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"TStanding alone in the world... she cast away the fragments of a broken chain. The world's law was no law for her mind."

- Nathaniel Hawthorne,
from *The Scarlet Letter*

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THE HEATH ANTHOLOGY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

Fall 2001 • Number 23

newsletter

Teaching American Literature in Spain: Approaches and Contexts for Integrated Programs

Ana Manzananas Calvo (Universidad de Salamanca)
Jesús Benito Sánchez (Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha)

It seems a long time ago now since Prof. Javier Coy started teaching a course on American Literature at the University of Salamanca, Spain, in 1968. It was actually the beginning of the teaching of American literature in the country. Since then, and particularly in the last decades, the teaching of American Literature has undergone a process of enormous diversification as new generations of Americanists have entered Academe. The so called "classics" are still studied and figure prominently in university syllabi, but these new waves of Americanists have introduced the study of literature written by women, as well as by "minoritized" writers, and, to a lesser extent, other genres traditionally considered subliterary such as detective or science fiction. As a result, and to a certain extent mirroring the debate over the nature, origins and limits of American Literature between traditionalists and so called "New Americanists" in the United States, American literature has become a rather contested arena. The conflict is well known and goes back, as Gerald Graff *e.a.* remind us, to a longstanding tension in the discipline between "the impulse to rigorously define and circumscribe the field," proposing a clear description of high literature and a set of presumably adequate critical procedures, and "the competing impulse to broaden and extend the discipline's borders" (1996: 263), through the introduction of new voices and new critical practices. In

many cases the borders between the two positions are clear cut in Spanish Academe. The traditional core curriculum has been fragmented through optional courses, introduced mainly through a series of curriculum revisions carried out in the late eighties and early nineties; as a result American Literature has become a "bifurcated" discipline between those who generally teach required courses devoted to traditional figures in the field, and those who commit themselves to the teaching of optional courses and cover what are generally known as "marginal" figures or "new" voices. For the traditional group the study of these "new" writers is merely circumstantial and fashionable. They explain their presence in university syllabi as a question of political correctness which has nothing to do with literary excellence, and perhaps more importantly, does not alter the presumably truthful and durable vision of what American Literature is. At most, these scholars are ready to concede a certain "cultural diversity" (in Bhabha's terminology) in America, and only in so far as the "Other" cultures are located and explained within the accepted Angloamerican grid. Distrust works the other way too; the new generations of Americanists in Spanish Academe seriously downplay the contacts and interactions between the dominant tradition and all the others, and are willing to promote so-called ethnic American literatures by separating the

diverse groups into particular traditions studied separately. This process has a professional parallel, as the new Americanists in Spain somewhat show forms of the “anxiety of influence” which makes them negate the work of the previous generations of scholars in order to affirm their new own way of understanding the field.

How to break out of this dichotomy? In *Canons and Contexts* (1991) Paul Lauter proposes what seems a most balanced approach to the study of American Literature, what he terms “a comparativist mode.” The comparativist approach seems a powerful corrective to the growing divide between the different generations of Americanists, and, in our view, can prove especially useful in the context of American Studies in Spain. The great advantage of this perspective is not only that it immerses the reader and teacher in the unknown, but also provides new perspectives on traditional works:

the comparative study of American literatures allows us to examine traditionally established works from fresh perspectives provided by minority and white female texts. Frederick Douglass' use of books illuminates in quite new ways Emerson's ideas of the value of letters; Harriet Jacobs' [Linda Brent] years in an attic cast an oblique light on Thoreau's more comfortable notions of simplification, of where one lives, and what one lives for . . . Most of all, a comparative strategy allows us to see Anglo-European male writing as but one voice, albeit loud and various, in the chorus of 'American' culture'. (1991: 51)

This comparative perspective could only become real, especially in the academic world outside the U.S., when the necessary editorial steps were taken to offer students and scholars easy access to a whole new set of texts. That editorial void has been magnificently filled by *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, which since its first edition in 1989 has truly offered new vistas in the study of American Literature, at home as much as abroad. *The Heath* allows students and teachers alike to dialogue both with traditional and non-traditional voices, and to multiply the analyses of interactions between texts and writers over different issues, breaking up all monocultural illusions. Our ideas about Transcendentalism, for example, can

be further qualified when we compare it with Margaret Fuller's vision of women, or with the distinctive voice of slaves such as Frederick Douglass's or Harriet Jacobs'. The problematic construction of the American takes on new nuances when we compare the underlying principles of Franklin's autobiography with those of Paine, Jefferson, Olaudah Equiano and Samson Occom. The meaning of tradition and its representation in

...American literature has become a “bifurcated” discipline between those... devoted to traditional figures in the field, and those who commit themselves to... “marginal” figures or “new” voices.

Modernist poetry is somewhat refracted when studied in the context of the Harlem Renaissance. The comparativist perspective these examples illustrate not only puts together names and visions of literature and writing, but rather advocates a more dialogical approach which helps us understand different works relationally. Traditional and non-traditional works create new sets of relationships which destabilize both the alleged canonicity of the first group as well as the liminal or marginal status of the second. This is the destabilizing frame of the comparativist approach which the publishing of *The Heath* made possible, and which we have tried to illustrate in the program below. If the opening of the canon in American Literature has discovered, as Sacvan Bercovitch pointed out in the introduction to *The Cambridge History of American Literature* (1995, 1996, 1999), what he terms “a new-found-land” (1995: 2), the comparative perspective critics such as Paul Lauter or Ramón Saldivar advocate, also opens a new world of literary dialogues and interconnections.

