

Mapping the World of Anglo-American Studies at the Turn of the Century

Mapping the World of Anglo-American Studies at the Turn of the Century

Edited by

Aleksandra Nikčević-Batrićević
and Marija Krivokapić

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Mapping the World of Anglo-American Studies at the Turn
of the Century

Edited by Aleksandra Nikčević-Batrićević and Marija Krivokapić

This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2015 by Aleksandra Nikčević-Batrićević, Marija Krivokapić
and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without
the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-7659-3

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-7659-9

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	ix
Marija Krivokapić and Aleksandra Nikčević-Batrićević	

PART ONE: LITERARY AND CULTURAL STUDIES

Reading Richard Powers at the Turn of the Century	3
Stipe Grgas	

Toril Moi's Reading of Simone de Beauvoir.....	21
Miloš D. Đurić	

Allan Houser's and Bob Haozous' Vision of Indianness: A Story of Filiation and Two Artistic Statements	49
Jeannine Belgodere	

The Universal and Timeless World of Shakespeare's Work	65
Esmeralda Subashi	

Modern Critical Approaches to Shakespeare: New Readings of <i>Merchant of Venice and Measure for Measure</i> among the Late 20 th Century Critics...	75
Tatjana Dumitrašković	

Less is More: Reductionism in Beckett's Plays.....	85
Loran Gami	

"Dulce et decorum est, pro patria mori": From Idealism to Radicalism in World War I Poetry	97
Armela Panajoti	

Anne Sexton's Search for <i>ÉcritureFéminine</i> : Reading, Writing and Echoing Female Identity	107
Aleksandra Nikčević-Batrićević, Miloš D. Đurić, and Marija Krivokapić	

Between American Contemporary Literature and Albanian Culture: Poetry of Luljeta Lleshanaku and Cathy Song; A Comparative Approach	123
Bavjola Shatro	
Poetic Image as Communicational Media in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney	139
Svetlana Kalezić-Radonjić	
Saul Bellow's Neo-Transcendentalism Under the Influence of European Modernist Literature and American Literary Tradition	153
Elonora Hodaj	
The Power of Narration in <i>The Woman Warrior</i> : Subversion of History and Tradition	161
Sanja Čukić	
Dealing with Evanescence: The Motif of Old Age and the Crisis of Meaning in Philip Roth's <i>The Dying Animal</i>	175
Sabina Osmanović	
PART TWO: LANGUAGE STUDIES	
Linguistic Cyberpunking	185
Željka Babić	
Translation and Arts Discourse	195
Brankica Bojović	
A New Vision for the Future: Obama and Romney Metadiscoursing in the Presidential Debates	205
Bledar Toska	
Humour and Horror in the Classroom: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Teaching English Language and American Literature at the University Level	223
Aleksandra Izgarjan and Diana Prodanović-Stankić	
Mapping the Importance of Metacognitive Strategies in Foreign Language Reading Classroom	243
Marija Mijušković	

Mapping the World of Anglo-American Studies
at the Turn of the Century

vii

Genre Pedagogy and EFL Teaching through Writing	253
Violeta Stojičić and Radmila Bodrić	
<i>Shifting Identities: The Spanish of U.S. Latino/a Speakers</i>	263
Ana Sánchez-Muñoz	
Notes on Contributors.....	279
Index	289

INTRODUCTION

MARIJA KRIVOKAPIĆ
AND ALEKSANDRA NIKČEVIĆ-BATRIĆEVIĆ

As suggested by the title of this book, the aim of this project is to revisit the most important issues that Anglo-American studies are facing at the beginning of the twenty-first century, both when it comes to research and when it comes to teaching. As the English language has become the *lingua franca*, it is not only its acquisition that has long been considered a necessity for an educated population, but those have also been the culture that has produced it and that has been changing it constantly, the literature written in English, as well as the linguistic and literary discourse that has largely dominated critical theory globally. Therefore, the subjects of Anglo-American studies, its traditional and modern concepts, as well as those that are currently developing must be approached from a multidisciplinary perspective. Also, they cannot stay only in the domain of the geographical and political regions in which Anglo-American culture is the dominant one, but are also being problematized in and determined by other spheres of the world, especially at the universities at which they are studied. This book, hence, approaches both mainstream cultural, literary, linguistic and academic achievements and, often by way of comparison, those smaller, more distant, or marginalized fields, such as some traditionally subordinate studies, like Native American or feminist, then distant cultures, like Albanian, Montenegrin, Chinese, as well as instances of cultural hybridization, like the position of Spanish students and the challenges they are facing at American universities.

