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Review

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REVIEW

Review Essays on Recent Scholarship: Maus on Contemporary Literary Dissenters, Coffman on Religion and Postmodernism, Di Leo on Big Little Magazines

[A note from the Book Reviews Editor: this is Orbit's first batch of multiple-book review-essays: more are in the pipeline. We're actively aiming to supplement our regular single-book reviews with more of these extended surveys of recent work in particular fields and on particular questions. If you're interested in proposing a review-essay covering at least 3 books of recent scholarship on some aspect of post-1945 US literature, please contact us at reviews@pynchon.net]

Contemporary Literary Dissenters: Re-examining Post-Cold War Perspectives

Review of:

Daniel Cordle. *Late Cold War Literature and Culture: The Nuclear 1980s* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), xi + 229pp

Sean Austin Grattan. *Hope Isn't Stupid: Utopian Affects in Contemporary American Literature* (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 2017), ix + 190pp

Heather J. Hicks. *The Post-Apocalyptic Novel in the Twenty-First Century: Modernity Beyond Salvage* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 208pp

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As the thirtieth anniversary of the end of the Cold War approaches, scholars seem no closer to a consensus about how to characterize the period that succeeded the decades-long superpower rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. Although both Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev and U.S. president George H. W. Bush spoke of a “New World Order” in the waning years and immediate aftermath of the Cold War, the parameters of what emerged from that far-reaching conflict remain imprecise at best, incoherent at worst. Such varied (and frequently incompatible) concepts as neoliberalism, globalization, nationalism, post-postmodernism and others can all make claims to cultural predominance in the West since the mid-1980s, when Gorbachev’s *perestroika* and *glasnost* policies and Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms in China effectively nullified the Cold War’s ideological dichotomies. However, as national security scholar Nikolas Gvosdev suggested in 2016, the “post-Cold War era” label appears to have outlived whatever utility it may once have had, especially in light of the increasingly untenable “belief that the age of nations was passing in favor of greater transnational cooperation.”

Although none of the three recent studies under consideration here offers an overarching thesis with which one might (re)characterize the last three decades of

American and/or British culture, they collectively present a useful rejoinder to some of the exclusionary presumptions that underlie many of those efforts that *have* tried to affix such totalizing labels. Examining them together, one discovers a refutation of the pervasive notion that a set of socially-conscious and frequently subversive cultural-philosophical modes – e.g., anti-nuclearism, utopianism, post-apocalypticism – became scarce and/or irrelevant in American and British literature in the wake of Reaganite and Thatcherite politics. Not only do these scholars reassure humanistic readers that their worldview is not following in the footsteps of the dodo or the passenger pigeon, but they also undermine the relatively monotonic cultural narratives that sacralize a particular set of centrist, neoliberal Western values as those that “won” the Cold War. Such narratives place these values beyond question, thereby ensuring the continuation of the status quo post (frigus) bellum and the concomitant marginalization of voices that advocate for a different way of organizing society. The studies I consider here reclaim the space for such questions.

Daniel Cordle's *Late Cold War Literature and Culture* begins this subversive process with a simultaneous examination of the anti-nuclear movements in Britain and the U.S. during the early years of the 1980s, a period he characterizes as “radical” by two conflicting definitions: “It was radical in the conventional sense of containing forthright and generally left wing protest, but it was also radical because it was a period of hard-line reform by governments of the right” (5). Building on the foundation of a “range of important studies [that] have revealed the embeddedness of cultural production in the geopolitics of Cold War confrontation,” he contends that real-life anti-nuclear protests such as the Women's Peace Camp at Greenham Commons in the U.K. and the Livermore Action Group in the U.S. provided a renewed “nuclear consciousness” that stimulated “a substantial body of literature” (6) throughout the remainder of that decade. Cordle identifies this nuclear consciousness not simply as a vestige of a bygone era of extreme nuclear anxiety, but rather as part of a broader societal debate whose contours have been effaced by the unexpected and mostly peaceful end to the Cold War:

The neoliberal worldview is now so dominant, so mainstream, that it is hard to imagine quite how virulently contested was this period of its establishment, when opposing, radical visions of society were proposed and fought over by left and right.... That the Cold War's end, though dramatic, did not

involve the nuclear conflagration toward which many had long imagined the superpowers to be heading can, in retrospect, give the period a quality of anti-climax, but this is to forget how central and pressing were its nuclear politics – and its politics more generally – and also naively to assume that the “safe” ending of the Cold War was somehow always assured. (5)

This forgetfulness is unconscionable for Cordle not only “because the final decade of the Cold War was the one in which the shape of our political landscape was sculpted,” but also “because the glimpses of catastrophic human conflict and the end of the world emerging from nuclear culture also produced alternative visions, imagining different, more peaceable means of existence that have been all but lost...since the Cold War’s end” (21).

Cordle’s most salient contributions to the scholarship on the anti-nuclear literature of the 1980s involve his choice to discuss numerous works of young adult (YA) and children’s fiction alongside canonical works of nuclear-themed film and fiction geared specifically for adult audiences. Each of his thematically-organized chapters contains such an intermingling of works designed for different age-levels of readership. He justifies this approach by contending that the children’s and YA books he surveys reflect the desire of anti-nuclear activist movements to mobilize children and adolescents in furthering their cause: “[N]uclear protest groups were particularly successful in recruiting young people to their ranks and we should think of nuclear protest in the 1980s as highly charged by a sense of generational awareness” (8). Although his claim that this makes such books part of the “central canon of nuclear texts” is far from ironclad (especially in light of the mixed evidence that they actually found a wide and receptive audience of young readers), considerable insight into the reciprocal relationship between activism and artistic production results from his methodology of comparing such grim adult-themed novels as Richard Powers’s *Prisoner’s Dilemma*, Denis Johnson’s *Fiskadoro*, and Maggie Gee’s *The Burning Book* to works like Lynne Hall’s *If Winter Comes*, Louise Lawrence’s *Children of the Dust*, and Jane Langton’s *The Fragile Flag* that are targeted towards younger audiences.

The temporal, geographic, and generic breadth of Cordle’s survey leads to a relative terseness that may frustrate readers seeking in-depth analysis of exemplary

novels. Although he returns frequently and in different contexts to some of his primary texts, no single work receives a particularly exhaustive treatment over the course of the book. For me, this is more than offset both by the richness of his discussion of the social/political/historical context of the 1980s and by the innovative correlations he makes among classes of texts. It is quite possible that Cordle is the only person who has read all the various children's, YA, and adult novels that he surveys, but he makes a compelling case for other scholars to follow his lead.

Whereas such nonfictional refutations of the nuclearized '70s and '80s as Helen Caldicott's *Nuclear Madness* (1978) or Robert Jay Lifton and Peter Falk's *Indefensible Weapons* (1982) have largely become historical artifacts, Cordle attributes a timeless (and, thus, continuing) function to fictional expressions of similar ideas:

A rich and complex area, with a mindset distinct from the earlier Cold War, [the anti-nuclear literature of the 1980s] challenges some of our critical assumptions about the decade.... [N]uclear literature asks us to confront nature and limits of human experience and to reflect on how our technologies shape our culture and society.... It prompts us to think of our species in the contexts of deep time that have recently attended the rise of the concept of the Anthropocene.... We retain the capacity to inflict horror on our fellow human beings and on our world, through nuclear war, that staggers comprehension" (201–2).

The explicit intention of Cordle's study is to recover these literary alternatives from the rhetorical scrap-heap to which they have been consigned by the dominant cultural narratives of the post-Cold War era. Although he acknowledges that "[n]uclear literature cannot resolve these dilemmas," he also insists that it "makes us aware of them and at its best it challenges us to imagine our possible futures in all their beauty and their horror" (202).