But the question still remains as to

what extent this comparative approach to American literature can work beyond the academic centers of the discipline, or how well it translates in different cultural and historical contexts. If we center particularly on the Spanish academic world we outlined before, the new model of American studies proves especially fecund, despite (or maybe as a result of) its obvious specificity. Just like many other countries in Western Europe, contemporary Spain has been witnessing an incredible influx of immigrants coming from Latin America, Asia, and, more significantly, from North Africa. Despite increasing cases of racial segregation and xenophobia it seems impossible to deny that these immigrants are not only solving the problem of the scarcity of fieldworkers, and alleviating one of the lowest birth rates in the world, but also infusing the traditional homogeneity of Spanish society and culture with some diversity. For others, this still moderate influx of immigrants is the price we pay for becoming an affluent country, and for finally entering Europe (a secular claim for a country traditionally considered as “in-between” Europe and Africa, not fully either one).

It is rather ironic, however, that the moment we are finally entering Europe, the African “Other” is entering us again. In our flight North our history has finally caught up with us. A simple and significant image can clarify this process. We need only picture the Spanish middle-class citizen glorying at the sight of the beautiful Alhambra in Granada, with its magnificent Moorish decoration, while the Moroccan immigrant at the entrance faces the threat of expulsion. The illegal Moroccan immediately becomes a sign charged with distress. The sight forces us to question the construction of a homogeneous national society and culture in Spain, a country traditionally traversed by settlers (mainly Arabs, Jews and gypsies), and radically determined by its long and vast history of colonization in Latin-America. In this context of a clearly homogeneous national culture, constructed through the silent and continuous erasure of the presence of the African and Latin-American Other, the introduction of a

revised American Studies curriculum can produce most significant cultural work. As Latin American and North African immigrants increasingly transgress the well-defined borders of the homogeneous national culture and geography, Spain is starting to confront its colonial and intercultural history, and to redefine its own cultural identity. In a certain sense, Spain is being forced to go through the different stages American culture and society have been going through over the last few decades. It is in this arena where the academic introduction of a curriculum in American literature which lays the emphasis on fusion and interaction, on the spaces in-between cultures and nations, on discovering the inevitable *mestizaje* still informing any national culture, proves all its ideological importance. This comparative perspective on American literature can highlight for the Spanish students the full "transnational and translational" (Bhabha 1994: 5) nature of culture, and bring all the complex interweavings of history to the fore. The program we propose intends to highlight the "contact zones," to use Mary Louise Pratt's term (1992: 6), in American literature, those processes of interaction, appropriation, fusion and revision between the diverse cultures involved in the construction of the U.S.; it is also designed to make the Spanish student rethink the very process of national construction at home.

Works Cited

Bhabha, Homi 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Gerald Graff and Evan Carton 1996. "Criticism Since 1940." In *The Cambridge History of American Literature. Volume VIII: Poetry and Criticism*. Ed. Sacvan Bercovitch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lauter, Paul 1991. *Canons and Contexts* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pratt, Mary Louise 1992. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*.

London: Routledge.

PROGRAM

The study of American Literature at the University of Salamanca is divided into the introductory course we describe below, as well as other required courses such as "Nineteenth-Century American Literature," "Twentieth-Century American Poetry," "The American Novel Between the Wars," "Twentieth-Century American Drama," and "The American Novel After World War II," together with other optional courses.

...Spain is starting to confront its colonial and intercultural history, and to redefine its own cultural identity.

N.B. This article was prepared prior to the publication of the Fourth Edition of the Heath Anthology. Page references are to the Third Edition.

I: General Introduction to the Study of American Literature

First Year
6 Credits (42 hours)

1. PROGRAM AND READINGS:

INTRODUCTION:

The nature of "American Civilization." America vs. Europe. Introduction to major themes in American literature and culture.

1. Native American Traditions

The diversity of the cultural traditions. The power of the word. The conception of "authorship". The "performance" of literature. Major themes. The encounter with the Europeans.

Readings:

"The Beginning of Sickness"; "The Europeans Arrive" (HAAL I 7)

"How America Was Discovered" (according to Handsome Lake) (HAAL I 182-84)

"Talk Concerning the First Beginning" (Zuni) (HAAL I 27-41)

"Wohpe and the Gift of the Pipe" (Lakota) (HAAL I 54-56)

2. The Literature of Colonization

Columbus and the vision of the New World and its inhabitants. The New World as earthly "Paradise". "Indian" as a misnomer. Other explorers and accounts.

The Anglo-Americans and the New World. Travel writing and English explorers. John Smith as a promoter of colonization. Pocahontas and the pattern of submission to a "superior" civilization.

Readings:

Columbus: from Journals (HAAL I 117-128)

John Smith: from The Generall Historie of Virginia (HAAL I 186-191); from A Description of New England (HAAL I 192-194)

3. Puritans and Puritanism

Religion, politics and literature in the colonies. The vision of the New World as the New Canaan. The writing of a Providential history. The natives.

Readings:

William Bradford: from Of Plymouth Plantation (HAAL I 247-66)

Thomas Morton: from New English Canaan (HAAL I 212-18)

Anne Bradstreet: "The Prologue"; "The Author to Her Book";

"Contemplations" (HAAL I 291-302)

Mary Rowlandson: from A Narrative of the Captivity (HAAL 343-66)

Jonathan Edwards: from "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (HAAL 592-603)

4. The Revolution and the emergence of the "American voice" in literature

Political thought and the Enlightenment. The problematic construction of the "American": visions

on identity, ethnicity and the nation in Benjamin Franklin, St. Jean De Crèvecoeur, Thomas Paine, John Henry Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Olaudah Equiano and Samson Occom.

