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# REVIEWS

Lorna Dee Cervantes. *Ciento: 100 100-Word Love Poems*, San Antonio: Wings Press, 2011. 115p.

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Lorna Dee Cervantes's book of love poems is a novel exploration of one of poetry's oldest subjects. The collection is a deftly-crafted experiment in form that manages to read like free verse. It is divided into five unnamed sections of twenty numbered poems apiece. The poems are self-contained enough that one may dip into the collection at random, savoring individual poems, but the book also works as a single longer text divided into one hundred shorter episodes. The sections loosely follow the trajectory of a relationship, as the first section is a cautious getting-to-know you, the second is the flirtatious early days, the third is the deep passion of hungry lovers, the fourth is a breakup and ambivalent aftermath of longing for the lost other, and the fifth is a reconciliation accompanied by a return of physical desire. As the collection moves along and the relationship warms up, the poems feel more natural and the visibility of their form falls away.

In the first section, each poem has one or two images that stick in the mind, but the poems otherwise feel ephemeral. There are exquisite metaphors such as "the way you unroll me / like a packet of nickels" from "100 Words to Your Secrets" (13), but one cannot see the lovers—whatever physical descriptions we get are of the outside world, not of their bodies—thus most of the early poems feel like they are only theoretically about love. There is no physicality to them.

But the second section is more welcoming. It is playful, with pleasant rhymes ("appealing / to you to take off / that frown, strip down to / your smile and ground" [45]) and a litany of pop culture references including Aretha Franklin (32), Winnie the Pooh (34), and Don McLean's "American Pie" (43) that help the speaker make sense of her burgeoning attraction to her lover. This playfulness is also present in a number of poems throughout the book that employ digital-age metaphors. Cervantes transforms the cold language of technology into a code of desire via love's touch. The speaker "want[s] to be pixilated / twitterpated by you" (30), she asks "Baby, let me blog you" (38), she is "waiting for your google, / Baby, waiting for your probe" (107). While *Ciento's* theme is traditional, its images are not, and this is one of the collection's strengths.

As the book moves on, it heats up. The latter part of section two and section

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three's poems are often about sexual desire. The most physically frank poems, such as the self-explanatory "100 Words for My Ass" (44), or "100 Words to Nail You," in which the speaker pleads "Come / and nail me. Kiss me. / Keep me on your cross" (56) are some of Ciento's best. They do not make the mistake of equating love with lust, but illustrate how sublime experiencing another's body can be. The speaker wants sex because it symbolizes how a relationship molds each partner into something new since they are willing to make themselves vulnerable.

Section four shows the downside of this vulnerability, as the speaker's partner's infidelity flays her. In "100 Words Against the Gamma Ray You," which reads like Sylvia Plath's "Daddy" and includes the same level of rage, the speaker's treacherous lover is described violently as "Laser beam you / gamma knife / you... irradiating you" (72), a monstrous presence. By this point in the collection, one is fully invested in the speaker's life, and thoughts about the poems' form dissipate. This is to Cervantes's credit; she exhibits her technical mastery by adhering to her 100-word structure, but shows an even stronger mastery of the rhythm of language, poetry's most important element.

The final section describes the lovers' reconciliation, as the speaker desires both the emotional intimacy of "your seldom told stories, your / contentious lines" in "100 Words to Content" (96) and her lover's body in "100 Words to Your Organ" (97), an ode to his penis. While the ending of the lovers' narrative is predictable, the poems themselves remain fresh.

A physical oddity of the book worth mentioning is that it is printed in dark brown ink instead of black. Nonetheless, the type is sufficiently readable. There is a typo on page 10 ("fne" for "fine"), but otherwise the physical quality of the volume matches the high quality of the poems. Ciento is a fun, well-written book that deserves a robust audience in both academia and among general readers. It is appropriate material for a wide range of courses, from introductory literary surveys to advanced poetry workshops. The collection is an enjoyable gift in the often barren landscape of contemporary American poetry. ✱

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William W. Hagen. *German History in Modern Times. Four Lives of the Nation*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 463p.

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Professor William Hagen of the University of California, Davis has written an engaging, versatile, and well-illustrated work that will certainly find use as a

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textbook in history and German Studies courses. For more seasoned scholars as well, this book will be a worthwhile resource to chart new approaches to modern German historiography and cultural studies. The source material is in many respects well known, and Hagen has skillfully examined considerable portions elsewhere over “more than a few decades of reading, writing and teaching” (xvii). Indeed, it is precisely because of his long academic involvement with German history that he is able to illuminate and authoritatively summarize its contours in promising ways for future research. The book is a well-written invitation to approach pre-1990 German history as four distinct yet interconnected lives or “nations.” Equally importantly, the cultural and political patterns Hagen traces can be used to contextualize developments in his posited fifth iteration of the German nation, the post-1990 Germany now “taking shape under globalizing and multicultural skies” (424).

Hagen’s concise introduction is a rich survey of important periods and schools in German historiography, including the 10-point “standard model,” “negative identity” and “separate path” models, as well as Marxist and liberal-democratic perspectives. Drawing on his four decades of scholarship, however, Hagen here introduces an approach that stresses “a succession of polynational existences” (17) in an attempt to minimize the influence of ideology on analysis while embedding “German” history in a wider European context. The main text, as per its title above, is then divided into four sections, each illuminating major events and movements within a particular time period both chronologically and thematically: Holy Roman Empire to the French Revolution, 1789-1914, 1914-1945, and 1945-present. In most cases, these divisions mirror those seen in other histories of Germany. Yet the prominent analysis of the transnational, federative Holy Roman Empire as Hagen’s starting point is an essential demonstration of the validity of his “polynational existence” thesis, not least given the structure of the European Union, of which (West) Germany is a founding member.