Sean Austin Grattan approaches a similar task along a very different vector in *Hope Isn't Stupid*. Whereas the books examined in Cordle's study are mostly cautionary tales that depict the literal and figurative damage caused by the existence and use (imagined, except for Hiroshima and Nagasaki) of nuclear weapons, Grattan focuses

on a more affirmative genre in trying to counteract the “popular story...that the late twentieth century has seen a surplus of dystopian literature, but very little investment in utopian literature” (1). As his title suggests, though, his explicit goal parallels Cordle’s desire to recover anti-nuclear discourses from their undeserved obscurity within post-Cold War cultural memory; Grattan seeks to rescue the concept of utopia from what he sees as its dismissive mischaracterization in recent years:

Bandied about on both the political left and right as equivalent with shoddy thinking or wild-eyed dreaming, utopia rarely comfortably occupies a space of critical engagement befitting the term’s continued existence as marking a desire or hope that the world could look better than the present.... [T]he pleasure of being right, that the world isn’t getting better, is both politically disingenuous and dangerous for those who putatively place themselves on the left.

By “contend[ing] that in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries the lost art of utopia is very much alive and well” (2), Grattan joins Cordle in attempting to counteract a literary-political truism that he perceives as going dangerously unexamined in contemporary Western culture:

Utopia, as a genre, calls into question the horizons of social possibility, but with the increased imbrication of capital with social life under neoliberalism those horizons become foreclosed by the logic of neoliberal capitalism.... It is precisely this preponderance of claims on both the conservative right and the progressive left about the impossibility of alternatives that makes thinking about the utopian in a nonreductive and open way crucial for contemporary writers. (8)

Although his critical approach is indisputably Marxist at its core – e.g., “Given the proliferation of capitalist forms of accumulation and degradation, the global economic crisis of 2008, and the resultant revolts, it is crucial to reconsider and reaffirm the need, now more than ever, for the utopian” (9) – Grattan’s intentions dovetail with Cordle’s inasmuch as both scholars see their work partly as a form of activ-

ism recovering a lost or possibly suppressed discourse of protest against the contemporary (i.e., post-Cold War) status quo: “What is at stake...is a reinvigoration of a critique of the world through thinking the utopian; here is another way of resisting left melancholy, and of describing the active forms of resistance utopia might make available” (26).

Grattan’s definition of utopian literature builds on the work of such prominent scholars of utopia as Lyman Tower Sargent, Marianne DeKoven, Fredric Jameson, and José Muñoz. However, he also departs significantly from these precursors by incorporating the work of such scholars of affect theory as Lauren Berlant, Eve Sedgwick, and Sara Ahmed in order to redefine utopia in a contemporary context based less on literary tropes and more on the psychological and physiological responses engendered by the experience of reading a hopeful story: “[t]he challenge to feel utopian is, in part, the challenge to recognize landing on utopia’s shore, to recognize both the desire and the need to glance at the map containing utopia, as well as to linger, stare, tarry, and accept the temporal openings that might grow from even the smallest seeds into something that might offer even momentary succor” (18). Although convincingly elaborated, Grattan’s highly specialized critical methodology may at times prove daunting to readers not already fluent in the nuances of either of his central theoretical discourses.

Thankfully, Grattan aids his reader by integrating his critical framework fully and immediately into his interpretive discussions of a series of novels linked by his interest in examining “utopias that slip through the cracks, those that hide their utopianism, or those whose utopianism...meets with critical silence” (2). Although each of his first three chapters treats fiction by a relatively canonical author – William S. Burroughs, Toni Morrison, and Thomas Pynchon, respectively – they cover novels that have received relatively little critical attention within those authors’ oeuvres. The first chapter inhabits the same historical moment as Cordle’s book in examining Burroughs’s 1981 novel *Cities of the Red Night*. Grattan claims that this novel’s “retroactive” utopianism “conceptualiz[es] utopia in a time when utopia, or at least left-leaning understandings of alternative social structures to neoliberal capitalism, are facing attacks from all sides” (31). In analyzing Morrison’s *Paradise*, Grattan reorients the extant criticism of the novel’s utopianism toward what he calls its “monstrous”

aspect, one that “opens a space for thinking alternative modes of being in the world, modes of being delineated by nonfundamentalist ways of understanding and imagining the world” (52). The chapter on Pynchon is likely of the greatest interest to *Orbit's* readership, as Grattan examines *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Vineland*, and *Bleeding Edge* as a utopian trilogy that “trace[s] the emergence and failure of the possibility of alternative political formations in the late twentieth century” (71). Grattan argues that this series of failures does not mark a shift toward the dystopian, but rather a different brand of utopianism predicated on the possibility of divergence from a constrictive status quo instead of the achievement of perfection: “[It] is neither nostalgic nor realistic; rather, Pynchon marks the limits and failures to imagine *another* world. This other world...is not necessarily a better world, but it marks, instead, the possibility of running counter [to] the prevailing norms of mainstream America” (72). The final two chapters are linked by Grattan’s attempts to “question the preference of community over solitude” in conventional utopias and thereby to delineate “a role for the solitary within utopian discourse” (29) in the twenty-first century. He examines three relatively obscure texts – Colson Whitehead’s debut novel *The Intuitionist* (which has only recently found a wider audience as Whitehead’s reputation grows), Dennis Cooper’s *Try*, and John Darnielle’s *Black Sabbath Master of Reality* – as utopias that occur on an individual scale. He contends that these “small utopian moments...[offer] another way of ordering the world that might be reparative.... [They] foster the hope and potential for something better than what can at times appear unyieldingly and unremittingly impossible: that tomorrow will be better than today” (146).

The fictional works analyzed in Heather J. Hicks’s *The Post-Apocalyptic Novel in the Twenty-First Century* also propose alternative social structures that might likewise be termed “reparative.” They depart radically from those found in Grattan’s book, though, by literalizing the need for repair alongside its figurative usage; the repairs in the novels Grattan analyzes are primarily philosophical and occasionally institutional/societal, whereas in the books that Hicks covers, the physical and sometimes even physiological structures of the world are also in dire need of fixing. Hicks asserts that Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*, David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas*, Cormac

McCarthy's *The Road*, Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*, Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*, and Paolo Bacigalupi's *Ship Breaker* series all depict "the end of the world as we know it" (1) in order to question whether the "survivors [of such apocalypses] should move beyond salvaging mere scraps of modernity and rebuild dimensions of it in earnest or...concede that modernity is beyond salvage and attempt to devise something that transcends its historical forms" (3). She situates her discussion of these texts squarely within "a set of historical and epistemological transformations – the globalized economy intensified by the end of the Cold War; the international recognition of the menace of anthropogenic global warming; the attacks of 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror; the growing disavowal within intellectual circles of postmodernity as a category of periodization; and the international resurgence of the concept of 'modernity'" (2). This catalogue of most of the major developments of the "post-Cold War era" allows Hicks to synthesize Cordle's cautionary tenor and Grattan's speculative idealism in the face of these developments in order to project a more far-reaching and provocative question onto each of her primary texts: "[W]hat should survive and why[?]" (4).

Hicks claims that each of the novels she analyzes contain "striking allusions" (1) to Daniel Defoe's eighteenth-century castaway novel *Robinson Crusoe*, arguing that Crusoe's loss of "his place in th[e] newly modern world" is the "predicament [...that] writers of post-apocalyptic narratives since the Enlightenment have wanted readers to confront" (2). In her view, this fictional confrontation goes through three stages. Defoe and other authors of "modern" post-apocalyptic novels generally lament the loss of modernity's presumed benefits and either seek to recreate or to restore them as wholly as possible. The two more recent stages she envisions both alter this basic formula:

Whereas postmodern post-apocalyptic narratives written from the 1960s through the 1980s charted characters' departure from modernity into ever deeper aleatory terrain, the characters of many of these new millennial narratives begin in conditions of what we might call postmodern modernity, conditions that break down and from which the characters must then move forward. (3)

The six novels she analyzes invoke several common themes and intertextual references (a detailed taxonomy of which is helpfully included in the book's conclusion) as they “play out a variety of...scenarios [in which] modernity is shut down and rebooted” (16) in order to ask “[w]hat aspects of modernity should be salvaged?” (24).