Readings:

Franklin: from Autobiography (HAAL I 762-819)

Crèvecoeur: "What is an American" (HAAL I 854-59)

Paine: from Common Sense (HAAL I 885-90)

Adams: from Autobiography of John Adams (HAAL I 904-905)

Jefferson: from Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson (HAAL I 919-923)

Equiano: from The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano (HAAL I 1019-36)

Occom: from A Short Narrative of My Life (HAAL I 981-87)

5. Explorations of the "American Self":

Emerson, Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Frederick Douglass: a comparative approach. Different responses to "what is an American." Romantic impulses, freedom and its limitations.

Readings:

Emerson: "The American Scholar"; "Self-Reliance" (HAAL I 1609-38); "The Poet" (HAAL I 1646-61)

Thoreau: from Walden (HAAL I 2107-17)

Margaret Fuller: from Woman in the Nineteenth Century (HAAL I 1634-62)

Frederick Douglass: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (HAAL I 1762-70; 1777-81)

6. The Fiction: The Short Story

Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, Edgar Allan Poe

Readings:

Irving: "Rip Van Winkle"; "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (HAAL I 1342-73)

Cooper: from The Pioneers (HAAL I 1406-25)

Poe: "Ligeia" (HAAL I 1450-1461)

7. The Flowering of Narrative

Nathaniel Hawthorne and the vision of puritanism. The use of allegory. Herman Melville; the complexity of his style. Melville as our contemporary.

African American novelists: William Wells Brown.

Readings:

Hawthorne: "Young Goodman Brown"

(HAAL I 2207-16) "Rappaccini's Daughter" (HAAL I 2236-56)

Melville: "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (HAAL I 2402-28)

Brown: from Clotel (HAAL I 2588-96)

8. The Poetry of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson

Whitman's poetic revolution; the poet of democracy; poetic evolution. Emily Dickinson and a new aesthetic. Her vision of love, death, religion and nature.

Readings:

Whitman: from Leaves of Grass: "Song of Myself" (HAAL I 2743-94)

Dickinson: poems 14, 280; 324 (HAAL I 2861-62; 2867-68; 2875)

9. Visions of Realism I: "The Local Color School"

"The Local color school" and the exploration of different spaces, from rural areas to Jewish slums. The belief in the free moral agency of the individual. Sarah Orne Jewett, George Washington Cable, Bret Harte, Joel Chandler Harris, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Charles Chesnutt.

Readings:

Jewett: "A White Heron" (HAAL II

132-139)

Harris: "The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story" (HAAL II 337-38)

Dunbar: "We Wear the Mask" (HAAL II 389-390)

Chesnutt: "The Passing of Grandison" (HAAL II 365-76)

10. Visions of Realism II: Mark Twain, William Dean Howells and Henry James

Twain and his vision of realism. The use of the vernacular. The point of view. Humorous vs comic.

Howells and the unromanticized view of commonplace American experience. The affirmation of middle-class values. The agency of the individual.

James and the combination of realism and psychological exploration. The point of view. The use of imagery and symbolism. America vs Europe.

Readings:

Twain: "Sociable Jimmy" (HAAL II 274-76)

James: from Daisy Miller (HAAL II 452-470)

11. Women and Writing

The literature of "The new woman." Common themes of inequality, repression, and racism. Frances Harper, Kate Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Pauline Hopkins and Edith Wharton.

Readings:

Harper: from Iola Leroy (HAAL II 697-704)

Chopin: "Desirée's Baby" (HAAL II 529-33)

Gilman: "The Yellow Wall-Paper" (HAAL II 725-37)

This comparativist perspective on American literature can highlight for the Spanish students the full "transnational and translational" nature of culture, and bring all the complex interweavings of history to the fore.

12. Naturalism

Environmental forces vs human agency. Naturalism and the American Dream. The questioning of popular notions of heroism. The comparison with O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*.

Readings:

Stephen Crane: "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" (HAAL II 624-32)
Jack London: "South of the Slot" (HAAL II 637-48)
Theodore Dreiser: "Typhoon" (HAAL II 1179-1204)
Upton Sinclair: from *The Jungle* (HAAL II 782-802)
Rebecca Harding Davies: "Life in the Iron-Mills" (HAAL II 45-70)
Ambrose Bierce: "Chickamauga" (HAAL 555-59)

14. Modernism

Transitional figures. Late realism and pre-modernism. Edwin Arlington Robinson and Robert Frost.

The reaction against the past and the critique of the modern age. Alienation and fragmentation. The new Poetry and formal experimentation.

Readings:

Edwin Arlington Robinson: "Mr. Flood's Party" (HAAL II 998-999)
Robert Frost: "Mending Wall" (HAAL II 1149-50)
Ezra Pound: "A Pact"; "In a Station of the Metro"; "A Retrospect" (HAAL II 1219-21)
H.D.: "Sea Rose" (HAAL 1341-42)
Gertrude Stein: from *The Geographical History of America* (HAAL II 1261-64)
William Carlos Williams: "Portrait of a lady"; "Spring and All"; "The Red Wheelbarrow" (HAAL II 1272-73; 1277)
T.S. Eliot: "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"; "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (HAAL II 1399-1403; 1405-11)
Marianne Moore: "England"; "What Are Years" (HAAL 1503-05; 1509)
Wallace Stevens: "Sunday Morning" (HAAL 1534-38)
e. e. cummings: "Buffalo Bill's"; "The Cambridge Ladies ..." "i like my body

..." "since feeling is first" (HAAL II 1386-87; 1387-88; 1388; 1389-90)

16. "The Harlem Renaissance"

Connections with Modernism. Harlem as a cultural mecca. The influence of Locke and Du Bois. The vernacular as a literary theme. The historical consciousness.