Because we are dealing with a broad field of culture, literature, linguistics, and methodology of teaching English as a foreign language, this book consists of two main parts comprising the closest research and teaching fields, one attending to culture and literature and the other approaching linguistics and methodology.

The first part of the book opens with a paper titled “Reading Richard Powers at the Turn of the Century” by the Croatian scholar Stipe Grgas (University of Zagreb). Grgas begins his article by describing the situation within American studies and literary studies as one in which we are witnessing an overproduction of both scholarly publications and original works of literature. As a consequence Grgas holds that it is virtually impossible to either summarize or evaluate the resultant eclectic overload. Expanding upon economic metaphors that have been used to describe this situation, the author argues that it is precisely the economic problematique that has revealed itself as the determining instance of the turn of the century. In order to corroborate this contention he proceeds to show how this insight dawned upon the American novelist Richard Powers and how it motivated him to write the novel *Gain*. After a reading of the novel the article proceeds to address earlier novels by the same writer and investigate whether the problematique thematized in *Gain* had not always already been a motif in Powers’s novel. As a third step of his reading of Powers the author proceeds to the novels published after *Gain* to show that the economic sphere continues to be presented in Powers’s narrative worlds. In his conclusion Grgas argues that such a reading demands that we reengage the agenda of America Studies, particularly if we are practicing the discipline in locations where, during the turn of the century, the economic problematique has been all but invisible.

Two more papers follow Grgas’ essay that in a like manner assume a multidisciplinary approach using and combining the tools of cultural studies, literary theory, and linguistics. Thus Miloš D. Đurić, from the University of Belgrade, Serbia, analyses certain aspects of Toril Moi’s reading of Simone de Beauvoir, illustrated by her interpretation of *L’Invitée* (*She Came to Stay*), which entails the opening of the reader to the adventure she has encountered. In addition to this, the author examines the implications of acquiring traditional dichotomies, which determine the relationship between philosophy and literature by establishing binary opposition lists, which are, according to Moi, often disappointing, particularly because these lists have the unfortunate tendency to reproduce the stereotypical gender hierarchy. Relying on the critical attitude proposed by Moi and completely adhering to her attitude towards the above mentioned dichotomies, Đurić adopts an even more critical position and more radical attitude and proposes these dichotomies be eliminated and disintegrated. His considerations are based on the exact analysis of the concrete literary text through the prism of computational linguistics on the concrete language material of Simone de Beauvoir’s novel *L’Invitée*.

In her paper “Allan Houser’s and Bob Haozous’ Vision of Indianness: A Story of Filiation and Two Artistic Statements,” Jeannine Belgodere from le Havre University, France, points to the other marginalized category in critical theory—that of Native American artistic sovereignty. She maintains that many Native American artists, including the Apache sculptor Allan Houser (1914-1994), convey in their works the beauty, the bravery and the time honoured ancestral ways of life of Native Americans. By giving voice to such dignified themes, they seek to value and rehabilitate the image of peoples who were reduced to silence and often depicted as either noble or bloodthirsty savages. Houser displays a vision of Native America that places more emphasis on the Indians’ strength and grandeur than their vulnerabilities. Allan Houser’s son, Bob Haozous moves away from the grand portrayal of Native Americans as expressed by his father, by exploring such themes as the desecration of the earth and Indian genocide. With Bob Haozous it is less a question of the Indians’ strengths than of their fallibilities and victimization. By emphasizing the Indian’s complex predicament in contemporary history, he denounces the exclusively positive representation of the Indian. Belgodere’s exploration compares Houser’s and Haozous’ treatment of similar themes, like the buffalo, the Apache Mountain Spirits and Mother Earth, showing how Bob Haozous revisits the past and speaks to the present life of his people. If Haozous revises his father’s view of Natives, Belgodere claims, the two sculptors meet in their defence of *Indianness*.