The 24-page bibliography that follows is very valuable to the novice or one not able to read German-language sources. It lists not only masterworks of German history – general, cultural and political - written in English or translated over time, but also a considerable number of translations of German literature and first-person memoirs spanning several centuries. The final section helpfully lists subtitled versions of seminal, readily available German films. Interestingly, German Studies scholars who came of age in the 1990’s will note apparent proof that the “Goldhagen moment” has passed, since none of his works or the scholarly debate occasioned by them find direct mention in the bibliography or Hagen’s main text. Photographs, maps and other illustrations throughout the text vividly

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underscore cultural and historical moments Hagen mentions, and many of these appear in an English-language text for the first time.

Several aspects of Hagen's work deserve special attention. First, as noted above, the book admirably embeds "German" culture in a larger transnational Central and Eastern European context. This includes a well-grounded discussion of the Austrian and Hungarian dimensions of "German" culture and politics at many points in the text, which is a most welcome feature. The term "German" has of course been defined in diverse ways throughout the millennia, but rarely with such stress on the multicultural, transnational dimensions and influences as here. In keeping with the first point, cultural aspects arranged by theme within the time periods Hagen addresses will be of value to students, professors and researchers alike. The move away from strict chronological organization of survey courses in German Studies is relatively recent, though German history's scope and the structural limits of the one- or two-semester sequence have long suggested such an approach. Hagen deftly demonstrates how one can compactly but thoroughly pay due attention to both, and is one of the few scholarly works recently published which could meet such requirements effortlessly. As with many comprehensive treatments of German history, some sections within Hagen's work are necessarily reduced to a one- or two-sentence description of certain important names, dates, and events. Some may find this too brief, and in such cases the course instructor will certainly be able to introduce supplementary materials as needed.

Finally, German professors teaching English-language survey courses will find Hagen's liberal deployment of German keywords useful. These include some increasingly familiar to English-language scholars, such as *Gleichschaltung*, *Ostpolitik*, *Wirtschaftswunder* or *Heimat*. Examples of additional important, if less often seen terms to which Hagen exposes the reader – first in German, then translated – include *Hausmacht*, *goldene Kaiserzeit*, *Grundgesetz* and *Burgfrieden* as well as more contemporary items such as *BAföG*. The reader is thus at first made more aware of the "foreignness" of the subject matter by being exposed to its unique linguistic aspects. In translation, these then assist in discerning cultural nuances influencing historical developments. One might have differences of opinion as to some renderings; for example, *soziale Marktwirtschaft* appearing as "socially responsible market economy" (364, 402), or *Wehrmacht* glossed understandably but perhaps confusingly as "the regular armed forces" in one chapter (288) and the "National Socialist army" in another (377). Overall, however, there is much to honor in the use and translation of authentic German terms in Hagen's work.

Despite popular – and even scholarly – opinion to the contrary, "Germany was never a monolithic country" (474), and Hagen's book provides much evidence to

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advance and promote this interpretation of German history in the modern era. It is indeed a work for our time, resonating with unified Germany's increased role at the heart of Europe and the attendant scholarly interest from many quarters being paid to it. The book also amplifies recent trends in German Studies scholarship that eschew strictly chronological portrayals of history, instead promoting the thematic interconnectedness of diverse phenomena in explaining historical narratives. Few, however, have made as convincing a case as to the trans- or "poly" national dimensions at work in German history as does William Hagen's newest work. ✱

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Annette Kolodny. *In Search of First Contact: The Vikings of Vinland, the Peoples of the Dawnland, and the Anglo-American Anxiety of Discovery*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012. 333p.

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Annette Kolodny's *In Search of First Contact: The Vikings of Vinland, the Peoples of the Dawnland and the Anglo-American Anxiety of Discovery* presents a detailed and varied account of the supposed "precontact" period in North America. Relying on an impressive methodology that attends to scholarship in archaeology, anthropology, American history, and ethnology, Kolodny carefully argues that the "first written narratives about Europe's encounter with the North American landscape and with its Native peoples" are two medieval Icelandic tales, *The Greenlanders' Saga* and *Eirik the Red's Saga* (49). These two tales, more commonly known as the Vinland Sagas, require us to revise how we approach North American literary history. Rather than begin with the contact narratives of Christopher Columbus and Bartholomé de las Casas, we would be better served, and more accurate in our accounts, if we turned to the Vinland Sagas and—one of Kolodny's more significant claims—to the petroglyphs and orally transmitted tales of Native peoples.

*In Search of First Contact* thus challenges the "old belief that Native peoples in North America were isolates" (22) and suggests instead that by the time Europeans visited in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the people they encountered were in fact savvy traders, a far cry from the "Native wonder" described in European accounts (263). Yet it is with this discrepancy that *In Search of First Contact* finds its focus. Announcing in her prologue that "this book is overwhelmingly about stories" (11), Kolodny clearly articulates her book's stakes: "how we shape and reshape our stories about discovery and first contact reveal how we are simultaneously shaping and reshaping our understanding of who we think we are as Americans" (11).

*In Search of First Contact* indeed focuses on the stories Anglo-Americans told

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throughout the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries about “first contact.” While scholarship about the Norse circulated in American newspapers and magazines in the 1790s (113), the Vinland Sagas gained cultural relevancy with the publication of Carl Christian Rafn’s *Antiquitates Americanæ* (1837) and its shorter companion piece *America Discovered in the Tenth Century* (1838). Each work not only included an extensive summary of the Vinland Sagas, they also identified the Massachusetts Bay and the Narragansett region of Rhode Island to be the geographic locations of Norse landfalls (107). Positively reviewed by American presses, Rafn’s work was embraced by an American public already eager to discover a “historical narrative in which British origins were only one among many other origins” (28) as well as a “rationale for removing Indians from their traditional lands” (31). As Kolodny concisely states, “In the face of multiple pre-Columbian contacts and arrivals, the continent had never *solely* belonged to the Indians in the first place” (31).

Throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, Anglo-Americans consistently returned to the Vinland Sagas as a way of producing an “*American* national narrative” (102). The sagas were particularly popular with New England poets like Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, and James Russell Lowell; these authors, among others, represented the “Northmen” as New England’s “kindred ancestors and historical precursors” (150). By the late nineteenth century a “Viking Revival” was well underway: “newly self-made Gilded Age multimillionaires” sought out Celtic styled “heirlooms” to demonstrate their “pedigree and old wealth” (210). These avowals of Nordic or Viking heritage revealed the main draw of the Vinland Sagas—what Kolodny describes as a type of plasticity that allowed Anglo-Americans to write and rewrite their prehistory as they argued over “who *really* belongs here” (14).

In its masterful account of the Vinland Saga’s circulation throughout North American literary history, *In Search of First Contact* offers one lesson, among many, that particularly resonates. Our failure to recognize the importance of the Vinland Sagas as potential first contact texts is partially due to the sagas’ failure to live up to our expectations of what a first contact text should be. As Kolodny states in her final chapter, the “Vinland venture never represented for Native peoples, as it did for the Icelanders, a major punctuation point in an ongoing national historic epic of heroic adventuring and expansive exploration” (313). Yet it is perhaps this point that offers the most hopeful reason for adopting the Vinland Sagas as one of North America’s first contact narratives: “unlike the European contact texts of a later period, the sagas do not shade over into narratives of conquest and colonialism” (331). They tell instead a different story, one where “we need not always fear or attempt to destroy the Other” (326). ✱

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Richard Locke. *Critical Children: The Use of Childhood in Ten Great Novels*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011. 218 p.

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Moving in a different direction from the usual critical examination of a particular era or genre's hegemonic characterization of childhood, Richard Locke's *Critical Children: The Use of Childhood in Ten Great Novels* considers ten works of differing style and structure and investigates how the authors incorporate a particular child's story to explore or evade more extensive social and moral issues. Notably, Locke moves beyond a single, thematic focus and considers several varied critical uses of children. For his study, he selects well-known but widely differing characters and works, ranging from *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, and *Pip* from *Great Expectations* to *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* to *Miles* and *Flora* from *The Turn of the Screw* to *Peter Pan* and *Holden Caulfield* and, finally, to the rarely included *Lolita* and *Alexander Portnoy*. The ten works that comprise Locke's study all "use children caught in violent situations as vehicles of moral and cultural interrogation" (4).

In his introduction, Locke asserts the importance of children as critics of their worlds. He states: "They [the selected child characters] are icons, figures that are taken to embody fundamental possibilities and problems, even long after their historical contexts have vanished" (4). Key to Locke's approach is his desire "to examine how these books about children work as literature . . . that invite and resist interpretation and support and provoke rereading" (4). The thematic descriptions Locke provides for his choices offer a broad range of significant topics: social-political reform, celebration of American democracy, racial and cultural slavery, "imprisoning regressive psychological fixations," "childish social delusions," and "intellectual and moral vanity" (5-6). Although Locke's explanation often begs the question regarding his choices of literary texts, his selections do provide an interesting range of character types and social situations, and his admission that he has selected these "particular ten novels" because of his admiration of them is apparent (6). In his subsequent attempt to provide "a general historic background," Locke offers an insightful but too brief overview of influences such as Blake and Wordsworth and of a variety of pertinent texts up to the present (11).

Locke first investigates three novels by Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations*, to argue that the regenerative power of a naturally good childhood will sometimes counter or at least mitigate the moral, emotional, psychological, and physical prisons individuals may confront or that the detrimental influence of a damaged childhood contributes to or facilitates

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these aspects of imprisonment. Locke exposes a shift in Dickens from a belief in a sympathetic and inspiring moral icon in Oliver to a realistic, “late-maturing” David Copperfield, and finally to Pip as a “disillusioned exile,” demonstrating a decline from “triumphant progress” into “stoic moral realism” thereby restructuring the traditional *bildungsroman* (49).

Locke’s chapter on Mark Twain conflates the examination of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* with the prominent focus on *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Exploring both texts and title characters, Locke acknowledges the popular reading of both as a celebration of American character and freedom but posits his own more cynical reading of loss and decline. Recognizing the affirming values and insights Huck gains in his earlier adventures along the river, Locke closely examines the novel’s final chapters and argues for a pessimistic reading of the conclusion. He asserts that Huck’s agreeing to meet with Tom and Jim refutes his earlier denouncement of “sivilization,” and connects the Territory with “cruel, deluded, childish ‘fun’ and games” thereby suggesting that there “is no possibility of liberty and justice, and the pursuit of happiness is just a boys’ game” (85). Locke persuasively argues that the initial perception of Huck and Tom as representatives of American freedom shifts to the defeat of those ideals as they fail to sustain their insight and return to seemingly inescapable social attitudes and games.

Locke’s subsequent reading of *The Turn of the Screw* turns from the implicit social criticism of both Dickens and Twain’s texts and emphasizes James’s use of children, Miles and Flora, to investigate and challenge the reader’s construction of truth and reality. Accordingly, after noting the complex ambiguities of the text and closely investigating several interpretative possibilities, Locke convincingly argues: “the key significance is that it is a child who is the vehicle for James’s indubitably classic interrogation of the reader’s capacity for response” (100).