Readings:

Alain Locke: "The New Negro" (HAAL II 1584-92)
Jean Toomer: "Karintha"; "Song of the Son"; "Blood-Burning Moon" (HAAL II 1594-95; 1595-96; 1596-1601)
Langston Hughes: "I, Too"; "Harlem"; (HAAL II 1618-19)
Countee Cullen: "From the Dark Tower" (HAAL II 1644)
Gwendolyn B. Bennet: "Heritage" (HAAL II 1650-51)
Sterling Brown: "Ma Rainey" (HAAL II 1663-64)
Claude McKay: "If We Must Die"; "America" (HAAL II 1689; 1691)

17. Modernist Fiction

The modernist novel and its peculiarities. The treatment of new and tabu issues. The influence of the cinema. The feeling of alienation and formal experimentalism. The different perspectives. Fragmentation vs continuity. Expatriates and the new vision of the American hero.

Readings:

Ernest Hemingway: "Hills Like White Elephants" (HAAL II 1522-25)
William Faulkner: "A Rose for Emily"; "Barn Burning" (HAAL 1548-66)

18. Social Writing in the '30s. Immigrant Writing

The return to realism. Visions of the American dream. Other traditions.

The drama: Clifford Odets, Lillian Hellman, Elmer Rice and Thornton Wilder.

Readings:

Anzia Yezierska: "America and I" (HAAL II 1745-52)

Pietro Di Donato: "Christ in Concrete" (HAAL II 1984-93)

Morning Dove: from *Coyote Stories* (HAAL II 1830-36)

19. The Literature of the South

The short story and its tradition. The Southern elements. Humor. The grotesque.

Readings:

Katherine Ann Porter: "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" (HAAL II 1486-92)
Eudora Welty: "The Wide Net" (HAAL II 2133-48)
Flannery O'Connor: "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (HAAL II 2165-75)

20. Fiction in the '50s

Different developments of post-war fiction. Jewish and African American fictions. The Beat Generation. J. D. Salinger. The New Journalism. John Updike, Norman Mailer.

Readings:

Joyce Carol Oates: "Where Are You Going ...?" (HAAL II 2178-89)
James Baldwin: "Sonny's Blues" (HAAL II 2222-44)
Tillie Olsen: "Tell Me a Riddle" (HAAL II 2267-94)
Norman Mailer: from *The Armies of the Night* (HAAL II 3014-24)
Bernard Malamud: "The Magic Barrel" (HAAL II 2592-2604)

21. Poetry from the '50s to the '70s

The formal, impersonal poetry of the post-war. The Black Mountain School. The Beat Generation. The Confessional poets. African American poetry.

Readings:

Elizabeth Bishop: "Filling Station" (HAAL II 2326-28)
Robert Lowell: "Memories of West Street and Lepke" (HAAL II 2329-31)
Gwendolyn Brooks: "The Mother"; "We Real Cool"; "The Last Quatrain ..." (HAAL II 2343-44; 2344; 2348-49)
Margaret Walker: "For My People" (HAAL II 1970-72)
Sylvia Plath: "Daddy"; (HAAL II 2407-09)

Anne Sexton: "Her Kind";
"Housewife" (HAAL II 2417-18)
Allen Ginsberg: "America" (HAAL II 2452-54)

22. Fiction in the '60s and '70s: Postmodernism

The dissolution of social and political markers. The disappearance of the "grand narratives." The breaking of boundaries between high and popular cultures. Ethnic difference as a central expression of postmodern life.

Experimental forms: the mixing of incongruous elements, voices and points of view. The rejection of closure.

Readings:

John Barth: "Lost in the Funhouse" (HAAL II 2877-93)
Donald Barthelme: "At the End of the Mechanical Age" (HAAL II 2894-98)
Ishmael Reed: "I'm a Cowboy in the Boat of Ra" (HAAL II 2909-11)

23. Contemporary Fiction

Neorealist and magical realistic narratives. Jewish, African American, Native American, and Asian American fictions. Minimalism

Readings:

Cynthia Ozick: "The Shawl" (HAAL II 2606-09)
N. Scott Momaday: from *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (HAAL II 2750-59)
Rudolfo Anaya: from *Bless Me, Última* (HAAL II 2632-41)
Leslie Marmon Silko: "Lullaby" (HAAL II 3202-09)
Toni Morrison: from *Sula* (HAAL II 3230-37)
Raymond Carver: from *Cathedral* (HAAL 3101-16)

24. Poetry of the Present

Different forms and themes. Formal experimentation.

Readings:

Carolyn Forché: from *The Country Between Us* (HAAL II 3034-35)
Michael Harper: "Here Where Coltrane Is" (HAAL II 2729-30)
Garrett Kaoru Hongo: "Stepchild" (HAAL II 2807-17)
Audre Lorde: "Power" (HAAL II 2939-

40)
Joy Harjo: "New Orleans" (HAAL II 3119-21)

2. **AIMS:** To offer the student a comprehensive and integrated survey of the history of American Literature, its major writers and movements as well as other voices from the colonial period to the present. It is also the purpose of this course to be an introduction to "American Culture" and civilization.

3. FURTHER ACTIVITIES

Film projections:
Birth of a Nation
Winds of Change (Scott Momaday on Native Americans) (USIA)
Pocahontas
A Rose for Emily (USIA)
Young Goodman Brown (USIA)
The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter

4. ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY¹

R. W. Horton and H. W. Edwards's *Backgrounds of American Literary Thought* (1952) is already a classic. It includes short biographies and brief bibliographies of authors, with information about their style and subjects, along with historical outlines of literary movements. Vernon Louis Parrington's *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927) is also a seminal work that investigates the social, economic, and political backgrounds of American literature with critical judgments made on the basis of social significance, rather than literary merit.

