

ABSTRACTS

Enter the Blues: Jazz Poems by Langston Hughes and Sterling Brown

Hao Huang

Beginning with the question “What constitutes jazz poetry?” this paper elucidates the musico-historical link between the jazz and blues genres. It also employs Henry Louis Gates’s literary theoretical concept “Signifyin(g)” — “black double-voicedness; because it always entails formal revision and intertextual relation” (*The Signifying Monkey* 51)—to analyze two blues poems, “The Weary Blues” (1923) by Langston Hughes and “Ma Rainey” (1932) by Sterling Brown. These enact a delicate balance between describing the social conditions of performing the blues and transliterating authentic blues lyrics. Jazz poems inspired by the blues do not simply transcribe blues lyrics; instead, they ingeniously transform standard twelve-bar and eight-bar blues forms with strategically placed disruptions of the steady flow of standard meter that recall the sudden stops and starts in improvised jazz. This demonstrates how jazz poetry is an intertextual genre, entailing writing and reciting words that evoke the sounds, pacing, and lyrics of music. (HH)

Richard Greenberg’s *Everett Beekin*: Trauma, Forgetting, and Mannerism

Robert F. Gross

Everett Beekin participates in the proliferation of discourses concerning trauma in the United States during the last decade of the twentieth century. A play in two parts, separated by the passing of fifty years, it depicts three generations of a Jewish family as they seem to be shaped by traumatic material that they are incapable of fully uncovering into conscious memory. A loss experienced by the family in Manhattan in 1947 and then repressed is on the verge of surfacing in Orange County, California in 1997, but temporal, geographic, and social forces have conspired to render the memory meaningless. As a result, the play at once relies on discourses of trauma that emphasize rootedness in the past and discourses of American rootlessness that stress a deracinated existence. The tension between these two sets of discourses remains unresolved and manifests itself in a structure

of ambiguities and distortions that are representative of a mannerist tendency in contemporary American drama. (RFG)

Remembering the Present: Ersatz Possible Worlds as Alternative Realities in Harold Pinter's "Theatre of Absence"

Márk Adrián Hevesi

The essay suggests that several Pinteresque play-worlds could be considered ersatz possible worlds which are either actual imaginary products of the characters' minds clashing with their presents or being evoked somewhere "outside reality" in a subjective, enclosed world of the mind through the process of remembering. A link is pointed out between Pinter's anti-essentialist ideas and that of the new pragmatists, both suggesting the impossibility of absolute truth as such. The discussion continues with the ontological and epistemological implications of such alternative realities, with special emphasis on the actuality/non-actuality of the present and the past and the introduction of the term "Theatre of Absence," which may be applied to most of Pinter's memory plays. The processes of fiction-writing are also compared with the way ersatz possible worlds are made up through remembering and the use of language, with special emphasis on the ontological similarities between fictional worlds and ersatz possible worlds. (MAH)

The Haunting of History and the Feral Self in Tim Winton's *In the Winter Dark*

Pilar Baines

The Gothic seems to be the perfect genre to explore how a troubled mind can damage oneself, and thus drastically affect one's environment, as *In the Winter Dark* demonstrates. This story, set in the Australian bush, shows that the past can never be left behind but remains hidden in our unconscious and sometimes comes to the surface adopting gothic forms. In Winton's novel, it takes the shape of a mysterious creature, significantly assumed to be a cat. This animal awakens not only personal anxieties, but also historical ones, since it acts symbolically as a reminder of colonization. The cat, along with the failure of the protagonists to control it, functions as a metaphor for Australia's deep-rooted anxiety about the successful domination of its wilderness. (PB)

Zora Neale Hurston's Cultural Space and African American Spatiality

Péter Gaál-Szabó

Zora Neale Hurston's place-construction is heavily indebted to the culture in which it is embedded. The present demonstrates its direct communication with African American culture, exhibiting a call-and-response pattern, which presents characteristic intracommunal dynamics. Hurston's research in African American spatiality enables her to refine her concept so that thirding/hybridizing of places for Hurston denotes a centripetal performance, showing that dissent is just another form of performative action of insiderness. Her places as demonstrated in two of her novels, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, serve to express the subjectivity of her characters and to represent tactics of identity negotiation, which allows the African American individual to become an agent within his/her culture. (PGSz)