Next, in an interesting but discursive examination of J. M. Barrie’s life and works with its focus on *Peter Pan*, Locke appears to lack his previous clarity of focus. However, by addressing the combination of oppositions, the instability, and the uncertainty found throughout Barrie’s works and especially evident in *Peter Pan*, Locke demonstrates a unifying focus in the sterility of Peter’s narcissism. He notes: “it [*Peter Pan*] becomes psychologically and morally complex. But it never comes to a thematic conclusion; it just recommences” (107). The *Peter Pan* analysis, however, sets up Locke’s subsequent examination of Holden Caulfield and pulls together the earlier discussions of Dickens, Twain, and Barrie. This chapter touches on conventional readings of Holden and shows, especially through levels of language, the fragmented aspects of Holden’s persona, notably the contrast between his rebellious use of language and his immersion in conventional culture.



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Locke ultimately argues that Holden's rescue comes from Phoebe's love and need for him, and he opts for a conservative reading where Holden reconciles with conventional order, escaping the deadly narcissism of Peter Pan (152).

Locke unconventionally expands his analysis of critical children in his final two chapters to include Nabokov's *Lolita* and Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*. While praising Nabokov's narrative skill in creating the deceptive Humbert, Locke emphatically denounces Humbert's character and criticizes the reader for any sympathy or empathy for Humbert. He argues that Nabokov confronts the reader's "willing misperceptions and fatal neglect" through a refocusing on Dolly Haze's traumas and not on Humbert's self-serving narration (171). Although Alexander Portnoy seems too old for inclusion in an examination of childhood, Locke plays Portnoy, especially the memories of a younger Portnoy, against Holden and Huck's earlier portrayals, revealing Portnoy's impotence. Locke ironically concludes by pronouncing Roth's accomplishment as "a bildungsroman in which failure to grow and develop is the point of the whole extravagance" (185).

*Critical Children* offers a probing and, at times, personal analysis of ten widely recognized texts. Despite Richard Locke's early explanation for his choices, some will find the lack of women authors or significant female characters or the fact that all the authors are white males to be problematic. For many, however, the real problem of Locke's study rests in the disjunction between the often provocative insights he constructs for each work and the reader's desire to apply these interpretations to a broader literary context – something that Locke only occasionally suggests or chooses not to do at all. Eschewing most previous hermeneutic approaches to these works, Locke diligently applies the portrayal of childhood as both his focus and his method, consequently opening new possibilities for analysis of these familiar texts as well as others that feature children in similar crucial roles. ✱

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David Palumbo-Liu. *The Deliverance of Others*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012. 226p.

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The seeds for *The Deliverance of Others* may have been implanted as early as 2002 when David Palumbo-Liu in his article "Multiculturalism Now: Civilization, National Identity, and Difference Before and After September 11th" invoked Samuel Huntington's widely circulated theory about the "clash of civilizations." Huntington's theory has not only been used by the Bush Administration to

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explain “why” the terrorist attack took place, but more problematically “how” the United States should respond to the “war on terror,” and the ideology of otherness as a site of abjection. In “Multiculturalism Now” Palumbo-Liu says that “Huntington’s thesis, if taken in toto, has dramatic ramifications for minority studies, minority rights, and political dissent in general” (109). These ramifications begin to form the central thesis of Palumbo-Liu’s timely book, *The Deliverance of Others*, where both the articulation of Otherness and one’s ethical responsibility in such an articulation is discussed through the lens of one’s engagement with the literary novel. Yet, the book is not an over-dramatization of what Otherness is/ or ought to be, but raises profound questions regarding the role of empathy and ethics in our cultural and literary readings in the production and deliverance of Others. This book demands our attention as we continue to engage in a nuanced understanding of how global agencies respond to the textual production of racial, cultural, national, and ideological differences that we have named as Otherness.

The presence of the Other in America (be it racial, ethnic, sexual, class or disability) has always been a problem, and it continues to challenge the ethos of American exceptionalism and principles of equality and equity. What W.E.B. DuBois said in the launch of his groundbreaking 1903 treatise *The Souls of Black Folk*, “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line” has shifted to a global dialogue regarding the construction of Otherness beyond just the color-lines to the “national-lines” of identification, racialization, and the politics of such marginality. In *The Deliverance of Others*, Palumbo-Liu is “intimately concerned with how literary aesthetics in particular helps us meditate the ways we are connected to, and act in relation to, others” (Preface, x). This book becomes a thoughtful mediation on the responsibility of global literature in delivering these Others. In particular, chapters devoted to South African writers like J.M. Coetzee and his novel *Elizabeth Costello* and Nadine Gordimer’s *My Son’s Story*, to Japanese writers like Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel *Never Let me Go*, and finally Ruth Ozeki’s novel *My Year of Meats*, draws an expansive stroke in portraying a global vision of Otherness in literature. It is also in this last chapter, “Pacific Oceanic Feeling” that Palumbo-Liu brings to the forefront the questions that are embedded in the fabric of the book:

The key question thus becomes, is this attempt to transmit affect trapping into something innate in all humans . . . Looked at more broadly, how can affect spread across national, cultural, racial, and other borders? What different sorts of affect flow differently, and in what kinds of directions? What is the wellspring of global affect? How does the self, particularly constructed, absorb, or fight off affect? (139).

