

ABSTRACTS

The Eye's Portion

Don Gifford

The art of viewing landscape, as landscape itself, changed throughout the ages. Through new reinforcements of the way of seeing—such as the perspective and the map-making frenzy in the Renaissance; the camera obscura and the Claude Glass; the gigantic surround panoramas and war scenes on display, the diorama of Daguerre; not to mention the invention of photography and the “gee whiz technologies of our own time”—the human eye was challenged and the “eye’s portion” irrevocably changed. Later, this habit of selection and composition applied to the landscape itself, as, for instance, English parks and gardens were designed around special vantage points—predefining today’s problem of virtual reality. Finally, the workings of memory were similarly influenced by these changes, transforming from a storehouse of images taken in the past into a fluid system—much unlike the computer (a contemporary but mistaken metaphor for the mind)—always reworking, metamorphosing, and recombining its contents. As in memory, so in art: present additions to the eye’s portion forever reshape past ways of seeing, offering indirections that, we may only hope, will finally direct us back to the common world. (KM)

On Mourning: The Trope of Looking Backwards in J. M. Coetzee’s *The Master of Petersburg*

Ottília Veres

Learning about the news of the death of his son, Dostoyevsky—the protagonist of Coetzee’s novel—arrives to Petersburg to find out about the obscure circumstances of this death. Concerned with the trauma of the loss of a son, *The Master of Petersburg* reads as a mourning text. I am interested in how this text speaks (about) mourning. Inquiring whether the text poses itself as a mourning text or rather as a (sick) melancholic one, I explore how Dostoevsky’s mourning is gradually saturated with certain mythological motifs and stories. Arguing that the act of looking backwards functions as a trope of mourning in the novel, I examine how reminiscences and traces of the Orpheus, Penelope, and Daedalus legends are at play in the novel, their function being to aid the father’s work of mourning and help him embed the trauma of loss into stories. (OV)

The Reconceptualization of the Columbian Heritage into a Trickster Discourse: Gerald Vizenor's *The Heirs of Columbus*

Katalin Bíróné Nagy

The essay examines how Gerald Vizenor's *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991) handles the grand narrative of America's discovery. Vizenor's retextualizing literary reaction to that challenging historical moment is created and presented by the trickster, as part of the Native past. Vizenor's is a special means of empowering indigenous America: he disarms Columbus through the conquistador's integration to a Native cultural rhetoric. Moreover, trickster humor is a channel through which alienating attitudes imbued with either hatred or the lack of interest can be released, and the colonizer-colonized antagonism can be overcome. The novel's visionary quality, present-mindedness, and preference for multiple versions along with genre variety contribute to the mystical aspect of its historicism and are necessary components of a narrative strategy deeply rooted in the Native American oral tradition. (KBN)

The Postmodern Use of Mythopoeia in the Narrative Temporality of Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*

Attila Kárai

Although Chicano literature is often considered only tangentially postmodernist, its resistance to essentialism, historicism, and grand narratives arguably undermines this classification. By reading narrative as culture, that is, exploring how culture is textualized through narrative form, this essay highlights Rudolfo Anaya's artistic appropriation of certain religious time concepts in *Bless Me, Ultima* as a postmodern operation. After describing the novel's narrative temporality in terms of Mieke Bal's culture-oriented narrative theory, a functional correspondence becomes visible between two distinct narrative strategies and the notions of sacred and profane time as described by Mircea Eliade. Indeed, ravaging profane time and restoring sacred time develop into separate narratives: the story of individual and communal crises is countered by the postmodern version of the ancient re-emergence narrative to reestablish order in the human world. (AK)

(Breaking out of) the “Literary Ghetto”: Where to Place Asian American Writers, Or De-essentializing Canon Formation

Silvia Schultersmandl

This essay looks at what we call, given its alleged idiosyncrasies and culture-specific traditions, the “Asian American canon” for cues about whether we read, receive, label, and therefore canonize Asian American literature mostly for its depictions of gender and ethnicity. The main question this paper pursues is: when reading Asian American literature, to what extent do we canonize the authors rather than their texts. For instance, authors’ “authenticity” and “cultural competence” seem as important as their conformity to existing patterns in Asian American literature. Considering the abundance of recent publication by Asian American writers, this essay also investigates who makes the canon of Asian American literature, that is, who decides which books are indicative of trends in Asian American literature and which authors may be considered as representative of these trends. (SS)

The Embodiment of Abstraction in Robert Holdstock’s Mythago Novels

W. A. Senior

The enchanted or perilous wood appears throughout folklore, medieval romance, and fantasy, but in Ryhope Wood, the center of Robert Holdstock’s mythago novels, functions as a source of mythopoesis through which memory, desire, need, and passion achieve physical form. Characters who enter the Wood do not meet elves, dwarves, or any of the other traditional figures in fantasy but instead tap the power of the Wood to create their own mythagoes, figures from earlier ages and tales generated by the power of imagination of those in the present. The Huxleys, Keetons, Wynn-Jones, and others abstract from both cultural and individual unconscious to give idea and need physical being and presence. (WAS)