The following three essays work with English drama’s presentation of the human condition. Thus, the Albanian scholar Esmeralda Subashi’s paper “The Universal and Timeless World of Shakespeare’s Work” discusses undoubtedly the greatest playwright of all time whose works have influenced the development of world literature more than those of any other writer. His plays are equally appealing and fascinating to modern readers and spectators as they used to be to the sixteenth century audience. This paper aims at identifying some of the universal themes Shakespeare addressed in one of his greatest comedies, *The Merchant of Venice*. While it addresses justice, mercy, society’s treatment of the outsider, trust, honour, loyalty, reputation, romantic love, good versus evil, etc., three major themes are the focus of this discussion: empowerment of women, racial discrimination and treatment of homosexuality, showing thus that Shakespeare still addresses relevant social issues such as gender equality, anti-Semitism or homosexuality. “Modern Critical Approaches to Shakespeare: New Readings of *Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure* Among the late Twentieth Century Critics,” by Tatjana Dumitrašković from the University of East Sarajevo, Bosnia and

Herzegovina, approaches the question of false justice and the hypocrisy of courts by looking at how different modern criticism of the late twentieth century perceives themes in Shakespeare's plays. She also concludes that these issues are still very relevant and that is why they are popular among modern scholars of the late 20th century who deal with them in different ways.

The concern of Loran Gami, from the University of Tirana, is the achievement of another famous playwright in English—Samuel Beckett. “Less is More—Reductionism in Beckett’s Plays” focuses on the reductionist and minimalist aspects of Beckett’s work, particularly his dramas. In this paper *reductionism* is interchangeable with *minimalism*, *diminution*, or *condensation*. Explaining how Beckett has broken radically with the conventions and rules of literary genres and reduced his works to the most essential and minimal constituents, Gami claims that, although considered difficult, Beckett’s first published play, *Waiting for Godot* is a relatively long play compared to his later plays, which are shorter and much more condensed. Plot and action in these plays are constantly reduced and lack the elements of traditional drama. Realism aimed to reach verisimilitude by the accrual of details, which would give a thorough and more comprehensive representation of reality. In Beckett’s plays details are eliminated. The article also considers various aspects of the *mise-en-scène* in Beckett. In *Waiting for Godot* the stage setting lacks the props and objects that we would normally find in a naturalist play and is reduced to a forsaken road, a tree, and a stone. Just as Beckett’s setting is elemental, so the plot is often eventless and is constructed by means of leitmotifs. The reduction in Beckett’s plays leads to condensation and it is precisely through this condensation that his plays convey powerful images and representations of human existence. Through them we can perceive our human condition undiluted by details.

In “‘Dulce et decorum est, pro patria mori’: From Idealism to Radicalism in World War I Poetry,” Armela Panajoti, from the University of Vlore in Albania, focuses on World War I poetry, by making significant distinctions between World War I poetry and World War II poetry. She points out that World War I poetry is held in higher regard compared to World War II poetry. One of the most important contextual differences is in the attitude towards war as expressed in the poetry; while the authors of the first group focused predominantly on the actual horrors of war, the poets in the second group found in poetry a kind of consolation. But, most importantly, World War I poetry is not seen in this paper exclusively as poetry about war but as a literally movement decisive in the development

of the thematic and formal aspects of modern poetry, which the author defines as a shift from idealism to radicalism.

Staying within the field of poetry, the two following papers discuss poetry authored by female artists. In their paper “Anne Sexton’s Search for *Écriture Féminine*: Reading, Writing, and Echoing Female Identity,” Aleksandra Nikčević-Batričević, Miloš D. Đurić, and Marija Krivokapić demonstrate the practice of poetic corpora diversity concerning some North American authors over the past few decades. The main area of argument revolves around revisions launched by theorists and critics working within the framework of gender and sexuality. Their differences provoked the appearance of diverse critical readings. Different theories that have emerged contribute to new insights and encourage new ways of interpretation, by deconstructing language, psychology, psychoanalysis, and the social practices that always go beyond the author’s domination or the traditional expectations of the reader. Bajola Shatro, Tirana University, makes a comparative study between American contemporary literature and Albanian culture, namely the poetry of Luljeta Lleshanaku and Cathy Song. Her article focuses on two groups of poets—non-American writers who live and write in the US and whose poetry is constantly translated into English, and those US authors who are of non-American descent and have used their origin as a key resource for their poetry in contemporary American literature. Poets from both groups share several features. They are able to introduce us to a poetic reality that would have much to contribute to both literary environments and—more significantly—to global literary discourse in the twenty first century. The two representative authors in this article are an American and an Albanian poet. Pain, memory, woman and family, sorrow, identity, the self, death, isolation, longing, are some of the main themes in Lleshanaku’s poetry, several of which occupy a central position in Song’s poetry. The article dwells upon analogies between Lleshanaku and Song focusing on the images, poetic perceptions, and metaphysical concepts that illuminate their poetics and the literary process in contemporary world literature.