The intricacy of Hicks's critical apparatus is assuredly not for the faint-hearted. She makes clear in her introduction that her approach is grounded in the work of “feminist, postcolonial, and Marxist critics, including Walter Benjamin, Wendy Brown, Jed Esty, Marianne Hirsch, Catherine Keller, Esther Leslie, David Medalie, and Franco Moretti” (5), and dozens more economists, social theorists, literary critics, and philosophers inhabit the interstices between her insightful and detailed close-readings of primary texts. Allow me to reassure the leery reader, though, that she unfailingly rewards the trust extended to her as, for example, her lengthy exposition of Benjamin's theories on kitsch and the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755 leads to a direct application of those concepts to Whitehead's zombie-novel *Zone One*.

Perhaps belying her aforementioned metaphor about these novels' “rebooting” of modernity in the wake of its apocalyptic destruction (which would involve a wholesale restoration of its original form), Hicks does not claim that they arrive at a cohesive answer to her overarching question. Rather, she concludes only that they collectively affirm the need for their readers “to become Crusoes who are also Fridays, curious agents of a new modernity that has learned from its mistakes” (172). Although one might be tempted to see the absence of a more prescriptive prognosis as a flaw – especially given the elaborately detailed list of common “symptoms” Hicks enumerates across the texts she examines – I find it wholly consistent with the understandably nebulous conclusions of the other two books considered here. The task that faces any individual or group seeking to resist the kind of power capable of bringing about the dire worlds that pervade the novels that Cordle, Grattan, and Hicks survey is potentially overwhelming. One can readily sympathize with these critics' leeriness towards tidy solutions to such massive and systemic dangers. Although they are all clearly infused with a spirit of social and political engagement, none of them explicitly advocates for a particular worldview. Instead, each one makes an ardent case for the necessity of widening our collective perception of the potential

options by which the contemporary world might be organized; they do *not* argue for the adoption of any such alternative. For all their urgency and earnestness, these are, after all, literary texts being discussed, not political manifestoes or religious tracts; even while potentially facing what Pynchon called “the last delta-t” (762) on the final page of *Gravity's Rainbow*, they urge far greater consideration of reality, but do not presume to replace the would-be gods whose clay feet they expose.

Because of my own narrative predilection for satirical subversions of authority, I am hard-pressed to find a better analogy for the rhetorical work these three books perform than that exemplified in a scene from Joel and Ethan Coen's 1998 film *The Big Lebowski*. The counter-cultural slacker-protagonist, Jeffrey “The Dude” Lebowski (Jeff Bridges), is berated by his “establishment” counterpart, a prominent businessman also named Jeffrey Lebowski (David Huddleston), in language that strongly evokes post-Cold War neoliberal triumphalism: “Your revolution is over, Mr. Lebowski! Condolences! The bums lost!... My advice to you is, to do what your parents did! Get a job, sir! The bums will always lose – do you hear me, Lebowski? THE BUMS WILL ALWAYS LOSE!” Even as the ostensible “winner” Lebowski harangues the “loser” Lebowski in this manner, the latter dismissively closes the door on him and proceeds to obtain a replacement oriental rug from the former's fawningly gullible assistant, Brandt (Philip Seymour Hoffman). The Dude has not overthrown the ruling order, as he claims to have tried to do earlier in life as one the authors of “The *original* Port Huron Statement...Not the compromised second draft.” Nevertheless, he has not only invalidated the “big” Lebowski's claims of supremacy, but also achieves the modest goal of justice that he brought to this otherwise unlikely conjunction of cartoonishly archetypal American characters. In less comic (yet no less subversive) ways, Cordle, Hicks, and Grattan each attempt to persuade their readers that there are still plenty of authors presenting literary challenges to the dominant discourses of the contemporary Western world. The point of reading such works is not simply a matter of reversing a binary conception of the world based on winners and losers, but rather to expand dramatically the discussion of how humanity might best survive in an age filled with countless large-scale perils. After all, as Cordle Pynchonesquely puts in in the final line of his book, “[W]e might, still, be between the wars” (202).

Religion and Postmodernism

Review of:

Christopher Douglas. *If God Meant to Interfere: American Literature and the Rise of the Christian Right* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), viii + 367pp

Christopher Leise. *The Story upon a Hill: The Puritan Myth in Contemporary American Fiction* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2017), x + 210pp

Mark C. Taylor. *Rewiring the Real: In Conversation with William Gaddis, Richard Powers, Mark Danielewski, and Don DeLillo* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), xiv + 322pp

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The relations between religion and American politics have never been as simple as excluding matters of church from those of state, but the general trend of the first half of the twentieth century was toward an at-least-nominally secularized political arena, one in which the various manifestations of political discourse—including voting, statecraft, and policy—were regarded by all but the most vocal fundamentalist believers as best practiced independently of faith. The past two decades have seen a remarkable shift away from that secularizing trend, and toward a revival of nationalist rhetoric appealing to constituencies defined by marked religiosity. In the United States, as in many instances elsewhere, nationalist arguments are of late largely successful in these appeals, finding no small measure of support from those who have accepted the idea that American political exceptionalism is possibly grounded in some divine dispensation. While it is certainly the case that the more strident of these claims amount only to populist sophistry, it would be a mistake to adopt unthinkingly the position that faith's influence on politics is best understood as a restriction of conscience detrimental to egalitarian, democratic politics. Indeed, such a position is, in its very dismissiveness, far too unsubtle to accommodate the complex historical

and present relations of American politics and American religion. While the books under review proceed with very different intentions, each offers valuable insights into how contemporary fictions illuminate the complexities, shortcomings, and contributions that derive from the entanglement of religious thought and practice with American history and politics. Perhaps more importantly, they consider fictions that at once honor faith's value for believers while turning a critical eye on the ways that it can be abused for gain by the unscrupulous. In selecting such texts for discussion, and in reading them as sensitively as they do, these three monographs model the sort of balanced viewpoint so desperately needed at the moment.

One strong connection between each of the books discussed is an interest in the dance between preserving the truth and delineating the ways it can be debased. Given that the problems they explore derive in part from efforts to reconcile individual conscience with collective inheritance, that Christopher Leise's *The Story upon a Hill: The Puritan Myth in Contemporary American Fiction* begins with a personal narrative-cum-scholarly pilgrimage to Salem is entirely appropriate. Residents of New England will know that this city turns with the approach of every October 31 into a touristic extravaganza bespeaking a mania more severe and wide-spread than anything seen in the seventeenth century. The argument of Leise's introduction, however, reveals that local practices confuse audiences during more than one season per year. He offers consideration of several monuments, plaques, and other ostensibly accurate historical markers that echo widespread misunderstandings of the Salem witch episode of 1692—much of which, Leise explains, actually unfolded in nearby communities such as Topsfield, Andover, Beverly, and Danvers (which was, at the time, known as “Salem Village and Salem Farms,” but not really part of the town of Salem itself). The Salem material demonstrates the more general point: a tendency to historical reductiveness, to misinformation both casual and serious, serves political myth-making well, but offers the American present a view of a past incompatible with concern for complexity and accuracy. Such a past is, in the case of the Salem episode in particular, one that betrays inclusiveness and diversity in service of privilege based on a falsified portrait of originary consensus.

Leise's text thence turns to its proper subject: the degree to which woefully misinformed conceptions of the colonial New English past have been explored

and tested by a number of our most powerful contemporary writers. His particular focus is the term “Puritan,” bandied about in any number of quarters to signify the founding population and, more importantly, originary attitudes of the United States. As Leise makes clear, this usage is abusive; “Puritan” was originally employed in a derogatory sense, and thus is unfit to describe the earliest Anglo-American colonists on their own terms; its applicability to any New World population prior to the very late seventeenth century is misrepresentative, given the variety of faiths and political opinions those populations actually present; and, it fails to capture the diversity of colonial America’s immigrant population, which included peoples from Spanish, Dutch, West African, and French origins, among others. At the same time, while Leise asserts that “Puritan” is not only problematic but almost entirely inaccurate as a descriptor for any early-American population, the historical simplification carried out under its aegis indicates its value for the promotion of influential and politically efficacious visions of American exceptionalism and normative citizenship.