Neil Gaiman’s Irony, Liminal Fantasies, and Fairy Tale Adaptations

Sándor Klapcsik

Utilizing and slightly contradicting Brian Attebery’s “fuzzy-set theory” on fantasy, this essay interprets Neil Gaiman’s short stories as prototypical

examples of contemporary, ironic fantasies. Gaiman’s stories frequently evoke Farah Mendlesohn’s “liminal fantasy,” a subgenre that “in defiance of the conventional understanding of the fantastic as straight-faced . . . [rests on] the ironic mode.” The pretense that nothing exceptional or fantastic is happening doubles the narrative perspective, as the restrained voice of narration becomes echoed by the reader’s growing wonder and estrangement. In Gaiman’s “Chivalry,” fantastic events are embedded in a highly realistic setting, narrated in a conspicuously naïve and absurd manner. The narrative tension is reinforced by the unascertainable reasons behind the narrator’s and protagonist’s lack of surprise. This reading experience indicates that “Chivalry” and some of Gaiman’s other stories are overtly based on gaps, and they are governed by the reader’s oscillation between narrative perspectives. (SK)

Time and Gnosis in the Writings of Philip K. Dick

Howard Canaan

Metrical Abstract

Time, like toothpaste, can’t get teased
Back in the tube from which it’s
squeezed.

Its grooves run on a one-way track
that can’t be dodged, jumped, or turned
back.

What follows here, though, will dispense
with plodding, time-bound common
sense

to undertake an expedition
in speculative science fiction
and study japing Philip Dick,
who saw time as a Kantian trick
and wrote how *gnosis* and *ecstasis*
could free us from time’s “slow
molasses.”¹

I’ll classify how Dick unravels
time in his stories and his novels
and how his fiction makes a suture
between the present, past and future
or twists time sideways as it hurls
his characters to other worlds,
both alternate and parallel,
where they uncomfortably dwell.

Dick’s take on time also relates
to certain altered mental states,
and touches, too, on drug addiction—
two spooks that trailed his life and
fiction.

An heir to van Vogt’s well-tried tricks,
Dick shapes an existential mix
or with more drastic time incisions,
involves us in his Gnostic visions.

Three broad types of criticism
refract Dick through a three-way prism.
Some study his theistic chatter,
but Marxists claim that doesn't matter,
and aesthetes like the deep abyss
of Dick's shifting-mirror artifice.
But *l'art pour l'art* now takes back stage
in our issue-oriented age,
and Marxists frankly miss the train
ignoring Dick's theistic vein:
however strongly they resist,
Phil Dick was no materialist.
His work is an unsettled mix
of mystic thought and politics.

So bear with this essay, which pursues
Dick's quirky theosophic views
and how his Gnosticism streams
into his overarching themes:
the "real" world an occluded shell
exiled from Truth, a shadowy hell

built by dark archons who conspire
to shape the entity "Empire,"
whose iron, mechanistic sway
controls our minds and world today.
It cites Dick's novel *VALIS*, where
he lays his Gnosticism bare,
intoned with Blakean bravura
in *Tractates Cryptica Scriptura*

So in summation, Philip D.
weds time to subjectivity,
twin mysteries in co-dependence
with human promptings towards
transcendence,
and celebrating these themes drives
the thoughts and fictions Dick
contrives.
(HC)

¹ A character who can see forward in time in
the Dick novel *The World Jones Made*, refers to
"the slow molasses of time."

Time and Evolutionary Dignity in George Gaylord Simpson's *The Dechronization of Sam Magruder*

Kálmán Matolcsy

The paleontologist as a writer of science fiction: Simpson's book offers no less than a view of evolution—human and animal—through the eyes of the natural scientist and popularizer of evolutionary theory, but clad in the cloak of fiction. As Stephen Jay Gould suggests in the afterword to *Dechronization*, "fiction can provide a truer and deeper account of empirical subjects than genres supposedly dedicated to factual accounting." The present essay examines this apparent paradox by sifting it through the theories of time travel, Sartrean existentialism, and contingent evolution. (KM)

The Dolphin Still Speaks: Leo Szilard and Science Fiction

Bill Clemente

The essay seeks to assess and to appreciate the significance of the short

stories collected in Leo Szilard's *The Voice of the Dolphin*. Drawing on Szilard's other publications and books about his life and the turbulent times in which he lived, this paper discusses the significance of the stories in the context of Szilard's life as a scientist and activist. In particular, the essay looks at the short stories in terms of Szilard's important contributions to the creation of the first chain nuclear reaction and of atomic bombs, leading to the struggle that consumed the remaining years of his life: Szilard's unrelenting efforts to halt the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. (BC)

Scotland in Europe

Attila Dósa

As a member country of the United Kingdom, Scotland's political access to Europe has been arbitrated and negotiated by Westminster. Scotland's proudly long-standing self-designation as a "European" country has often been in conflict with Westminster's reluctant, sometimes even antagonistic, EU policy. In cultural terms at least, however, no such mediation via London has been necessary. Over the past centuries, Scottish writers have knowingly exposed themselves to foreign influences and their efforts at literary communication have been reciprocated by other writers and translators all over Europe. *Scotland in Europe* (edited by Tom Hubbard and R. D. S. Jack) provides a geographically and chronologically considered spectrum of literary cross-fertilization between Scotland and mainland Europe. The present essay weighs up Hubbard and Jack's excellent survey in the context of other recent attempts at the recontextualization of modern Scottish culture. (AD)