"I can't tell if you're being serious or not": Vonnegut's Comic Realism in *Slaughterhouse-Five*

Ryan Wepler

Close examination of the form of Vonnegut's humor in *Slaughterhouse-Five* reveals a more straightforwardly realist intent than his mode of representation initially suggests. As Rachel Giora has argued, the structure of jokes establishes an initial system of meaning followed by a punchline that recontextualizes that system, thereby forcing a reinterpretation. *Slaughterhouse's* humor is structured such that an initially escapist system of meaning is overturned by a punchline that provokes the reader into recognition of the real, thereby mirroring the intent of social realist narrative. By comically linking Billy Pilgrim's fantasy worlds of time travel and alien abduction to the real events of Dresden, Vonnegut triggers reappraisals of a variety of American cultural ideals, ultimately prompting a robust moral schema based on serious reconsideration of our social and civic obligations. (RW)

Postmodern Infundibula and Other Non-linear Time Structures in *Breakfast of Champions*, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and *Sirens of Titan*

Sharon Lynn Sieber

The article investigates Vonnegut's use of time as a means to communicate value constructs in three novels, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *Breakfast of Champions*, and *Sirens of Titan*. Even while time manifests in all three works on the continuum of the fantastic, Vonnegut uses fantastic time to communicate the banal, while real time seems to become fantastic. Vonnegut's combination of the fantastic and the ordinary create a new understanding of what it means to be a human being, as he scrutinizes racism, greed, sexism, and violence as juxtaposed against the values of human kindness. Vonnegut exposes the peculiar human inability to decipher real value and meaning when faced with choices involving mundane or materialistic goals. The questioning of traditional values, exposed as meaningless, contradictory, and nonsensical when viewed from the alienated perspective of defamiliarization causes a rupture which is emblematic of a corresponding need for new ways of reading and interpreting. (SLS)

Now It's the Women's Turn: The Art(s) of Reconciliation in Vonnegut's *Bluebeard*

Tom Hertweck

This reading of Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Bluebeard* (1987) with the late-twentieth-century move to Truth Commissions uses the post-apartheid South African TRC as key example. In both cases the enlivening of past misdeeds—through testimony in South Africa and through visual art and narrative in the novel—brings about not only personal reconciliation (as confession), but also a new way of thinking about ethical relationships, where acts enter into the symbolic, interpretive order for the public's negotiation and reflection. While narration (in whatever form) cannot undo, or even properly atone for, past acts, the openness expressed by narrating one's actions—a capacity all people carry within themselves—offers an alternative to command-and-control models of politics, which locate power with a small group and appear solely to perpetuate more misdeeds. Here Vonnegut's novel poses a compelling, democratic ethical humanism we might embrace in the twenty-first century. (TH)

“This Space In Between”: Barbara Johnson’s Dislocations of Feminism and Deconstruction

Gyula Somogyi

Occasioned by the publication of her new book, *Persons and Things*, the review essay sets out to analyze Barbara Johnson’s contributions to contemporary literary theory. Ever since *The Critical Difference*, Johnson’s literary criticism and theory has been uniquely sensitive to deconstructive as well as feminist inquiry, two theoretical and political positions which, according to many critics, remain skeptical of each other. In “Apostrophe, Animation and Abortion,” the author negotiates the fundamental differences between these two discourses through the figure of abortion, the political debates about which seem to hinge on a rhetorical figure, apostrophe. The essay concludes by reviewing *Persons and Things*, which can be regarded as a return to the theme of rhetoric and politics put forward originally in *A World of Difference*: all of Johnson’s keen-eyed analyses revolve around the figurative powers of language that structure the separation and conflation of persons and things. (GyS)