Literary histories of American Literature provide first-hand information of what American literature is and has been. Particularly interesting is Moses Coit Tyler's *A History of American Literature 1607-1763*. Written in 1878, Tyler's approach to literature is "nationalistic." He divides his study into "The First Colonial Period: 1607-1676" and "The Second Colonial period 1676-1765." The study places special emphasis on the literature of Virginia and New England. Though particularly outdated, Spiller's *Literary History of the United States* (1948; rev. 1974) is still useful. It offers a homogeneous and monocultural reading of the rise of American civilization and culture from its colonial origins to the

1960s. The ethnic and multicultural roots of American literature are totally erased. Further updates and revisions have not significantly changed the slant of this work. Spiller's *Cycle of American Literature* (1965) presents major American writers (from Edwards to Faulkner) as they undergo different and gradual stages: acceptance of European conventions; later abandonment of these conventions; the gradual construction of an American literature.

Marcus Cunliffe in *The Literature of the United States* (1954, rev. ed. 1986) offers biographical as well as sociocultural information about the writers. In the 1986 edition he devotes new chapters to women's and Southern literature. Walter Blair e.a.'s *American Literature* (1964) is a chronological study of American literature which presents conventional divisions. Instead of a series of names, however, Blair e.a. divide each chapter into "Intellectual Currents" and "Literary Trends." This division helps to place individual writers and their works. For a generic approach to American Literature see Ihab Hassan's *Contemporary American Literature 1945-1973*. After a General Introduction Hassan devotes a chapter to the American novel, poetry and drama.

Several modern literary histories have broken down the tradition established by Spiller. Sacvan Bercovitch's *Reconstructing American Literary History* (1986) is a first attempt at presenting discontinuity and disruption as the driving force of American literature. A more massive endeavour is Emory Elliott's *Columbia Literary History of the United States* (1988), which though uneven in merit, offers a multicultural and postmodernist revision of the birth and development of American literature into the 1980s. Also published in 1988, Boris Ford's edition of *American Literature* appears as another conventional history of American literature if compared with Elliott's. Peter Conn's *Literature in America: An Illustrated History* (1989) is a useful study, if sometimes too restricted in the scope of writers studied. Conn's work describes literary documents within a chronological framework and

offers a sampling of America's accomplishments in the visual arts.

Still in the making, with only four volumes already out, *The Cambridge History of American Literature* (1994-99) is particularly profound and rich in detail, and it covers the full range of American literature as perceived today.

For the colonial period and the literature of Puritanism see these few suggestions: Michael Gilmore's edition of *Early American Literature: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1980) is particularly interesting and varied. It covers the literature produced in America between the founding of Jamestown in 1607 and the end of the 18th century. More specific studies on Puritanism and its effects in later literature include Bercovitch's *The American Jeremiad* (1987). Bercovitch contends that the writers of the American Renaissance participated in the Puritan notion of the elect nation. In *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (1975) Bercovitch turns to Puritan literature to see its imprint on 19th century literature (Hawthorne and Emerson). Another important study is Emory Elliott's *Puritan Influences in American Literature* (1979). In this work Elliott examines the Puritan roots for much of American's later literature (Hawthorne, Thoreau, Melville and Dickinson).

The series *Taller de estudios norteamericanos*, published by the University of León (Spain), is a good tool for the Spanish reader. Each volume offers a general introduction as well as bilingual editions of key texts.

1 The bibliographies offered here are based on the rather limited funds available at the university libraries of the University of Salamanca and the University of Castilla - La Mancha in Spain.

Correcting An Oversight: Suggestions for Additions to and Revisions of the Heath's Selection of Italian American Literature

Paul Giaimo, Highland Community College

At the time of this writing, the current second volume of the 4th edition of *The Heath Anthology* contains a brief selection of Pietro DiDonato's groundbreaking 1939 novel, *Christ in Concrete*. But since the 1920s, 9 anthologies, 20 works of criticism, 120 poetic works and 224 works of fiction including Don DeLillo's renowned text *Underworld*, a critical success and best-seller compared by reviewers to Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*, have been written by or about Italian Americans and their literature. Yet many students of American literature are only familiar with one or two Italian American writings. Such critical neglect might dangerously evoke the commonplace stereotyping of Italian Americans as non-intellectuals. My purpose here is to suggest additional texts, and offer critical appraisals of the same, which could be used in an American Literature Survey Course properly representative of the past 100 years of the Italian American contribution to American literature.

To begin, the choice of *Christ in Concrete* is a very suitable one for the representation of early twentieth-century, modernist Italian American writing. This literary-historical period (approximately 1918-1930) is characterized by autobiographical immigrant narratives and fiction heavily reflective of the author's own experience. Referring to DiDonato, Italian American novelist Helen Barolini notes that the death of the character Geremio, father of the protagonist Paul, mirrors the real-life tragic construction accident which killed DiDonato's own father. Featuring a juxtaposition of transliterated Italian (grammatically proper English speech "dubbed in," as it were, from the characters' Italian) and broken English, *Christ in Concrete* is a poignant and haunting outcry against the criminal

exploitation of Italian workers in the pre-union era. The novel culminates in a dream sequence portraying the resurrection of the exploited, wounded and murdered laborers, a metaphysical call to Communist revolution. Considered modernistic due to DiDonato's experimentation in linguistic and narrative form, the novel provided early twentieth-century American audiences a glimpse of what is called *Italianita*, or the remnants of Italian language and cultural forms surviving in the culture of later generation Italian Americans. For example, the sumptuous description of an Italian American feast which is enjoyed by the characters at a wedding banquet contains both descriptive terms and secret recipes unique to those Italian Americans about whom the novel is concerned:

"The chicken soup was rich with eggs, fennel, artichoke roots, grated parmesan, and noodles that melted on lips...Ah, brother and sister, this is the life - cuddlingly arranged close to the flesh and smell and joy of them who are your own people...Yes dear heart and soul, without words I tell you I would this night last forever." (*Christ in Concrete*, Chapter 11.)