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If what propels terrorism, war, atrocities, genocide is a failure of imagination, or rather a failure *to imagine* other possibilities, then Palumbo-Liu is quite astute in asking a fundamental question: what is the role of literature in mapping an imaginative landscape, or an imaginative response to Otherness? The spectrum between a failure of imagination and an excessive imagination (as Wolfowitz blames terrorism being spurred by “too much imagination”) leads to the same path, a path that suggests an inability to understand the rift between the self and the Other, and any grounded response to the crisis at hand. In the post 9/11 world, Otherness has once again shown its ugly head. The rise of the national security state—along with the state of surveillance, torture, detention and authorized killings by Drones—have become legalized methods to keep Others under the gaze of the panopticon. The crisis that has led to such mistrust and suspicion of the Other, according to Palumbo-Liu, is an inability to be empathetic to the Others, followed by a tension to articulate the modes and modalities of difference that makes both the delivery and the acceptance of Others a dialectical dilemma.

Palumbo-Liu artfully divides the book by reading literature in a global perspective as he delivers his own reading of notable South African and Japanese literary figures. Even names of the chapters are carefully chosen to reflect the logical continuity in the rhetoric of Otherness. In the opening chapter “When Otherness Becomes Reason” Palumbo-Liu discusses J.M. Coetzee’s *Elizabeth Costello* at length. This is followed by Nadine Gordimer’s *My Son’s Story* in “Whose Story is it?” where “the political” is placed in the foreground [and] . . . Gordimer powerfully installs gender as a key element that allows a different kind of political action to take place. Its altogether startling conclusion suggests a feminization of politics and a complex, ambivalent stance toward literary art”(66).

A discussion of Otherness always provokes a kind of “nervous condition” (to borrow Franz Fanon’s term) within disciplines such as Cultural Studies, Literary Studies, Ethnic and Postcolonial Studies. These are also academic disciplines within which the study of Otherness raises both ideological stakes and strategic implications, where questions regarding the Other (i.e., Who are these others? Where do they come from? What do they want? Who do they become? Once these others are delivered to us, how do we respond to their presence?) on the outset seem benign, but if not treated can metastasize and produce malignant tumors on the discourse of identity politics. Palumbo-Liu’s book offers a useful diagnosis to understand this discourse of Otherness by delineating the role of global literature in understanding states of belonging. If reading literature is an act of excavating the truth about the human consciousness, then this excavation must be conducted with an ethical obligation. Palumbo-Liu precisely uses his ethical

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obligation in literary readings to bring to us *The Deliverance of Others*. This is an influential book which belongs on every shelf that wrestles with understanding the politics of difference, marginality and Otherness. ✱

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Birgit Brander Rasmussen. *Queequeg's Coffin: Indigenous Literacies and Early American Literature*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012. 207p.

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Birgit Brander Rasmussen's *Queequeg's Coffin* is an eye-opening deconstruction of the way we consider writing in early American literature. With thorough research, an extensive notes section, and concrete examples, *Queequeg's Coffin* is a welcome addition to the realm of early American scholarship.

In *Queequeg's Coffin*, Rasmussen proposes and supports the argument that literacy comes in more forms than scholars of early American literature normally pursue, reminding us that “Without the survival of people literate in alphabetic script, it, too, might have become a misunderstood relic presumed to be merely mnemonic. This realization should remind us that the legibility of a given writing system is intimately tied to the fate of the culture of which it is a part” (91). With this understanding, Rasmussen studies the narratives of wampum, the Andean quipu, and Polynesian graphic marks on bodies and wood.

Rasmussen works with the premise that “Broadening the definition of writing in the Americas beyond a particular semiotic system—the alphabet—disrupts a whole complex of cultural meanings, as well as dynamics of dominance” (4). To support this thesis, Rasmussen first interrogates the normalizing process of defining “writing” as alphabetic script, then goes on to explain where this process was interrupted by other kinds of writing, and how this offers a space to see and better understand indigenous literacies.

For instance, in Chapter Two, “Negotiating Peace, Negotiating Literacies: The Undetermined Encounter and Early American Literature,” Rasmussen illustrates how indigenous literary disruptions can occur through colonial writing. Rasmussen argues that Barthélemy Vimont's *The Jesuit Relations* exhibits a struggle to understand and record the meeting between French settlers and Kiotseaeton, a Haudenosaunee orator. Because Kiotseaeton reads wampum, Vimont's recording of the event follows the “terms and textual logic” of the wampum (54), interrupting the hegemony of Western writing, and, Rasmussen argues later, colonial desires.

Throughout the text Rasmussen's argument depends on the idea of dialogics,

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and in Chapter Three, “Writing in the Conflict Zone: Don Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala’s *El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno*” this concept is exemplified in Poma’s narrative, which, Rasmussen argues “brings together distinct literary traditions and perspectives that are often radically at odds with each other. He embodies them on the pages of his manuscript in order to bring them into dialogue and knot them together into a new narrative in which disparate perspectives and claims are reconciled into an admittedly uneasy coexistence” (105). Poma’s indigenous history is written mainly in Spanish, the language of the conquerors, but, as Rasmussen argues, Poma’s manuscript embodies the quipu, an Andean method of writing using complexly knotted cords, as part of its narrative and organization structure. In Chapter Four, “Indigenous Literacies, *Moby-Dick*, and the Promise of Queequeg’s Coffin,” Rasmussen further examines dialogic possibilities in Herman Melville’s work, which, she argues, gives presence to indigenous writing and “alternatives to the fatal embrace of colonialism” (137) normally associated with *Typee* and *Moby-Dick*.

Rasmussen does not always remain on solid ground in each chapter, offering “probably” and “suppose” a number of times; yet, these suppositions come after a scaffolding of evidence and grounded theoretical discussions. The speculations in *Queequeg’s Coffin* do not take away from the scope of the text; rather, they offer scholars a place to build on Rasmussen’s theories and work, just as she has built on the work of others.