“Poetic Image as Communicational Media in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney,” by Montenegrin scholar Svetlana Kalezić-Radonjić argues that be it his complex view on reality and past, everyday life, man’s animal nature, the current problems of turbulent society or most intimate evocations, Heaney’s poetry breaks the boundaries of literature entering life itself. In this poetic constellation one of the key positions belongs to the poetic image, which very often represents the cornerstone and fulcrum of Heaney’s poetic weave. Poetic image in itself contains dual reality—it is at the same time a form of spirit or awareness, but also a linguistic form.

Heaney's poetic image is often based on symbols, on symbolized reality, which opens up new possibilities in communication of the poetry. Based on the Horatian thesis *ut pictura poesis*, and continuing with many a modern theorist, the author attempts to decipher the way in which the poetry of Seamus Heaney communicates with its recipients.

Three papers that close this part of the book discuss post-war fiction. "Saul Bellow's Neo-Transcendentalism Under the Influence of European Modernist Literature and American Literary Tradition," by Elonora Hodaj from the University of Vlore, argues that Saul Bellow's central role in the second part of the twentieth century owes a lot to a dual heritage that blends a series of strong modernist interests with American literary tradition of the time. Her paper is an attempt to give a general picture of Bellow in the framework of the didactic tradition of American literature of the nineteenth century delivered by Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Melville and others, as well as under the influence of the spiritual probing literature of Dostoevsky, Kafka, Sartre and Camus. Bellow's existential dilemmas in a harsh and victimizing world show the pressure of the era which he explores with an indebted Dreiserian naturalism aiming at achieving a basic, fundamental and transcendental truth; the complex path towards the understanding of human responsibility.

In her paper "The Power of Narration in *The Woman Warrior*: Subversion of History and Tradition," Sanja Čukić from the University of Belgrade, explores the ways Kingston uses narration in her novel *The Woman Warrior* as the means of retaliation and insurgency. Narration helps the narrator not only to find out who she really is, but also to change the course of the past and avenge herself on the American community for the maltreatment of the Asian American community to which she belongs. Kingston shows that only in writing is the narrator capable of materializing her feelings. Moreover, the written word gives her the feeling of security and the opportunity to be heard and understood both within her family and society. The longer the narrator is hindered by paralysis of speech, the stronger her desire is to express her feelings on paper. In her narration, Kingston took the role of a protector giving a voice to the neglected and silent, primarily Chinese women, identifying with them and subverting history and tradition so that their voices could be heard. She uses myths from China which she revises, creating new stories in English, showing that she sees culture as heterogeneous. This essay shows how narration in this novel shapes the narrator's personality and helps her in the search for the answers of her identity as an American and Asian American woman. At the same time, the essay highlights the importance of language and story-telling in the process of narrating which

help the narrator gain her voice and overcome silence, finally bridging the gap between American and Chinese cultures.

Sabina Osmanović, from the University “Luigj Gurakuqi” in Shkodër, Albania, discusses the novel *The Dying Animal* by Philip Roth. She explains how Roth portrays male life as a chain of conflicts that men have to face courageously. Since Roth is well known for including autobiographical elements into his work, this novel offers the possibility to follow several decades of his own aging process. Roth’s characters are predominantly successful intellectuals; nevertheless their relationships to women are always defined by narcissism, dependence, and self-pity. The author claims that *The Dying Animal* is crucial in the author’s literary work, as this novel finally moves from midlife-crisis towards the big issue of Roth’s final novels: the endlife-crisis, and the inevitable confrontation with approaching death.

Devoted to linguistic issues and teaching English as a foreign language, the second part of the book opens with the paper titled “Linguistic Cyberpunking,” by Željka Babić from the University of Banja Luka (Bosnia and Herzegovina) that makes a natural bridge between the previously researched field and these ones. In her paper Babić asserts that even though that it has been almost thirty years since the publication of the first cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer* (1984), the need for turning back to William Gibson’s masterpiece is ever so present. By creating Cyberspace, which, in his own words, presents a “consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators,” Gibson had to introduce a new way of communication, thus creating new linguistic tools for expressing virtual reality. This paper explores the variety of morphosyntactic and syntactic tools used by the author to extract specific linguistic layers within the particular characters and plots. The paper puts a particular focus on types of modification used in noun phrases, as well as linguistic tools used for emphasizing personal traits of the characters.