Italianita is present in the passionate tone of this passage, the tantalizing description of the food, and the direct address of the narrator to the reader. In linguistic terms as well, the nomenclature and verb phrases resemble closely those found in Italian, as well as the abbreviated use of articles and use of epithets. Though the novel is focused on the sociological facts which many historians and literary critics have noted characterized Italian American life at this time, those who read the novel only to observe the oppression of labor and the alienation of immigrants miss its sensuous beauty.

However, other stories and novels would also serve equally well to augment representation of early twentieth century Italian American literature in

anthologies. Jerre Mangione's *Mount Allegro*, a colorful sketch about life in an Italian American urban enclave, captures the complex interrelationships amongst family members and neighbors. Tales of estrangement and superstition (use of the "maloggio" or evil eye against one's perceived enemies) are intertwined with positive images of the more beautiful aspects of the subculture, *sirinati* amidst guitars and wine. In Mangione's writings, though the immigrant laborer complained of America as the "*maliditta terra*" wherein he "spend(s) his strength in factories and ditches" and "thinks of nothing but money" (*Mount Allegro* Chapter 2), he or she also takes the time to enjoy life and tell folktales from the old country. Mangione chronicles day-to-day life as the Italian Americans of the '30s and '40s lived it, going beyond the dichotomy of old and new world towards a new "Italian American" vision.

Throughout this early modern period, Italian Americans, like African American authors of earlier times, struggled to break out of the cycle of oppression. Writers in particular suffered from a lack of recognition cultivated by mainstream stereotyping of Italian Americans. John Fante, a third major author of this era, struggled with dire poverty and inconsistent profit from his texts. Despite positive reviews of his first novel *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, by literary giants H.L. Mencken and James T. Farrell, later acclaims from the likes of William Saroyan, and sales of his work to MGM studios, Fante struggled. Fante wrote to an advisor at Viking Press, Pascal Covici, of his poverty,

"We face eviction here (Manhattan Beach California). If that happens, my wife will go north to live with her mother, but I'll stick it out for a couple of weeks ... This address is good for another ten days however." (Cooney 163-4)

Fante died before completing his four-novel length epic of Arturo Bandini, a self-styled Italian American writer who crosses the country in search of the opportunity for self-expression and the meaning of life in America. Anticipating the philosophical quests of later Beat poets and '60s radicals, Fante's protagonist is shockingly irrev-

erent in his truculent attitude toward mainstream social conventions and mores. Yet Fante himself, unlike Pietro Didonato, Hemingway and many other American writers of this time, did not advocate contemporaneous American Communism as the antidote to the social ills and personal meaninglessness of modern life. During the Second World War, Fante's apolitical views are typified in his further comment to Covici that he would "type with one hand, the fingers of the other pinching my nostrils," (166) while

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Allied, Nazi and Communist forces "(tore) this over-rated civilization apart" (166). One should read Fante's lack of political sympathy in a wider context. Italian Americans at this juncture in the twentieth century felt divided loyalties and experienced conflict as their friends and relatives in Italy fought against the United States. Some were even sent to internment camps as were Japanese immigrants at this time. As is true of other cultures, the Second World War drained the creative energy of Italian American authors and slowed important developments in written text.

However, with the post-war period came new visions and interrelationships in Italian American writing. Groups such as the Beat poets utilized literature to make political statements against war, injustice, and social hypocrisy. The late 1950s and the entire 1960s were a time of enormous liberation for all Americans in terms of both political and literary self-expression. The role of Italian American Beat generation poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti has been duly noted, but the presence of Italianita in his work is barely noticed or brought to the surface by criticism. Ferlinghetti's use of Italian in such poems as "Dove Sta Amore" and

"The Old Italians Dying" indicates the poet's appreciation of Italianita. The latter poem politicizes Italian ethnicity in its references to anarchist Italian publications and to the famous trial of Sacco and Vanzetti, which had garnered tremendous support in the political/literary left in the U.S. Italianness in Ferlinghetti is a rich source of emotion, well-suited to the Beats' tendency toward primal lyric tones. Also a unique opportunity to criticize American politics from a culturally "other" or outsider point of view. Ferlinghetti is internationally celebrated as a major literary figure, but not as often acknowledged as an Italian American writer of the twentieth century. His position as a Beat poet enabled future generations of writers to get beyond the issues of labor, anti-Italian discrimination, and epicurean uses of the Italian love for "la bella vita" as a means of anesthetizing ourselves against the harsh realities of the ethnic alienation we sometimes experience.