Finally, the text is a boon to those who teach in this field. *Queequeg’s Coffin* offers opportunities for faculty who struggle with one of the more difficult aspects of teaching early American literature, namely, addressing writing and literacy in non-Western cultures and bringing students into conversations with pre-Columbian texts, texts of conquest, and texts that allow for interrogation of conquest and cultural imperialism. While Rasmussen’s book may be more accessible to the advanced graduate student than undergraduates, there is much to be learned and pedagogy to be gleaned from her research for instructors of early American literature at all levels.

Altogether, Rasmussen’s *Queequeg’s Coffin* is a solidly-written, methodologically-sound book that adds to and furthers the discussion of early American literatures, offering an invaluable resource to instructors and researchers alike. ✱

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Barbara Richardson. *Tributary, A novel*. Torrey, Utah: Torrey House Press, 2012. 352 p.

Laura Pritchett  
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Mormonism is hot these days: everything from Mitt Romney's faith careening into national politics to the Broadway hit *Book of Mormon*. Add to that mix a new historical novel by Colorado author Barbara Richardson, whose book *Tributary* takes on the incomplete history of the Mormon religion. Set in a Utah Territory in the mid-1800s, the novel follows Clair Martin, a misfit in a Mormon frontier town, and shows what polygamy feels like from inside the fold. Her life becomes a quiet revolution as she untangles herself from a religion and culture she finds wanting.

While the writing is superb, it's the plot that offers the greatest strength of this book. Simply put: the novel does what art should do, which is to show us our lives with renewed clarity and better insight. *Tributary* takes the incomplete history and mythos of the West to task, and instead shows us some of the far more interesting and unexplored stories of American West – Mormonism, racism, women who don't need marriage or men. Beautifully written and engaging, this is a story of one woman and her refusal to cave into societal norms in order to seek her own difficult and inspired path.

The greatest problem with literature set in the Western US, of course, is the lure of falling into the Western myth. In most of our past literary history, the West has been portrayed one way: Men were the focus; they were quiet and stoic, they had a bunch of broken dreams, and they sure as hell couldn't be scared of camping alone at night. There was an absence of minorities or women, except to use them as characters who reflected something about the man.

Big changes have occurred, of course. We evolved. We quit talking about gunplay and instead started talking about other compelling stories. We quit being so romantic and nostalgic. New voices became part of our literary dialogue: voices by minorities and women, for instance, who had characters way more complicated and interesting than the single silent unafraid cowboy.

This book is a prime example of breaking the pattern of romanticizing the West. In that regard, Richardson, whose Mormon ancestors settled the northern Salt Lake Valley, is as brave as her protagonist – both are trying to capture a truer and richer version of what life was like for those outside the center of power—Native Americans, blacks, women – and to thus offer a more complete portrait of life in the American West. ✱

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José David Saldívar. *Trans-Americanity: Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012. 304p.

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American Studies scholar José David Saldívar has long chased culture across national boundaries. In *Border Matters* (1997), he tackled the Southwestern U.S.-Mexico border region, and in *Trans-Americanity* he highlights the larger stage of the Hemispheric Americas. Saldívar draws heavily from Anibal Quijano's and Immanuel Wallerstein's 1992 essay "Americanness as a Concept," in which the authors describe New World colonization as the "constitutive act" of modernity, since so many of our conceptions of ethnicity, race, nation, labor, and economic development were forged in this "American crucible," only to be exported globally (549, 552). Just as Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* traced cultural routes between the Americas, Africa, and Europe, Saldívar builds on previous scholarship to map the Americas as an important cultural terrain. What might happen, Saldívar asks, if we read ethnic/regional U.S. writers like Sandra Cisneros and "postcolonial" writers like India's Arundhati Roy alongside each other as fellow subaltern voices conditioned within a capitalist modernity predicated on the divisions and hierarchies enabled by Americanness?

At a time when U.S. presidential "foreign policy" debaters fail to mention Mexico (let alone Europe or Africa), Saldívar's "outernational" American Studies is especially timely. He dismantles inward-looking readings of the U.S. as an exceptional and non-imperialist nation, and thus as an unambiguous beacon of light toward the world. Rather, for Saldívar the Americas were built on a racialized division of labor that still echoes today. In response to this catastrophic history of colonialism, he considers Quijano's and Wallerstein's utopian claim that a future politics might be found in the subaltern modernity produced in the Americas—specifically, in a new synthesis of the Enlightenment's liberal ideals and a broadly indigenous framework of "reciprocity" and "social solidarity" (Quijano and Wallerstein 557). Saldívar, then, attempts to situate the local "small voice of history" within the global metanarrative of commodity flows, and to bridge ethnic identity with global subaltern solidarity (xviii). In search of a "critical and comparative cosmopolitanism from below," (30) he looks to Chicano/a artists, to Toni Morrison and José Martí, and to political figures like Mexico's Zapatista leader Subcomandante Marcos and Bolivia's Evo Morales.

*Trans-Americanity* is not an exhaustive study, but an initial gambit that might ideally generate new scholarship elsewhere. When it comes to close reading, Saldívar is capable of great insight; he powerfully suggests that authors like

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Cisneros, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Victor Martínez are not merely ethnic or regional U.S. curiosities, but figures of global significance. Early on, he deftly connects Anzaldúa's reformulation of hegemonic frontier thinking, Martínez's vernacular *barrio* poetics, and Roy's challenge to the postcolonial Indian kinship system. This chapter fulfills the book's promise as an urgent search to "re-examine who counts in our cultures and societies" (29). Later, Saldívar convincingly reads Cisneros as both a playful deconstructionist and a spiritual prophet of social revitalization, and achieves a depth that makes up for the unfocused treatment of magical realism in Chapter 5. Finally, in chapters on Jose Martí and the Spanish-American War, Saldívar successfully argues that foreign policy is not always so foreign: that a Cuban expatriate in 19th century New York might have more insight into the U.S. than a French Aristocrat like Alexis de Tocqueville, and that Theodore Roosevelt's arrogant blindness to the agency of black soldiers (both U.S. and Cuban) might have been tragically repeated in Lyndon Johnson's underestimation of North Vietnamese fighters in a later colonial war.