“Translation and Arts Discourse,” by Brankica Bojović from the University of Montenegro, discusses translation studies that focus on a lot more than just translation techniques. Rather, they depend on close understanding of the cultures of both the target and source languages. Acquiring correct grammar and punctuation means just as much to translation as learning the techniques of painting or sculpture means to art. This paper shows that extra-linguistic knowledge plays the most significant role in semantic or pragmatic lexical relations. The pictorial language of one of the top Montenegrin academic painters, who uses traditional, modern and his own unique representation of the world in his

paintings, drawings, watercolours, and photographs is the subject of this paper's analysis.

Bledar Toska's (University of Vlora, Albania) multidisciplinary focus is around several aspects and functions of some of Obama and Romney's metadiscoursing in the 2012 presidential debates. Generally speaking, Toska argues, presidential debates are characterized by various viewpoints and policies defended by candidates, which are not only related to the future but which also convey new visions of future situations or solutions to the audience. The author mainly discusses the uses of *hedges*, *boosters* and *attitude markers*, i.e. resources intended to add pragmatic meaning to the propositional contents of statements, which reveal explicitly or implicitly much of the speakers' intentions and their projections in political discourse. Toska also offers some statistical data and discusses the way Obama and Romney have taken advantage of these powerful linguistic devices to express their respective new visions for the future.

The last part of the book comprises some challenging views on foreign language didactics. It opens with "Humour and Horror in the Classroom: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Teaching English Language and American Literature at the University Level," by Aleksandra Izgarjan and Diana Prodanović-Stankić from the University of Novi Sad, Serbia. The authors present an interdisciplinary approach to teaching language skills in English and American literature within the framework of literary theory and linguistic theories of humour. The authors decided to use humour as their focal point through which these two disciplines are refracted and integrated. Humour for them became a teaching resource which helped the students to gain better insight into the English language and culture and values related to it. The analysis of the elements of humour in the texts of American writers enabled the students to better understand the writers' narrative strategies. Simultaneously, the students' motivation in language classes increased and their higher levels of language attainment were reflected in better results at language tests. Thus, integrating humour theories with language and literature teaching proves to be a successful way to enhance students' understanding of the English language and American literature.

"Mapping the Importance of Metacognitive Strategies in Foreign Language Reading Classrooms," by Marija Mijušković from the University of Montenegro, assumes that the twenty first century has changed the way one thinks about reading. It is no longer whether or not one can fluently read the words and repeat the plot of the story. It is about reading instructors truly making sure that students understand what they

read. The students are expected to make connections to their background, to the world around them, and other things they have read. They are expected to detail the underlying meanings of what they read in addition to being fluent and accurate with the words. This means that teachers must employ new strategies that have been proven by research to be effective in teaching students the deeper meaning of what they read. This requires students to be active in the process of reading, as opposed to being passive and simply take in the words. Metacognitive strategies are the tools that teachers are using to teach students to truly comprehend what they read.

This paper is followed by the co-authored paper “Genre Pedagogy and EFL Teaching Through Writing” by Violeta Stojičić, from the University of Niš, and Radmila Bodrič, from the University Novi Sad, Serbia. In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the authors explain, genre is viewed as a social process in which language use has a social purpose, which in turn influences specific language choices at the level of lexicogrammar and discourse. Recently, genre pedagogy within SFL has proposed a genre-based language teaching model, described as a teaching-learning cycle. This paper discusses the principles this model rests on, the tools and objectives of instructing learners in gaining control of a genre, in terms of the fundamental stages in its structure. The teaching-learning cycle incorporates three phases: 1) modelling, in which the teacher provides a model of a genre to be discussed in terms of language resources and structure; 2) joint negotiation of text, in which the teacher and learners draft a new text complying with the conventional structure of the genre, and 3) independent construction of text, in which learners produce their own texts exploiting the possibilities of a genre. In our view, the direct identification of text features within genres may assist courses of foreign language writing, which are examined through the evaluation of the exposition essays assigned to EFL students in English Lexicology courses. The authors suggest that a straightforward genre analysis prepares learners for a better command of the substantial features of a genre, which do not only include syntactic and lexical choices, but also the essential stages of the genre employed to convey meaning in a given context.