As an Italian American teacher of American Literature survey courses, I like to call my students' attention to the contemporary works of Italian American men and women. Such texts as Tina DeRosa's *Paper Fish*, nominated for the Carl Sandburg award, fit in nicely with the postmodern philosophy and literary theories currently used and advocated in many of our classrooms. This later Italian American novel presents ancestry both as preserving memory of the old country and creating a mythic Italian landscape in the minds of later generations. The protagonist, Carmolina, engages her surviving grandmother, Doria, in dialogue throughout the novel, allowing the stories and memories of her grandmother to structure her own unending journey toward greater consciousness. Grandma tells Carmolina of "Italy, the land that got lost across the sea, the land that was hidden on the other side of the world." (15) In this scene, it is the power of first-generation Italian American memory which propels Carmolina into an early philosophical quest:

"And Carmolina would wonder, sometimes, if

she really were in the kitchen and watching two people on the porch. If she were, if she were really in the kitchen, then she could look out the window with its blue paper stapled against the screens, and see a little girl with brown eyes looking up at her Grandma laughing." (15)

DeRosa portrays how within Italian American culture the sense of another past, a world and reality intimately bound within the identity of the writing or thinking self, leads to the critical ability to reflect objectively upon the self: DeRosa's main "she" is both in the experience and watching from afar. From chroniclers of both injustice and la bella vita, the Italian American author becomes a philosopher with personal and social insight to impart to the reader.

But ancestral memory in Italian American writing should not be mis-read as some sort of "Italy as lost paradise," a distortion similar to the idealizations of agricultural Africa, Native America, or any treatment of the ethnic past as part of an erroneous "noble savage" view of the ethnic point of origin. In *Paper Fish*, there is also the dark presence (real or re-imagined) of an Italy of cutthroats hiding out in the mountains. This negative memory gives the reader a sense that the earlier generation's memory of a mythic ethnic past provides both positive and negative parameters for the search to live an authentic life in the late twentieth century. The incredible bonding which occurs between prior and later generations and the sense of gratitude the author feels towards these figures who prompted the birth of this conscious emerges in the highly lyrical tribute which follows: "Her sight is fragile, her heart is fragile, she is the strongest woman in the world." (16) Readers who search *Paper Fish* for an ending to Carmolina's philosophical quest need to bear in mind DeRosa's vision of philosophical thought as recursive, of experience and memory of it facing each other in a mirror as if for all time. DeRosa's philosophical relativism and focus on self-awareness can be compared to the philosophical paradigm of post-modern relativism, which undermines our assumptions about objective truth and narrative closure, especially that of the

Bildungsroman.

In other fiction as well, the recent trends in literary production involving women's studies and women's writing, there are other noteworthy texts. Carole Maso's *Ghost Dance* presents what Fred Gardaphe calls "the experience of the third generation ethnic who, unlike earlier generations, has the option of picking and choosing from the many traditions that make up American culture." (*Gardaphe*, 149) As the memory of older generations

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fades, and signs of Italianita in a writer's surrounding environment grow more rare, he or she must work harder to recapture an ethnic identity which fades in memory and culture. The narrator's mother is symbolically representative of the tendency amongst certain ethnics to want to erase the past, an experience of Italian Americanness as negative or stifling, as this description of Mother's house indicates:

"There are no curtains on the windows of my mother's house. There is little furniture. At night you can look straight through to the other side. There is nothing to obscure the strangeness of the fact that we live in boxes made of wood. A whole family lives in this sad box—though the father is not home much, has never been home much. He works at the silk mill, two and three shifts a day..."(111)

As with *Christ in Concrete*, the urban ethnic experience of Italian Americans is frequently imbued with poverty and oppression. As such, some seek to erase all trace of Italianita and Italian American identity from their lives. In the novel *Ghost Dance*, such an erasure is simply accomplished by the change of a name: Angelo to Andy, Maria to Mary. (*Gardaphe*, 143) When Christine, the second generation mother, destroys the roots of her garden, this action symbolizes the cultural destruc-

tion of ethnic heritage which Vanessa, narrator and protagonist, must reverse. (217) As in DeRosa's text, the memory of earlier generations helps preserve ethnic identity as a basis for a critical consciousness. Maso's protagonist/narrator intersperses memory of her grandfather and his insights about Italy:

"These are the leaves!" he said. "These leaves. Back in Italy when I was a little boy, my grandfather used to dip these in egg and flour and fry them!" and he turned them over in their imaginary batter...the memory warmed him and the warmth spilled onto us."(92-93)

This emotional warmth guides the narrator in reunion with her brother Fletcher and also in other relationships. Whether Italian American authors are being nostalgic or philosophically skeptical, a critique of society remains at the forefront of their fiction in many cases. Unlike DeRosa, Maso draws from Native American imagery, Black Hills Sioux symbolism, prophecy and *Ghost Dance* ritual to align Italian American critique of mainstream American capitalist lifestyle with Native American critique of the same. (272) In doing the *Ghost Dance* with her brother, Vanessa is able to symbolically reconnect with the agrarian values and lifestyle of her Italian American ethnic past. (216-217) Maso's novel takes Italian American narrative out of its East Coast ethnic enclave and contextualizes it in multi-ethnic terms.

Further, the achievement of Italian American women poets is significant; indeed, these women have been prolific in recent times. Recent developments in Italian American women's poetry include work by Diane Di Prima, Daniela Gioseffi, Diane Raptosh, Dana Gioia, Phyllis Capello, and Rachel Guido DeVries, as well as several others. DeVries' 1996 collection *How to Sing to a Dago* is comprised of lyric love poems. To cite one example, "Moaning and laughing like the sea/soon I will sprawl alongside of you./ At last, I'll sigh, beneath my fierce desire /to believe your face." (from *Daydream/Soon*). DeVries' style of love-lyric is evocative of Dickinson and Claude McKay's passionate direct statements of amorous emotion.