Occasionally, Saldívar's broad scope results in shallow readings based on a too-simple binary of Anglo-U.S. dominance and global anticolonial resistance. In highlighting Américo Paredes's sojourn in Japan, Saldívar fails to engage complications in the great Texas writer's sympathy for a conquered people. As José Limón argues, Paredes often denigrates China, downplaying the horrors of Japanese imperialism. But Saldívar treats Paredes's Asian experience largely as an avenue toward understanding Paredes's critique of U.S. colonial domination in the Texas borderlands. No doubt, Paredes's observation of Japanese people subjected to U.S. military occupation reminded him of his home territory. But as many Chinese and Koreans would attest (with regard to their experience with Japanese), the U.S. is not the only powerful global force, especially now.

Focusing on U.S. colonialism, and on the continuing relevance of race, Saldívar highlights important problems; the U.S. is still uniquely powerful, and its Anglo-Protestant faction continues to exercise hegemony. But he fails to reckon with a world increasingly dominated by a transnational, multi-racial ruling class. These new capitalist robber barons are as outernational as anyone, hardly trapped within modern categories of race and nation. In today's multi-polar order—in which Chinese leaders promise to reshape Africa—U.S. power cannot monopolize the global neo-colonialist narrative. And yet in this new phase of decolonization we will need more than ever the subaltern cosmopolitan ideal so powerfully articulated in Saldívar's book. Saldívar is one of the boldest and most important scholars in American Studies today. Like few others, he engages what Martí calls *Nuestra*



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*América*, and for that he should be congratulated. *Trans-Americanity* is well worth reading. ✱

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Nancy Schniedewind & Mara Sapon-Shevin. *Educational Courage: Resisting the Ambush of Public Education*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2012. 209p.

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As a teacher education professor, I was strongly attracted to this book because of events that have recently transpired in Ogden, Utah, where my university is located. The Ogden City School Board had just decided to bypass negotiations with teacher representatives in contract negotiations. Letters sent to all district teachers ended with the words, “Please note that should we not receive your signed contract by 4:00 p.m. on July 20, 2011, we will declare your current position open for hire.” Superintendent Noel R. Zabriskie supported the new approach as a “bold” decision (“Sign or Lose Your Job,” 1).

One of my newly hired teacher education students showed me her letter and asked, “What do you think I should do?” This is precisely the question addressed by veteran public school educators Nancy Schniedewind and Mara Sapon-Shevin in their book *Educational Courage: Resisting the Ambush of Public Education*. In the preface of the book, Schniedewind introduces herself as a teacher of an innovative public school in Philadelphia, while Sapon-Shevin describes how her work as a special education teacher was frustrated because “things that I thought were best for my students were disallowed by those in positions of power” (xvi). Their points of view make for the two main thrusts of the book: the “powerful potential of public education” as experienced by Schniedewind, and the “problematic aspects of Sapon-Shevin’s school experience” caused by policies instituted without honoring teachers’ knowledge and understanding of their students (xiii).

As co-editors, Schniedewind and Sapon-Shevin write introductions for Parts I-IV of the book. Each part is made up of chapters consisting of real-life narratives written by public-school teachers, students, and parents. In Part I, “Is This What We Call Education?” contributors focus on what they perceive to be a gradual redefinition of how schools, teachers, and students are treated by policymakers. In Chapter 1, Schniedewind traces a history of increased attacks since the Reagan administration and continuing into the Obama presidency on teachers, teacher unions, and collective bargaining. In Chapter 2, a teacher laments that her lesson plans must focus on test preparation rather than student’s learning and real life experiences. In Chapter 3, a parent tells the story of her 10-year-old daughter’s

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nervous breakdown and how she tells her father, “Daddy, I’ll die of another test week” (28).

In Part II, eight chapters focus on stories of resistance, such as a fifth grader who refuses to take TAKS, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (Chapter 6), a teacher who starts a teacher committee at her middle school asking that teachers be included in decision-making when the principal decides to implement “no excuses, whatever it takes,” school reform based on data-driven tests and teacher evaluation (Chapter 7), and a university business student who decides to quit the “Teach for America” assignment she had won after graduation, because she discovers it is better to fight for school reform through public education (Chapter 9).

Four chapters in Part III, “Working in the Cracks,” include narratives of educators who decide to stay within schools “ambushed” by the new school reform movement in an attempt to teach authentically while also meeting demands for multiple high-stakes testing and scripted teacher evaluations. For example, in one of the most compelling chapters of the book, a high school teacher describes the intriguing reactions of her students to a variety of strategies she develops for a unit providing debate-oriented reading and discussion combined with test preparation for the high-stakes New York State English Language Arts Regents Exam (Chapter 13). In a final caveat, however, she warns that through the interactive activities of her course unit, “My students had the luxury to write about something they cared about and had studied—rather than the Regents approach of writing on something you may care nothing about or know nothing about, and do so for ninety minutes” (103).

Part IV ends with ten chapters about practical ways to organize with others in order to counter those Schniedewind and Sapon-Shevin refer to as “corporate and education CEOs, venture philanthropists, and top-level government officials,” the new policymakers who have “hijacked public education for profit” (201).