The book closes with the paper titled “Shifting Identities: The Spanish of U.S. Latino/a Speakers” by the American scholar Ana Sánchez-Muñoz. The author agrees that heritage language maintenance is linked to healthier levels of ethnic identity and better sense of self and satisfaction in one’s community. Conversely, heritage language attrition/loss is associated with linguistic insecurity that affects the speaker’s identity development. Relying on Valdés and Villa, she argues that losing fluency in the home language often leads to linguistic insecurity and inhibition that directly

interferes with the language development process. In a world that is gradually more diverse with immigration levels increasing steadily throughout Europe and the U.S. (among other places), it is important to research the effects of attrition/loss of heritage languages in immigrant populations and come up with ways to effectively promote maintenance. The goal of this paper is to present the case of Spanish as a heritage language in the U.S. and examine the ways in which courses specifically designed for this speaker population can positively impact their linguistic skills and their sense of belonging to their ethnic community.

The papers gathered in this book are diverse and speak for themselves, yet, in their different ways they address a common core of questions arising from the nature, conventions of and the problems and issues the Anglo-American studies are facing at the beginning of the twenty first century. Without an intention to impose one solution or one reading onto the reader, we have tried to make a mosaic of the most current features of these studies and the discussions led at the academy to better understand where the new research and teaching trends are leading us. Assuming a multidisciplinary approach, our interest is focused on the literary texts ranging from the classics to contemporary writing, but also on some other forms of human expressions, such as art and politics. Therefore, we trust that we have met our primary aim of giving scholars and students of language, literature and culture alike the opportunity to share the results of a very successful international cultural and academic event, as well as stimulate intellectual confrontation and circulation of ideas within the field.

PART ONE:
LITERARY AND CULTURAL STUDIES

READING RICHARD POWERS AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

STIPE GRGAS

Biographers differ from novelists only in the direction of their proof: a biographer starts from particular details of character and attempts to deduce the life's general, historical context. A novelist assumes the historical terrain and induces representative details of character. Both muddy their work with intention and temperament. Biographer and sitter tangle and interdefine. Biographers can demonstrate no objective link between a life and its times free of the biographical interpretation. Yet in a final vicious circle, that limiting interpretation must be, in part, a product of the biographers' own relation to their times.¹

More so than at other historical junctures, to take stock of what is today being done within literary studies in the Anglophone world, a site that has disproportionately contributed to the unprecedented inflationary eclecticism of these studies, is to come near to questioning the *raison d'être* not only of the discipline but of its object of study. Faced with an overload of both newly published literary texts and a burgeoning cascade of scholarly work the reader poignantly feels an anxiety produced by a staggering glut of information. Merely to map its main contours would be a Promethean task. To venture into value judgments pertaining to this production is no less difficult. In the article "The Research Bust" Mark Bauerlein has shown how even the finest academic work does not receive a hearing either amongst the broader reading public or amongst people working on contiguous topics. Addressing the question why essays and books in literary studies of high scholarly merit suffer inattention he writes:

Because after four decades of mountainous publication, literary studies has reached a saturation point, the cascade of research having exhausted most of the subfields and overwhelmed the capacity of individuals to absorb the annual output. Who can read all of the 80 items of scholarship that are published on George Eliot each year? After 5,000 studies of Melville since

¹ Richard Powers, *Three Farmers on Their Way to a Dance* (New York: Perennial, 2001), 205.

1960, what can the 5,001st say that will have anything but a microscopic audience of interested readers?²

This admonishing data ought to be kept in mind when we wager to envision whether there is a future for literary studies. The situation is the same in other fields and disciplines. Bauerlein's diagnosis would easily find corroboration in American Studies that I indicate as the disciplinary framework of what follows. As a matter of fact, some of the publications Bauerlein explicitly names belong to the field of American Studies while the porous nature of this disciplinary matrix and its interdisciplinary networking only augment the number of authors and works that fall under its subject heading.