However valuable its unseating of this misapplied term, the real strength of Leise’s book may be its readings of particular texts in relation to the myth of Puritan origins. Across its several chapters, the volume devotes significant attention to William Gaddis (by way of Nathaniel Hawthorne) as an author concerned with interrogating the ways that “historical and theological scrutiny” unveil flaws in inherited conceptions of American identity (39); Kurt Vonnegut as a means to unsettle the spurious idea, derived to no small degree from Puritan mythography, of an American ethical exceptionalism; Thomas Pynchon as one who rewrites Puritan myth as confusing and inclusive, and therefore affirmative of “positive uncertainty” (rather than of certain pessimism) (88); Marilynne Robinson’s works as respectful rewritings of the Puritan legacy that find in it space for appreciative apprehensions of the complexities (both aesthetic and political, celebratory and problematic) of this world; and, Toni Morrison’s *A Mercy* as a rewriting of the early American past as one of diverse voices and heritages, rather than of the monovocal vision of the Puritan myth. Leise also discusses Paul Auster and Colson Whitehead more briefly, and a handful of other authors in passing. While some of these figures—Pynchon and Robinson, especially—are unsurprising selections, almost every instance offers new

insights. The chapter on Vonnegut is especially bold and convincing in its suggestion that we think of *Slaughterhouse-Five* as a contemporary revision of the captivity narrative. Like such foundational examples as Mary Rowlandson's, Vonnegut's text provides an alternate sense of time that reconfigures suffering as explanatory justification for salvation rather than as only unnecessary tribulation and misery. Unlike some other readings of the genre, however, Leise pursues the ways Vonnegut resists aspects of the genre's logic, trading salvation and narrative resolution for pointers at ongoing, non-narrative, confusion. In so doing, he reads Vonnegut as suggesting that the past may be incomprehensible on any available terms—including those of secular humanism—that honestly assess the disorder of historical moments such as the bombing of Dresden. Even as he casts some suspicion on the likelihood that a vision of the American history resistant to reductive binaries will be devised in an antifoundationalist era, Vonnegut employs the optimism of the genre to suggest the hope, and need, that exactly that possibility could be realized if only we took a collective look back at the actual, rather than the mythologized, American past.

While the large majority of Leise's book succeeds admirably, one point of organization is somewhat unsatisfying. The penultimate chapter is wonderful in itself—linking as it does readings of texts by Whitehead and Auster with political maneuvering by Presidents Kennedy and Reagan—but seems misplaced. The critique advanced in these pages is to be applauded: as observations in recent years of trick-or-treating at Kennedy's birthplace have reminded this reviewer, myth-making in service of political power is not an activity found on only one side of partisan lines. The difficulty is that Leise's intelligent and careful consideration of presidential politics in relation to the "Puritan" should serve as part of the introduction, indicating the degree to which such political strategizing fosters the sort of problems addressed by the readings offered across the book as a whole, rather than only in relation to the comments on Whitehead and Auster.

Leise's book unveils some portion of the etiology of America's tendency to employ woefully misapprehended and / or misrepresented histories of prenational religious identity as a means to bolster political agendas. As he asserts at one point, the uncontrollable indigenous population surrounding, and unstable internal dynamics within, early Euro-American colonies produced an unease that emerged

in periodic violence, whether directed outwardly (King Philip's War) or inwardly (the Salem Witch Panic). At the same time, a somewhat amorphous racial and religious identity crystallized during and after the period, one that has been taken up again during the past five decades by that subspecies of the American political animal for whom processes of exclusion are the most certain way to determine national identity. Christopher Douglas's *If God Meant to Interfere: American Literature and the Rise of the Christian Right* takes as its subject this more recent phenomenon, as it considers several of the ways that post-WWII American culture has cultivated close ties between Christian fundamentalism and conservative politics. While it is a cultural commentary, Douglas's text is more particularly a work of literary criticism. In this sense, one recognizes that he draws on and extends recent "postsecular" critical work by Amy Hungerford and John McClure. What Douglas adds to their arguments about how postmodernism has contributed to conservative religiosity is a set of insights regarding multiculturalism's role in that process.

One dimension of Douglas's overall argument is familiar: the resurgence of conservative Christianity as a social program relies on the paradoxical conviction that political compatibility can exist between a defense of freedom of conscience on one hand (a tradition that needs defense in the age of secularism) and the advocacy of universalist—even totalizing—grounds for public policy. The position, which he labels "Christian postmodernism," suggests that the believer should be free to practice unchallenged, even as she challenges others for practices not in accord with her belief. Perhaps most innovative among Douglas's contentions is the second broad argument he presents: today's conservative Christianity and progressive multiculturalism share as a common heritage the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and early 1960s. For the former group, the power religion had to shape politics in the hands of someone like Dr. Martin Luther King was a lesson of two sorts: one a "grudging admiration" for the achievements of Civil Rights leaders who could articulate the religious grounds of their position in politically efficacious ways, and the other a motivation to resist the sort of liberal civil religion of the 1950s, which denied that that strong religious faith could justify the educational practices and legislative policies that preserved social institutions shaped by exclusionary dynamics pertaining

to race and gender. For multiculturalists, that same post-war liberal civic religion was the enshrining of a spiritually vacuous and politically stultifying affirmation of homogeneity, one that whitewashed American difference by denying the religious authenticity of any number of faiths, from Chicano/a Catholicism to veneration of Haitian loas. In the cases of both conservative Christianity and multiculturalism, the interplay between cultural relativism and an impetus to universal political standards created a tension that served one goal well only at the expense of the other.

In presenting these arguments, Douglas looks not only at the fictions of contemporary Christian conservatism, such as the *Left Behind* series, but also at a wide variety of popular and literary fictions that reveal the degree to which the context of recent conservative religious practice in the United States has registered in the works of our authors. These readings begin with a chapter on Barbara Kingsolver's *Poisonwood Bible*, in which Douglas considers how that novel's tale of missionary work and relations among races suggests that religious fundamentalism in America is open to injustice in two related senses: firstly, as it frustrates pluralism (because it disparages other cultural values), and, secondly, as it promotes Western ethnocentrism (because it seeks to impose its own views in preference to those it denies). The chapter on Kingsolver works together with those on Robinson's *Gilead* and Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*, both of which Douglas also reads as treating religion as a matter of cultural identity. Robinson, although a Christian writer, shares with Kingsolver an opposition to fundamentalist religion, but her response to it, Douglas argues, falls short of the mark. At the heart of the problem is an insufficiently probing consideration of the historical relations between American religion and slavery. More specifically, in attending so carefully to Christian abolitionism, and to religion as a private experience, the novel neglects both the history of religious arguments against abolitionism, and the degree to which private religion is foreign to the politically active contemporary conservative Christian. In the case of Roth, Christianity becomes a cultural construct, an identity, that can be adopted independently of faith. As a consequence, Douglas argues, the novel "fundamentally misapprehends" contemporary conservative Christianity, which may use multiculturalism as a veil to advance its agenda, but is finally displeased with any true

religious pluralism. The second half of Douglas's book discusses some more popular texts (Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* and Carl Sagan's *Contact*), as well as Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* and Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*. Douglas sees *Lot 49*, with its networks and indeterminacies, and Oedipa Maas's search for the transcendent, as mapping a "religious desire" for an alternative to a mainstream culture that is at once banal and uncertain. The novel is not, Douglas is careful to clarify, a prophetic anticipation of the conservative Christian resurgence in the decades following its publication, but a striking assessment of the confusions and desires of the historical moment that made the resurgence possible. In the case of the chapter on McCarthy, the violence of *Blood Meridian*, and the meditations of its fascinating and horrifying Judge, are for Douglas a theodical engagement with the debate between creationism and evolution. From this perspective, the novel is a study of a world in which suffering seems not merely a redemptive exercise or a punishment for sin, but an endemic characteristic. In so far as this is the case, the text demands readers reject either the (creationist) idea that the world offers signs revealing the nature of the creator or classical conceptions of God's goodness, as both cannot be compatible with the novel's vision.