The narratives in this book are clearly activist, in support of a democratic, collaborative approach for public, rather than private or charter-oriented education. Such an identity and point of view make for insightful reading because the voices of teachers, students, and parents are too often ignored by educational policymakers. However, these are voices we need to hear because they know the power of learning in the public school classroom; they are the people who have paid the price through their many years of everyday experiences teaching and learning on the front lines. ✱

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Theodore F. Sheckels. *The Political in Margaret Atwood's Fiction: The Writing on the Wall of the Tent*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2012. 188 p.

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Over the years, Margaret Atwood has become known as an author with outspoken political views. Yet, when it comes to the political within her fiction, its presence is far from straightforward. Margaret Atwood has frequently expressed her discomfort at the use of political labels such as “feminist” to describe her novels. Theodore Sheckels outlines this uneasy union of the political and fiction: “In her mind, writing that raises such issues was propaganda, and true writers, such as herself, do not author propaganda”(1). Likewise, literary critics focusing on politics run the risk of instrumentalizing the text to suit their own (perhaps unconscious) ideological outlook, as the author of this volume shows in a brilliant analysis of the handmaid’s dystopian tale: her account retrospectively comes under the scrutiny of sexist male academics who distort and transform her words (83).

The same problem emerges when it comes to criticism devoted to Atwood’s novels. On the one hand, Atwood’s undeniable political commitment and its inscription within her fictional texts have to be taken into account; on the other hand, the scholar will want to avoid distorting the texts to make them politically meaningful or “correct” at all costs.

The critical lens adopted in *The Political in Margaret Atwood's Fiction* is unquestionably post-structuralist, especially in its use of Foucault’s account of power, discipline and resistance. In Foucault’s work, power is not seen as merely top-down and external, but as internalized by individuals themselves. Likewise, resistance is not perceived as located outside power, but as being situated within hegemonic structures, often even produced by them. In addition to this theoretical framework, Sheckels borrows an arguably less pertinent conception of power from Kenneth Boulding, which divides human activity into three much more conventional realms – the political, the economic, and the social – and distinguishes three types of power balances or imbalances: threat power, exchange power and love power.

The book consists of a chronological discussion of the novels, which are grouped together according to the predominance of interiority or exteriority of power. Starting with the oldest novel – *The Edible Woman* – and ending with the first two novels of a science fiction trilogy, *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, the volume covers an impressive forty years of writing. It is written in a clear, accessible style, and the absence of jargon and the well-worked-out transitions carry the reader along in the author’s exploration of power in Atwood’s fiction.

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One aspect of the study that could have benefitted from a more rigorous approach is the use of theory. Although the reference to literary theory and philosophy within this volume sheds an often fascinating light on the novels, it occasionally leaves the reader hungry for a more in-depth use of the frameworks. This is particularly the case with notions borrowed from feminist theory such as *écriture féminine* or Foucault's texts, which are more often than not alluded to in general terms but rarely backed up by any specific references. Similarly, the use of two different theoretical frameworks, Foucault's and Boulding's, at times leads to confusion, as it causes the definitions of the two central terms, "political" and "power," to shift. The introduction clearly uses them as synonymous; indeed, Sheckels explains that "the political" can be defined in broad terms. From a post-structuralist point of view, this interchangeability is fully justified, since the political has increasingly been defined as seeping into each domain, including the personal and the intimate, such as sexuality. Although this is the definition Sheckels adheres to most of the time, a certain amount of confusion arises when the author returns to the more classic definition of the "political": the term is then narrowed down to its etymological meaning, based on the Greek word *polis*, city-state, pertaining to the state and its administration.

An example of this shifting definition appears in the subdivision of the chapters into an overview of the political, economic and social domains in the novels. Although Sheckels indicates that these areas frequently overlap, the subtitles still seem to separate the three terms and to turn the "political" into a sub-category of "power." This raises the question of whether the book's title should have contained the more overarching concept of "power" rather than the "political." As a result, the changing approaches to the "political" occasionally create the impression of a lack of focus. The analysis appears to branch off in multiple directions, touching upon too great a variety of issues derived from the broad notion of power.

On a similar note, one question readers might have wanted to see explored in greater depth is what has metaphorically been called the death of the author. As an important tenet of post-structuralist criticism, it complicates the study of the political within fiction. Sheckels does not address this question in depth, and his analysis sometimes treats Atwood's fiction as an uncomplicated translation of the biographical author's political points of view. In the preface, for example, Sheckels establishes a telling analogy between the public's expectations of a candidate for public office and Atwood as a writer: not unlike a voter in the elections, a reader might want to know what Atwood's "platform" is (x). The analogy appears to neglect the possibility that her fiction might contain textual affects that contradict the biographical author's explicit and overt politics. What if power were also a

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question inherent to that of authorship: how much conscious, controlled, top-down power does an author have over her literary works?

Arguably the greatest contribution the book has to offer to Atwood scholarship is its analysis of resistance, based on Foucault's work. Resistance is described as thoroughly ambivalent and incomplete, for example in *The Year of the Flood*, where the resistance group called God's Gardeners appears to be enmeshed in violent relationships and hierarchies, in spite of their outspoken aims to rebel against power (160-61). One of this study's main qualities therefore consists in offering the reader insights into the often bleak political conclusions Atwood's in novels. Sheckels's analysis of these endings is captivating and never obscures the ambiguity and complexity of Atwood's novels.

This study will appeal to anyone interested in Margaret Atwood's fiction but also to readers coming for the first time to post-structuralist criticism. In particular those designing a course on theories of power might find the volume of great use, as it provides fascinating textual examples of power, discipline and resistance. ✱