Furthermore, that data is being constantly supplemented because the number of publications grows with no end in sight. In the novel *Galatea 2.2* (1995), Richard Powers, whose work is responsible for my own contribution to this inflationary overkill, answers the query how many books are in existence in the following manner:

I told her that the Library of Congress contained 20 million volumes. I told her that the number of new books published increased each year, and would soon reach a million, worldwide. That a person, through industry, leisure, and longevity, might manage to read, in one life, half as many books as are published in a day.³

Needless to say, more than a decade after Powers wrote this, his calculations are outdated, surpassed as they have been by an unprecedented augmentation. Therefore, if at some point in the future Powers decides to voice his writerly views on literary studies as he did in this autobiographical novel, he will undoubtedly be even more vociferous than he was back in 1995 when he wrote that "the whole discipline is breaking up," "total chaos."⁴ The condition of literary studies today reveals that Powers was prescient. Drawing upon Giovanni Arrighi's economic history, Ian Baucom makes the following statement:

I think the moment we inhabit is one of speculative chaos, a moment in which, as in his (Arrighi's) history of capital, one dominant center of speculation has entered a phase of decline but no new center has yet

² Mark Bauerlein, "The Research Bust," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 4, 2011. <http://chronicle.com/article/The-research-Bust/129930/>

³ Richard Powers, *Galatea 2.2*. (New York: Picador, 1995), 290.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 255.

established itself as hegemonic. And if this is true, we should anticipate a set of critical projects, each offering itself as the new Paris of our minds.⁵

If Bauerlein and Powers voice the anxiety I feel knowing that I am adding to a prodigious archive that is in danger of inflating itself out of relevance, Baucom implicitly gestures to a problematique that has not only prompted these notes but whose urgency I hold demands a rethinking of our “critical projects.” The problematique is in large part the economy which at the turn of the millennium has insinuated or revealed itself as the totalizing horizon of human activity. Taking my cue from this diagnosis of the turn of the century I will argue for and illustrate the heuristic potential of a criticism that foregrounds the economic theme in literature.⁶ I propose to do this by reading the work of Richard Powers. The theoretical purchase on the field of literary and American Studies that I merely hint at here is the reason why I focus upon and draw attention to Richard Powers as a writer deserving our critical engagement. Put otherwise, the new Paris of our minds, to use Baucom’s metaphor, has turned out to be a city that, although different from the cities of old, is being built with bricks that evince the obduracy of economic laws.

Everything mentioned so far—the inflationary overkill, the economic turn, Powers’s work—are phenomena that can be subsumed under the broadly-defined rubric of the turn of the century. In whatsoever manner that period is demarcated, such a demarcation belongs to the work of periodization, which, as Gopal Balakrishnan warns, is never an innocent exercise but implies questions concerning “duration and identity of specific epochs and geopolitical orders.”⁷ Concurring with that last point I think that the notion of spatio-temporal specificity is particularly relevant to those engaged in reading theories and practices of the Anglo-American world from places that during the turn of the century have been projected as being out of sync with major developments in the world. Simply put, the notion of the turn of the century is not only dependent on the way we structure temporality but also where such structuring is being done. I return to this at the end of my article.

⁵ Ian Baucom, “Globalit, Inc.: The Cultural Logic of Global literary Studies,” *PMLA*, 116.1, 167.

⁶ Readers unacquainted with this development in recent literary theory are advised to look up Mark Osteen’s and Martha Woodmansee’s collection of essays *The New Economic Criticism: Studies at the Intersection of Literature and Economics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁷ Gopal Balakrishnan, *Antagonistics: Capitalism and Power in an Age of War* (London: Verso, 2009), 4.

In an interview he gave after the publication of *Gain* (1998) Powers was asked about his inspiration for the novel. In his answer he provided two sources. One of the two story lines, that of Laura Bodey, beginning “just this side of millennium’s end,”⁸ arose out of the author’s experience of loss, whereas the second is, as Powers’s remarks, “a bit more abstract.” He goes on to explain:

Looking at my old books, I see a restlessness of theme—photography, genetics, music, pediatrics, artificial intelligence—but there was a kind of lurking presence behind these topics that I wasn’t addressing, or acknowledging in any overt way. It’s the rhinoceros at the table that no one was talking about—and that’s business, that’s markets, that’s incorporation. The more I’ve thought about that, the less satisfying the literary approach to commerce and manufacture has been. There have been wonderful books on those themes, but it’s considered a kind of subclassification of literature, when in fact, it’s really the center of our existence here as social man. That indicates that there’s a bit of evasion going on.⁹