Overall, Douglas's points are surprising yet convincing at first blush, and, more importantly, even more so upon consideration of the several arguments he musters in support of them throughout the volume. The result is a critical text that a reader can encounter with that sense of appreciation experienced when an author articulates a cultural condition one intuitively grasps but had never seen clearly enough to describe so well. His argument that conservative Christianity, rather than dwindling into a largely-silenced sociopolitical undercurrent, profited from assumptions entirely compatible with both multiculturalism and postmodernism in its recovery from the decline of social religiosity evident in America after the 1930s is an illuminating perspective on forces that have increasingly defined our cultural moment. Indeed, if there is any fault to be found in Douglas's text, it is that he did not manage to imagine just how successful the Christian postmodernism he describes would become within months of the publication of his book. As post-fact, post-truth discourse is rampant, and the most disheartening populist impulses

regnant, even the most extreme associations in *If God Meant to Interfere* seem not to go far enough in their vision of the challenges US religious practice presents to democratic politics.

Mark C. Taylor's *Rewiring the Real*, the seventh book in Columbia's "Religion, Culture, and Public Life" series (of which Taylor is a co-editor), takes rather a different tack from Leise or Douglas, although it shares their interest in the relations between spiritual concerns and contemporary American culture. It is of course difficult to overstate the degree to which Taylor's earlier work has already shaped scholarship devoted to a variety of topics at the intersection of cultural studies and theology, a point evident in the consideration his work, particularly *After God* (2007), is given in both Leise's and Douglas's books. The contexts for Taylor's remarks in *Rewiring the Real* are several, and he acknowledges the primary ones. In one sense, the book is a companion to his earlier *Refiguring the Spiritual: Beuys, Barney, Turrell, Goldsworthy* (2012), which looks at the work of four visual artists who encourage their audiences to see aspects of our culture, particularly those aspects that have some bearing on its religious sensibilities, that are difficult to recognize. Like that earlier book, this one also deals with one dead (Gaddis) and three living (Powers, Danielewski, DeLillo) figures, the latter of whom seem to have inherited the world anticipated by their predecessor. Another framework for the text is Taylor's interest in the degree to which art and philosophy have informed one another since the publication of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (re)turned the attention of philosophy to art in late-nineteenth-century Jena, where gathered such luminaries as Schleiermacher, Schiller, the Schlegels, Hölderlin, and Novalis. Taylor asserts early in his text that "philosophy has lost its way," becoming "more and more about less and less," and *Rewiring the Real* is an attempted correction that proceeds by making "philosophy ... more artful and art more philosophical" as a means "to create a new opening for the religious imagination" (11). In short, the challenge Taylor sees our culture as having issued to the engaged thinker is nothing less than the recovery of spiritual life in the age of technology, via the revivification of connections between art and philosophy (including especially those connections relevant to the philosophy of religion, which might better be understood as the province of theology). His

response to this challenge is a book that finally works like nothing so much as an experiment in the form of literary criticism, “experiments that begin on, migrate from, and return to the page as we have known it in the past” (11). As this remark suggests, there is a certain progression by digression in Taylor’s book, as he moves among fiction, textual interpretation, autobiographical passages, and images in a fashion that reminds one that the essay as a form was born as a written exploration rather than a telic activity.

Taylor covers an admirable amount of ground. A chapter on Gaddis, focusing on *The Recognitions*, reveals how that book repeatedly collapses binaries into a “nonsynthetic third” term, which joins without uniting its predecessors (13). His argument concerns particularly the tension between the widespread unbelief of the technological present and the cultural recollection of faith. A chapter on Powers primarily discusses *Plowing the Dark*, reading the novel’s dual narratives as evidence that some central mystery will remain forever elusive, a concealment of a transcendent spirituality approached in the novel via the two paths of isolated contemplation and collective technological enterprise. His chapter on Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* is also concerned with mystery, especially the novel’s house that is bigger on the inside than on the outside. For Taylor, this is a figuration of the divine, which is endlessness itself revealed by means of a false container. While each of these chapters has much to recommend it, the chapter on DeLillo’s work, which is largely concerned with portions of *Underworld*, is perhaps the best example of Taylor’s approach. It begins with a fiction, a rewriting of the end of *Point Omega*. This fiction is followed by a shorter critical section, one that reasonably positions the novel in relation to the transition from Cold War to post-Cold War America, particularly insofar as that transition occurred simultaneously with the development of new media technologies and is at least somewhat comprehensible in relation to Marxism. Most of the remainder of the chapter is given over to a sequence that alternates between autobiography—beginning with Taylor’s childhood interest in baseball, including the player Andy Pafo—and reflection on the novel. The blend of the two genres is so extensive that a description of the chapter as belletristic philosophy is perhaps more accurate than is “literary criticism.” An epilogue both extends the reflections on the novel

and returns us to Taylor's biography, as his own endeavors creating earthwork art are brought into dialogue with material already introduced in consideration of DeLillo's text.

Taylor caps his book with an extended conclusion, one that situates his literary-critical readings in the context of tensions that shape thinking within several fields: that between ontological and cosmological theologies, analytic and continental philosophies, modern and postmodern critical theory, and so forth. Insofar as the positions delineated by such terms are those that have tacitly shaped the preceding chapters, one wishes somewhat for their presentation in the introduction, where a more explicit declaration of the book's conceptual framework would be welcome. On the other hand, given that Taylor contends that philosophy has blinded itself to important questions, especially in the wake of the logical positivism of figures such as Carnap, the advisability of opening certain philosophical problems via engagements with select literary texts would seem to be justified, insofar as those encounters proceed via hesitations, recursions, and openings, rather than the more conventional methods of linear argument.

As the above comments suggest, readers must approach Taylor's book on its own terms if they are to enjoy its virtues. Those dissatisfied by lines of inquiry that seem to aim for no particular end will encounter much frustration, although such readers will likewise overlook the way that the divine Taylor conceives may only be able to reveal itself when processes of representation and comprehension are breaking down. Even for readers willing to follow the sometimes-idiosyncratic paths that Taylor's thinking takes, a few disappointments will arise. Perhaps in the interest of highlighting the freshness of his approach, he offers less critical context than scholarly books typically do. As a consequence, one senses the palimpsest of one earlier critic here, and another there, synthesized by the force of Taylor's acumen into new arrangements, but left nevertheless unnoted. This is a risky move, in that he seems to expect readers to trace their own paths through the scholarly thickets, rather than offering the very reasonable courtesy of pointing out some of the routes that led him to the conclusions he presents. Too, there is a need for more careful proofing: "Schlegel" is misspelled early in the text (4), and Simon

Rodia appears throughout as Simon “Rodina”—an error that may especially trouble readers who recall that “Simon” was not even the artist’s actual given name, as DeLillo reminds readers in one of the several passages in *Underworld* that mention the Watts Towers (e.g., *Underworld*, 277). This latter problem is particularly perplexing in a text that attempts to grapple with post-1945 American literature, given the well-known remarks on the Towers by Thomas Pynchon. Ultimately, Schlegel and Rodia are recognizable in spite of the mistakes, but one wonders about what may be regarded as other oversights, such as why Taylor decided against including a chapter on the eminently-suitable Pynchon, or why he does not mention William T. Vollmann even though the long fiction at the start of his chapter on DeLillo employs settings (Slab City, Salvation Mountain) to which no other American novelist has given so much attention. While this reviewer finally applauds Taylor’s attempts to reinvigorate intellectual efforts in a variety of fields simultaneously, in part via experiments with the form of scholarly writing, some qualification of this praise should be kept in mind on the part of those who will likely be less patient in their assessments.