Perhaps the most important event in recent American fiction has been the 1997 publication of Italian American author Don DeLillo's epic novel *Underworld*. Topping the *New York Times Fiction Bestseller* list for several weeks, and receiving glowing reviews in every major literary American popular periodical of the late twentieth century, *Underworld* has placed Italian American writing "on the map" of American letters indelibly. Unlike prior Italian American fiction writers, DeLillo uses Italian American ethnic identity as metaphor for fundamental questions of human existence. Having as its central theme the nuclear arms race and the Cold War which propelled it, *Underworld's* central characters are members of an Italian/American family. Their surname, the "Shays," suggests an erasure or Anglicization similar to that effected in *Ghost Dance*. Here, however, the Italian/Americanness of the story's central character Nick Shay, an environmental waste management bureaucrat, darts in and out of the spotlight in several significant ways. First of all, Nick's role as micromanager in the industry of radioactive poison evokes the politics of ethical rationalization in the nuclear age. Nick literally makes the unthinkable thinkable. About his workplace, the Italian American narrator admits that he imitates a mafiosi for a living. As mentioned above, this mafiosi mask is how the majority perceive Italian Americans. Nick has here become the great Italian American simulacrum, a walking self-satire similar to an African American in minstrel blackface, or Bruce Lee clowning as a foppish Chinese farmhand. Nick's unreal mask, the Italian fake mafiosi, perfectly suits the unreality he deals in everyday, the unreal faith in the unlikely possibility of controlling nuclear war and nuclear waste which made the arms race ethically feasible in the minds of Cold Warriors of Nick's time and other nuclear warriors of ours.

Secondly, to the degree that the Italian American ethnic enclave is a source for a politically radical vision, DeLillo celebrates it in narrative prose. But he also criticizes ethnic insularity in the Italian American community as an

instance of the kind of thinking which propelled the Cold War. In Nick's choice to mock himself by impersonating a mafiosi, we see such insularity; further, we see it in the following narrative commentary:

"The Italians. They sat on the stoop with paper fans and orangeades. They made their world. They said, Who's better than me? She could never say that. They knew how to sit there and be happy." (*Underworld* p. 207)

"She" in this passage is Rosemary Shay, Nick's mother, "Italian American by marriage," to her dead husband

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and Nick's father Jimmy, who Nick believes pretty accurately to have been violently executed to end his career as a mob numbers runner. The inappropriate pride alluded to in this quote (orangeade and paper fans are not exactly flattering representations of *Italianita*) shows Rosemary and Jimmy's insularity within and relative to the Italian American community: Rosemary feels inferior to the "happiness" of this ethnic enclave. In this passage by DeLillo the attitude of this particular group of Italian Americans forms a metaphor for American society during the Cold War, proud, self-protected and ethnocentric, yet caught up in a Faustian bargain with deadly violence. However, DeLillo is careful not to demonize Italian American ethnicity by portraying it only or even primarily in terms of the Mafia. Rather, the violence of *Underworld* is nuclear violence, the production, use and deployment of weapons of mass destruction. Against the negative vision of Italian American ethnicity, DeLillo also notes a potentially radical vision of politics in the Italian

American worldview. Nick refers to the Italian language as follows, "There's a word in Italian. Dietrologia. It means the science of what is behind something. A suspicious event. The science of what is behind an event." (280) The "suspicious event" which Nick will come to see behind involves contemporary nuclear violence. *Dietrologia* is part of Nick Shay's Italianita; it enables him to ultimately see beyond the ideological and cultural veneer which makes nuclear destruction thinkable. *Dietrologia* propels Nick's quest ultimately to visit his Russian counterpart, Viktor, with whom he observes the sinister and destructive power of nuclear weapons testing and waste:

"All those decades," he says, "when we thought about weapons all the time and never thought about the dark multiplying byproduct. "And in this case," I say. "In our age. What we excrete comes back to consume us." (*Underworld* 784)

On his dietrologic quest through life, Nick is finally forced to confront the consequences of Cold War life in which all citizens of superpower nations share a complicit part: permanent personal and environmental destruction. Touring a hospital full of victims of Soviet nuclear testing, Nick comes to the conscious realization that the victim's disfigurements, cancers and other nearly unspeakable sufferings are "all part of the same surreal" landscape of nuclear violence. (800) This intuitive *dietrologia* is the aspect of Italian American identity which DeLillo the author celebrates by portraying it in Nick's point of view as at least potentially radical. Once aware of our social evils, we can work to change them. Despite Nick's conclusion that he has come through life all right, he remains altered by his visit to Viktor in Moscow.

In conclusion, from DiDonato to DeLillo, and from Ferlinghetti to Guido DeVries, Italian American writers have been making significant contributions to the socio-political critique and epistemological quests which enliven twentieth century American letters. In the words of Heath contributor Helen Barolini, author of the novel *Umbertina* and the anthology *The Dream Book*

(winner of the 1985 American Book Award) : "The very feeling of being outsiders, the estrangement from both old traditions and new ways, the clash of generations as the children of immigrants remade themselves outside the traditions—all this has been the very stuff of literature for Americans, Italians and otherwise." (127)

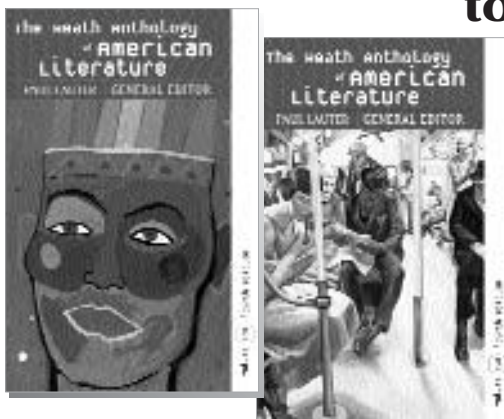
Paul Giaimo
Freeport Illinois
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