear pointless in the current racial waste land depicted by Ward, but which constitutes a powerful voice to reclaim dignity and humanity for her characters, her people.

Paolo Simonetti, *The Self in/and History: Historiographic Autofiction in Contemporary US Literature*

This article aims at investigating the relationship between autofiction, postmemory and historical novel in contemporary US literature through a hybrid subgenre that I would tentatively call "historiographic autofiction" – novels set in a (real or reimagined) historical past (or having to do with historiographic reconstruction) in which the author also appears as a fictionalized character. By analyzing as case studies Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* and William T. Vollmann's *The Rifles*, it will be possible to see how autofictional strategies applied to historical narratives apparently provide factual legitimacy to personal, reconstructed, or imagined events, while paradoxically presenting them (as well as their author/protagonist) as fictional. Putting the author's autofictional self in a historical setting lends credibility to the narration and gives the mark of sincerity and authenticity to the text, bestowing it with testimonial value. At the same time, the work's evident fictionality deconstructs any actual claim of objectivity or truthfulness, stressing the inevitable manipulation and stratification of history while encouraging reflections on how past narratives influence one's identity in the act of shaping (and being shaped by) one's life story.

Angelo Grossi, “War Is Ninety Percent Myth”: Post-postmodern Revisions of Vietnam in Denis Johnson’s *Fiskadoro* and *Tree of Smoke*

Denis Johnson’s post-9/11 incursion into the Vietnam war genre, the sprawling novel *Tree of Smoke* (2007), is a prominent example of a typically post-postmodern constructive attitude towards the crisis of historical referentiality. This issue can be further illuminated by reading *Tree of Smoke* in the light of another novel by the same author, the overlooked post-apocalyptic phantasmagoria *Fiskadoro* (1985). Set in a “time between civilizations” following a nuclear holocaust and in a region of Florida called “The quarantine,” *Fiskadoro* portrays a fallen and linguistically hybrid America where only the elements that were marginalized by the myth of American exceptionalism seem to have survived. *Fiskadoro*’s only incursion into the past, buried in the memory of a mute centenarian female character, concerns the fall of Saigon, which is narrated also in *Tree of Smoke* and is seen as the event that marks the beginning of the decay of the US empire. Reading *Tree of Smoke* in connection to *Fiskadoro*, this article will analyze how Johnson’s literary project reflects on the ritualistic and mythical dimension of the construction of history with a sensibility that both incorporates and overcomes postmodernism.

Daniela Daniele, “In a Tumbling Void”: DeLillo’s Late Lyrical Prose

DeLillo’s *The Silence* contemplates the entropy which lies at the core of digital trafficking in a new, sustained critique of the accelerations of the new economy, recently intersecting with the current and recurrent states of emergency. My analysis of his late lyrical prose locates this novella within his Millennium series of six short lyrical narratives written in the sparse, paratactic form inaugurated with his absurdist plays. In these late works, the author recovers an experimental, modernist style which, in its clipped, hermetic tones, explores the secrets of domestic jargons and of small talk while calling for a badly needed social reconstruction and for a compelling reflection on post-traumatic confinement as a condition still able to preserve the humane ability to write and communicate beyond screens.

Mirella Vallone, Listening in Khaled Mattawa's *Zodiac of Echoes*

This article analyzes the acoustic dimension in Khaled Mattawa's *Zodiac of Echoes*, particularly its relation to diasporic subjectivity, faith and translation, starting from the premises of Jean-Luc Nancy in *À L'Écoute* (2002) / *Listening* (2007). Unsatisfied with the visual paradigm that dominates Western thought and the related anesthesia of the senses associated with ocularcentrism, the French philosopher evaluates the possibility of an ontology and epistemology based on listening as the sense that touches upon and stimulates all bodily senses and the mind. Like Nancy, Mattawa seems to propose resonance as a foundation, as the first or last profundity of sense itself. *Zodiac of Echoes* is the space/time of reverberations where the diasporic subjectivity of the poems lends an ear in the process of ongoing definition and redefinition of the self.

Angela Santese, Narrating the Nuclear Armageddon: The Atomic Menace in the US Popular Culture of the 1980s

During the 1980s, the idea that a nuclear war could materialize led not only to an unprecedented antinuclear mobilization in the US and Europe and to a public conversation on these themes, but also to a series of cultural initiatives designed to alert public opinion and politicians to the atomic peril. In this political and social context, key cultural moments can be detected in the book *Fate of the Earth*, in the initiatives that revolved around the Nuclear Winter Scenario, and in the TV movie *The Day After*. Using primary sources and through an historical approach, this article aims at analyzing how these cultural products described the consequences of a nuclear war on the planet, highlighting also the environmental costs of a nuclear war, and their impact on US public opinion and media. Moreover it discusses how the scheduled airings of *The Day After* in 1983 became the arena for a political and media clash between the Ronald Reagan Administration and the antinuclear movement, since both actors indeed tried to exploit the film to influence public opinion on US nuclear posture.

Fabiola Mazzola, Detecting the “Specters” of Chicano/a Past in Lucha Corpi’s *Eulogy for a Brown Angel*

Since its first affirmation at the end of the nineteenth century, the detective genre has been highly debated: on the one hand it represented a very popular genre, but on the other hand it has always been considered “inferior,” receiving scant academic attention. Nevertheless, during the 1960s and 1970s, hard-boiled fiction got a new boost due to the increasing recognition from both a wider audience and critics. It also became one of the means through which multicultural writers could explore society and deal with issues such as gender and ethnicity. The aim of the present article is to show how detective fiction has been rethought from both a multicultural and a postfeminist perspective, to give voice to those deprived of it, through an analysis of Lucha Corpi’s first detective novel, *Eulogy for a Brown Angel* (1992), and of her heroine, detective Gloria Damasco. In the novel the past and the history of the Chicano/a Movement overwhelmingly re-emerges, in Derrida’s words, as a specter to resume its fights after an unforgettable disillusion.