Finally, the three texts under consideration here are recommended for the diversity of informed perspectives they bring to considerations of American religion, and religious thought in America, during an historical moment in which our culture seems increasingly in need of clarification and careful reflection on such matters. The problems they identify are to some extent not entirely unique to American literature—writers from any culture deal with its foundational myths and the role of religious belief and practice in shaping their culture—but the nature and implications of these problems assume forms in America that have been uniquely shaped by our past, from the exceptionalism of our mythic Puritanism, to the Cold-War rhetoric of the “godless Reds,” and beyond. Taken together, these studies offer valuable insights into the ways that America abuses its religious history, is shaped by contradictions in its convictions, and sacrifices spiritual awareness to instrumental thinking. While scholarly exercise alone will not serve as a full corrective, these texts enliven the critical enterprise and provide intellectual grounds for the ongoing work of moderating religious extremism without sacrificing the spiritual.

Big Little Magazines

Review of:

Joe Hagan. *Sticky Fingers: The Life and Times of Jann Wenner and Rolling Stone Magazine* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), 547 pp

Amy Hungerford. *Making Literature Now* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), xii + 199 pp

Ian Morris and Joanne Diaz, eds. *The Little Magazine in Contemporary America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), xx + 236 pp

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In the spring of 1967, Beatlemania and the summer of love were in full flower. *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* was released in the U.K. on May 26th and in the U.S. on June 2nd. It was also at this time that a novella by Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*, first released the previous spring (and itself containing several allusions to The Beatles and their songs), was coming to signal—through multiple re-printings and a growing readership—a new direction for contemporary literature in America. Amidst this flourishing counter-culture of psychedelia and postmodernism, Jann Wenner had an idea for a new magazine.

So he drove to the home of the legendary Bay-area, music critic Ralph Gleason on Ashby Avenue in Berkeley, California, and pitched it to him. “How about a magazine?” asked Wenner. “Like the *Melody Maker* and the *Musical Express*, but an American one that would be different and better and would cover not just the records and the music but would cover the whole culture” (Hagan 78). Gleason not only agreed, but also put up \$1,500 for it and committed to write a column for the magazine entitled “Perspectives” (90). *Rolling Stone* incorporated in the state of California in October of 1967, and the first issue rolled off the presses on the 18th of the same month (94). Fifty years later it is still going strong.

In at least one sense, the origins of *Rolling Stone* magazine are not very unique: ambitious, idealistic person has a vision to found a journal that will fill a gap in the existing media and goes about pursuing it. In another sense though, at least from the perspective of the world of “little magazines,” its level of success and impact is almost unparalleled. While the vast majority of similar efforts either never get off the ground or go on for a few years and then run out of steam, of those that do survive, fewer still thrive, and only a handful such as *Rolling Stone* turn into anything like a critical juggernaut and media empire.

Born in 1946, Wenner was only 21 years old when he founded the little magazine that arguably not only elevated rock criticism into a “serious” genre, but maybe also “made” what we have come to consider “classic rock music.” From the voice of the counter-cultural world of San Francisco in the late sixties to the center of American politics in the 1970s and the founding of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio in the 1980s, Wenner took a counter-cultural little magazine to the pantheon of American culture and publishing. In *Sticky Fingers: The Life and Times of Jann Wenner and Rolling Stone Magazine*, Joe Hagan magisterially charts the birth and ascent of this little magazine, and its legendarily ambitious editor and publisher. Photographer Annie Leibovitz, film director Cameron Crowe, and journalist Hunter S. Thompson among many other writers, critics, and editors built their careers on the foundation of *Rolling Stone*. Its impact on American music, culture, and politics is ubiquitous, and clearly warrants this long and meticulously researched study.

For a fan of classic rock music, especially The Beatles and the Rolling Stones, the story of *Rolling Stone* magazine and its role in shaping this musical genre is an eye-opening one. Hagan covers in great detail the economics, politics, and aesthetics of this little magazine. But as the founder and continuing editor of a journal myself (*symplōkē*), and now also the publisher and editor of another (*American Book Review*), the story of *Rolling Stone* magazine is even more interesting, particularly regarding the moral dilemmas Wenner faced as editor and publisher along the way.

Little magazines are instrumental in shaping literary and cultural values and tastes. However, in spite of growing interest in the study of book and publishing history and culture, rarely have we had the opportunity to read about the genesis and

evolution of a little magazine in the kind of historical detail allotted to it in Hagan's volume. Such detail is usually relegated to individual book publishers and presses—not little magazines and their editors.

Wenner's ruthlessness as an editor and publisher, as portrayed in Hagan's book, is a path that few would be willing to take, let alone maintain for so many years. The story of his interview with John Lennon encapsulates his professional temperament in a nutshell. Using his personal friendship with Lennon (who was also on the first cover of the magazine) to secure a long interview after the breakup of The Beatles, Wenner promised him that he would only publish part of it in the magazine—and never publish the rest. Later, when Wenner saw an opportunity to profit from the publication of the interview in its entirety, he took it— but without Lennon's consent and over his repeated objections. Lennon was furious and never spoke to his "friend" again.

While this happened relatively early in the magazine's history, the pattern of deception for professional gain continued over the course of Wenner's career. For example, when he asked Paul McCartney in the late 1980s to give the induction speech for Lennon at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, McCartney said he would only do so if Wenner would see that he was himself inducted the following year. Wenner promised him this and McCartney delivered the speech, but it would take three years before he was inducted—and McCartney, justifiably, felt he had been deceived.

Much of the book also details the biases underlying the stories and music reviews done in the magazine—not to mention how and why individuals came to grace its "celebrated" cover. For those like myself, who have used and enjoyed the *Rolling Stone Record Guides* since the early 1980s without much thought about their biases, Hagan's book will decisively end that innocence: the illusion (if there ever was any) of their critical objectivity will be long gone after reading this book. *Sticky Fingers* openly documents the music and musicians favored by this little magazine—and the reasons underlying the favor. My favorite example of journalistic bias (and "logrolling") in the magazine is heavy rock bands like Led Zeppelin being offered what came to be known as the Rolling Stone "package deal" (294): in exchange for unlimited backstage access by young rock critic Cameron Crowe they would get positive press

in the magazine—otherwise the magazine would more than likely either ignore or pan them.

Perhaps it is not fair to compare the stories of the twenty or so little magazines represented in Ian Morris and Joanne Diaz's edited volume, *The Little Magazine in Contemporary America* to Hagan's account of Wenner's now not-so-little-magazine, especially if one subscribes to the neoliberal mantra, "the market is all." Sales of Rolling Stone magazine dwarf the sales figures of all of the magazines discussed in Morris and Diaz's volume.

But nevertheless, in many ways, the story of Wenner's founding of a little magazine dedicated to the counter-cultural music and culture of the late 1960s is cut from the same cloth as the stories and memories recounted by the editors and publishers in Morris and Diaz's volume. Small budgets, limited distribution, and topics of appeal to only a select audience are the common story of little magazines in America—and the essays in Morris and Diaz's volume deliver them on cue.

The major difference then between Rolling Stone and the magazines discussed in Morris and Diaz is that the former is the rare example of a little magazine that hit it big. Still, stories about the genesis and evolution of the little magazines that remained relatively little through the courses of their respective histories are important to share because literary and cultural impact is not only determined by sales figures, but also things like literary innovation and cultural diversity—things that little magazines often deliver in spades even if they don't yield huge sales figures.

Divided into five parts dedicated to roughly four little magazines each, this book is well organized. Part 1, "The Editor as Visionary," contains brief publisher statements about BOMB, the *Ontario Review*, *McSweeney's*, and *n+1*. For example, Morris and Diaz adapt a couple of pages from Dave Eggers' introduction to *The Best of McSweeney's* that he wrote on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the magazine in 2013. "Art is made by anarchists and sorted by bureaucrats," writes Eggers (36). Arguing against the "bureaucratic" notion that *McSweeney's* has a "house style," Eggers points out that the magazine has consistently balanced "experimental" writing "with more traditional storytelling" (36). "Issue 3, for example," says Eggers, "included a story by David Foster Wallace that we ran on the journal's spine, but

also featured a 25,000-word essay about Gary Greenberg's correspondence with Ted Kaczynski" (36). "This balance," concludes Eggers, "has held true ever since" (36).

What is interesting here is that Egger's evidence against a "house style" for *McSweeney's*—publication of an "experimental" work by Wallace and Greenberg's correspondence with the "Unabomber"—sounds a lot like the normal contents of *Rolling Stone* which regularly featured "experimental" writing such as the "gonzo" journalism of Thompson alongside accounts of American music, literature, film, politics, and culture. For example, Jason Diamond recently published an article in the magazine with the subhead "Ted Kaczynski was a madman who killed and maimed innocent people—but did some of his worries come true?" ("Flashback: Unabomber Publishes his 'Manifesto,'" 17 August 2017). And the connections between *Rolling Stone* and Wallace are many, including Wallace's 1996 interview with *Rolling Stone* reporter David Lipsky, which became the basis for the film, *The End of the Tour* (2015, dir. James Ponsoldt). Though the interview was never published, Lipsky wrote "The Lost Years & Last Days of David Foster Wallace" for the magazine after the writer's death, which won him the National Magazine Award in 2009.

Comparing *McSweeney's* to *Rolling Stone* shows that the line between the content of a "little magazine" and a "magazine" (or even a "big magazine") is a blurry one, perhaps distinguishable only by the relative success (or failure) of the magazine in terms of sales, longevity, readership, and cultural impact. A case can be made that in these terms, while both of these magazines started out "little," today there is nothing diminutive about either of them (while Hagan establishes this for *Rolling Stone*, Amy Hungerford arguably does the same for *McSweeney's*, as I discuss below).

In part, the "bigness" of these two little magazines can be attributed to the "vision" and drive of their founding editors. "What a fuckin' editor," says Hunter S. Thompson of Wenner. "He's crazy, but he's got a dream" (Hagan, back cover). The same might be said of Eggers, but it is hard to determine this from the 2 pages (or technically 2 1/3 pages) allotted to this "visionary" editor in Morris and Diaz's collection, especially given that his chapter is by far the shortest in a volume where the majority of the entries are 10 or more pages in length with the longest by Bruce Andrews (co-founder of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*) weighing in at 18. With all due respect

to Andrews, who has a lot of interesting things to say about his journal, it might have been better—given the importance of *McSweeney's* to contemporary literature—to split the combined pagination more evenly.

Also, in spite of only the first part of Morris and Diaz's volume being expressly dedicated to "visionary" editors, other selections in the volume provide plenty of material to make a case for their inclusion in this section too (a compliment to the journal editors in the volume, rather than a knock on the editing of Morris and Diaz).

In succession the parts are entitled, "Politics, Culture, and the Little Magazine" (featuring comments on *Callaloo*, *Women's Review of Books*, *Bitch*, and *Asian American Literary Review*), "Innovation and Experimentation: The Literary Avant-Garde" (*Exquisite Corpse*, *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, *Fence*, and *DIAGRAM*), "The University Magazine" (*Creative Nonfiction*, *Southern Review*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, and *New England Review*), and "Today's Magazines and the Future" (*At Length*, *Memorious*, and *Poetry*). All in all, the range of little magazines covered is diverse and wide enough even if some of the choices and editorial statements feel less inspired than others. Nonetheless, the former (viz., provide a range of voices) is what Morris and Diaz mainly aim to achieve with this volume, not so much the latter (viz., provide inspiring editorial statements). Giving these little magazines a voice and allowing their editors and publishers to tell their respective stories is a positive contribution to scholarship on print culture in contemporary America, and reason enough for the volume.

What is missing though is the excitement and energy of fresh and inquisitive eyes critically looking at these publications from outside of their operation—as opposed to only views from the inside. I'm not saying that a journal founder or editor or publisher cannot achieve some critical distance on their journal, but the degree to which this is possible is limited. Wenner's own recounting of the publication history of the complete John Lennon interview would probably be much different to Hagan's. And journal editors are understandably less inclined to report on their "package deals" and "logrollings" than third parties. Fessing up to bias and favoritism is not something that comes easy to editors who partake in it—so reporting on it is better left to third parties, if they can find evidence of it.

When I took over editing and publishing *American Book Review* thirteen years ago, I knew very little about its origin and even less about its day-to-day operation. I was an occasional reviewer for the publication, now to assume the role of sole publisher and editor. Over the years, I've spoken to many individuals about its origins and have received conflicting accounts of not only the story but also its founders. To this day, the origination story of *American Book Review* has more in common with *Rashomon* than the ones told by the journal editors in Morris and Diaz.

But more importantly, I quickly came to see how bias and favoritism operated in a little magazine from the inside: authors started to approach me to not just run reviews of their books, but to run *positive* ones. Why? Because this is what they had come to expect from *American Book Review*. And the day a long-time contributing editor of the journal resigned because I ran a slightly negative review of his dear friend's book was the day that I came to truly understand some of the historical stakes and terms of this little magazine—and why they needed to end.

As Hagan's story of *Rolling Stone* makes abundantly clear, bias and favoritism can come to be the modus operandi of a little magazine (even after it gets big): systematically promote the work of your friends and favorites, and deliberately and consistently dump on or disregard the work of your enemies or things you don't like. To think that literary criticism cannot function similarly to music criticism in this regard is to be naïve as to how many little magazines operate. These are not the little-magazine stories shared in Morris and Diaz: to be fair, such stories are not commonly available outside of the circles of individuals who run these magazines.

What is remarkable about Hagan's book is the level of detail he has put together regarding a single magazine—and its editor and publisher. But Hagan, who is a professional exposé-writer (of Hillary Clinton, Karl Rove, the Bush family, Henry Kissinger, Dan Rather, Goldman Sachs, *The New York Times*, and Twitter, among others), is in some ways the ultimate journalistic outsider on this subject in the same way that the journal editors themselves in the Morris and Diaz volume are the ultimate insiders. What happens though if we turn a literary critic with historicist inclinations onto a subject like little magazines? What different kinds of insight might she generate?

Amy Hungerford's *Making Literature Now* in fact covers some of the same ground as the Morris and Diaz volume, with the first two chapters devoted to *McSweeney's* literary quarterly and press. Given that "533 different writers appeared in the first 31 issues...—and thousands of others read their work, mapping the social geography of *McSweeney's* distribution around the world" (2)—it is an especially rich little magazine and press from which to gain a sense of "contemporary" American publishing (even though Hungerford prefers "post-1945" or "20th century" to describe the field of the "contemporary") (143). But unlike Hagan and probably all of the contributors to the Morris and Diaz volume (though it is not completely clear from their contributions), Hungerford sees the "social" world and "making" of contemporary literature in a theoretically unique and self-consciously "daunting" way.

Drawing upon the sociology of Bruno Latour, Hungerford believes that

social connections only deserve the name when they are acted upon, that the social only exists at all when its networks are activated, and what's more, the social actors come in both human and nonhuman forms. Our connections to other people only constitute social organization when we, or nonhuman actors like books, apps, or delivery truck routes, act to change or shape the arrangements in which we live—be they material, cultural, environmental, geographic, psychic, intellectual. (4)

She acknowledges though that this method of inquiry can be "daunting and tedious and threaten to devolve into what one colleague called 'a heap of facts': being *there* to see the conversations that make things happen in whatever field of endeavor we want to understand; raking the archives not for recollection or record but for the actual trace of a social act as it unfolded, and not just one social act but an infinite series of them; cramming them, by force of method, into the book one writes" (4). Consequently, application of Latour's method, termed "Actor-Network-Theory" (or simply, "ANT"), yields for Hungerford a much finer-grained response to questions regarding the making of a little magazine and literature. Simple statements about its production as found in Morris and Diaz are rejected as methodologically unsound when considered outside of the wider network of actors involved in the making of the

little magazine. And though Hagan uses extensive interviews and archival research to produce an account of the making of *Rolling Stone*, his book too falls short of the methodological bar set by ANT.

Viewing *McSweeney's* from the point of view of social networks and regarding non-human actors such as the technologies of publication (e.g. Aldus Pagemaker as it became Adobe PageMaker) and apps (e.g. the subscription app created for *McSweeney's* by Russell Quinn) yields a much different account of the little magazine than simple pronouncements about it from its editor—even celebrity ones such as Eggers. This allows Hungerford to treat “the subscription” and “the iphone” as “actors” in the story of the rise of *McSweeney's* on the same par as its editors, authors, and readers. It also allows her to widen the social network around this little magazine to include not only its celebrity authors such as Eggers, David Foster Wallace and Rick Moody, but also its “subsistence writers” and “volunteer, part-time literati” (6).

But Hungerford is also emphatic that this method *should not* be applied to just any little magazine or writer. Rather, it should be applied to celebrity little magazines and writers, rather than failed ones. Why? Because stories about failed or briefly-known little magazines and writers

lack the intrinsic attraction of accounts that focus on the charismatic, the successful, and the well known. Insofar as the failed or only briefly visible writers vastly outnumber the successful ones, and insofar as it doesn't take much in the way of disaster to stop most of us from writing our novel, their stories may lack both interest and individuality; the banality of failure doesn't make for good reading. (14)

To be honest, neither do short accounts of little (and relatively unknown) magazines—particularly when placed beside accounts of celebrated ones—but I digress. The argument as to the value (“good” or “bad”) of reading about “failure” versus “success” is not nearly as well developed as her argument about “close” versus “surface” reading. Still, it would be an interesting one to develop at some point.

Hungerford makes a strong case in *Making Literature Now* both against traditional “close-reading,” and in favor of what might be called “surface reading.”

The argument made at different points throughout the book against close-reading—controversial because of the affinity many scholars and critics have for it—amounts to the fact that close-reading does not provide us with much insight into the network in which little magazines or literature function: that is, Hungerford says, drawing on Franco Moretti, “traditional closed reading is blind to the fabric.” For that matter, even if we advocated for close reading, to perform it on just the “actual literary production of a single year of the 19th century would take many lifetimes” states Hungerford, let alone the 55,000 novels that were published in 2010 alone (14).

Her point about limited close-reading time comes up most notoriously in the final chapter of the book, “On Not Reading DFW.” After she submitted a negative piece on David Foster Wallace to the *LA Review of Books*, aiming to provide some balance to the “Saint Dave phenomenon,” the editor responded to Hungerford’s argument as to why she does not want to read more Wallace by telling her she needed to read *more* Wallace. Focusing on his personal misogyny, and “[t]he fact that Wallace makes a subject out this aspect of his behavior,” she refuses to read any more of his writing—even though he is “intermittently regretful about his behavior toward women” (151). She decided that further reading of Wallace would be a poor use of her time—and wrote an article defending her decision. The editor’s comment assumed “that a refusal can’t, in the absence of more reading, have an intellectual or scholarly relationship to a professional decision about resource allocation—about what to spend one’s (limited) time doing” (160).

Understand, Hungerford is not telling *us* that we should not read Wallace, but rather stating and defending her own position, which of course she is more than entitled to do. What is more interesting about her refusal (and an editor’s response to it) is that she refuses to read Wallace while at the same time serving on a doctoral committee at Yale University, where she is a professor of English and Dean of Humanities, for a graduate student who is writing on recovery culture—and using Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*. “For me, the most persuasive of reasons to be interested in Wallace right now is that as Jamison’s [doctoral] advisor I want to be in conversation with her, and to be the best conversation partner I can be might in the end require

that I read Wallace's novel," states Hungerford (156). "My respect for Jamison as a writer and thinker makes me open to the task" (156).

A similar dilemma is described in the preceding chapter regarding Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Everything Is Illuminated*, which she describes as "an aesthetic innovation within the history of American Holocaust narratives" (123). For Hungerford, Foer's generation of Holocaust writing is "a field not defined by the original genres and their cultural stature—or by the tighter relational bond of parent and child, with its accompanying filial pieties" (124). It "is defined rather by questions of personal achievement and recognition in a network of values that distill out of the larger batch of new writers a subgroup we might call the bi-coastal young literati" (124).

The literature of this field is not one that often sits well with scholars of contemporary literature for it is one in which "writing remains a prestigious avenue to fame" (124). Or, in the case of Foer, is motivated by a need for "attention" (and for Hungerford, "*Foer loves attention*") (137). Still, in spite of its vain motivations—or perhaps *because* of them, *Everything is Illuminated* was selected by her students to be the final novel in her "American Novel since 1945" course. "I had to read it," writes Hungerford, "and deliver two fresh lectures." "My students' love—produced by and mediated through the literary press, peer sociality, and the classroom—produced, if not exactly more love, then at least more attention ..."—for, of course, Foer (139).

The middle two chapters of *Making Literature Now* focus on the use of the net and apps to produce innovative and interesting ways of reading (or relating with) and making literature. However, the Small Demons web venture she describes in Chapter 3 is now "closed" and the Red Lemonade web site "appears, as of this writing, to be inactive" (170). Still, her account in Chapter 4 of the serialized, exploratory novel for iPad and iPhone, *The Silent History* (in spite of its unfortunate publication as a bound book by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in 2014)—is one of the highlights of the volume as it persuasively demonstrates how human and nonhuman "actors" can participate in a network that is making literature now.

In spite of their differences in methodology, *Making Literature Now* and *Sticky Fingers* both demonstrate well the impact of little magazines in the making of

literature, music—and celebrity. However, the effective and convincing use of actor-network-theory by Hungerford in the cause of understanding contemporary (or “post-1945”) literature begs for a similar approach to the celebrated networks associated with *Rolling Stone*. One wonders, for example, how Wenner’s publication of Lennon’s full *Rolling Stone* interview against his consent appears when considering not just the editor and the musician, but also a wider network of nonhuman actors, the most obvious being subscriptions, as discussed in Hungerford’s account of *McSweeney’s*. Other non-human actors that might be included in an ANT account of *Rolling Stone* are MTV and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, both of which play a large role in Hagan’s account.

As a journal founder myself, I can empathize with the difficulty of the task charged to the contributors of the Morris and Diaz volume. It is not easy to articulate an engaging account of the origins, aims, and futures of a little magazine. But as Hungerford makes abundantly clear in her book, the material we choose to investigate, the questions we ask, and the approach we utilize to answer them in large part tempers the appeal of the response. While accounts of celebrity writing (or music) networked with little magazines is intrinsically fascinating, copious details about little-known, little-read, and little-celebrated magazines can have a somnolent effect on even the most dedicated purveyor of small press literature and culture.

Hungerford raises the bar on accounts of how literature is made and how we tell the story of little magazines. And as Hagan has demonstrated, albeit in a more conventional form, the cultural and economic possibilities of little magazines can be large, when cultivated and networked by a strong and determined actor (Wenner). In short, Hungerford shows how making literature now involves far more today than simply the artist as sole actor or creative genius. Rather, literature now involves a range of actors—both human and nonhuman—put into a dynamic network of creative possibility. The ways of describing making literature now in Hungerford’s book tease us with the possibilities of using a similar approach on other celebrated works and authors. I’m all for convincing her now to take on works like *Sgt. Pepper* and *Lot 49*, if not The Beatles and Pynchon. They’re both post-1945—and both much celebrated.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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