Without dwelling upon Laura’s story, whose travails I have analyzed elsewhere,¹⁰ I maintain that Powers’s narrative of Clare Corporation in *Gain*, the diachronic of American capitalism provided there, unearths the genealogy of the current turn of the century both in the United States and elsewhere. Doing this Powers delineates the main events, strategies and developments of capitalism in the New World. If, as Marx contends—Marx who, we need to note, is referenced not only in *Gain* but, as I will show, in Powers’s other novels as well—capitalist production is founded upon “the metabolic interaction between man and the earth”¹¹ what Powers in one way does in *Gain* is to expand the biological metaphor. He shows not only the anabolic, constructive metabolism, at work in the growth of capital but also its destructive, catabolic features, both as these work themselves out in the economy but also, most importantly for the novel, how they impact upon the human body. In *Gain* these trajectories clash head on when it is revealed that Laura’s cancer is part of a larger pattern of incidence near the Clare Plant.

A history of American capitalism, its cycles of boom and bust, from its moment of inception up to the 1990s, is the backbone of Powers’s text. The originary moment of the United States polity is not described as any

⁸ Richard Powers, *Gain* (New York: Picador 1998), 6.

⁹ Laura Miller, “The Salon Interview: Richard Powers.” *Salon* (July 1998).

¹⁰ Stipe Grgas, „Tijelo u romanu Richarda Powersa“. *SIC*-časopis za književnost, kulturu i književno prevođenje, 1, May 2010.

¹¹ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I (New York Penguin Classics, 1990), 198, 637.

kind of exceptional “errand,” to use one of the founding ideologems of American Studies, but rather as a business opportunity: “Jephthah Clare cared not where he landed, so long as he could reach the all-delivering ocean.”¹² The self-perpetuating nature of capitalist production is encapsulated in the rollcall of nineteenth century business crises:

Clare’s warehouses and factories, twenty separate buildings in all, stretched from Boston to Harrisburg. They, too, fed off one another. After each national panic or recession—in ‘37, ‘43, ‘57, ‘60, ‘65—sales always managed to rebound somehow.¹³

Of particular relevance is the importance Powers ascribes to the 1893 Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition.¹⁴ This milestone event and its significance are rendered in the following passage:

Here, in Chicago, four hundred years after Columbus’s landfall, America could see itself for what it truly was: less a nation than a collective outfit for the capitalization and development of its endless hinterlands. The fair’s numerous and luminary speakers exhorted the Captains of Industry to use the power of manufacture for the uplift of all nations and the betterment of the human race [...]

The World’s Columbian Exposition assembled in one place all the inconceivable astonishment of the industrial age. It made visible the mighty conversion of matter worked by the mechanization’s torrent, and rendered undeniable all the blessings unleashed by the ingenious genie over the space of three generations. It compiled an anthology of those inventions that had cracked open the globe’s buried treasure: steam, electricity, telegraph, telephone, chemistry, internal combustion, dynamo: and surpassing them all, the limited-liability corporation.¹⁵

At certain points in the text Powers indulges in theorizing about economic categories such as the following passage on money with its evident Marxian overtones:

Money was a theory of universal conversion. Everything was procurable by the sacrifice of *x* units of any other object, effort, or interval of time that

¹² Richard Powers, *Gain*, 9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹⁴ In an earlier article I argued for the significance of this site in Thomas Pynchon’s novel *Against the Day*. See Stipe Grgas, “Capital and Labour in Thomas Pynchon’s *Against the Day*,” in *CrossSections*, Volume 2, ed. Andrew C. Rouse (Pecs: Institute of English Studies, 2010), 359-370.

¹⁵ Richard Powers, *Gain*, 247.

you might care to sacrifice for it. The history of humanity was the history of higher and higher orders of convertibility. Barter, money, insurance, corporations: equivalence for equivalence, transfers for transfers, until all cogs turned every other in the self-replenishing whole.¹⁶

Powers is too keen an observer of the economic scene not to notice that capitalism constantly mutates, that the productivist phase was being displaced by a different hierarchy of capital: “*Raiders, poison pills, goal-line defenses, porcupine provisions*, one of them thinks: didn’t we use to make things?”¹⁷ In the final paragraph of the novel Laura’s surviving son mentions a “bit of capital he had tucked away.” Actually the money is the settlement Clare paid to the cancer victims. But these considerations are overridden by the metabolism Powers had unearthed as we read at the very end of the text: “The sum had been compounding forever, waiting for a chance to revenge its earnings. The figure was now huge, a considerable bankroll. And softly, Tim suggested that it might be time for the little group of them to incorporate.”¹⁸

Going back to the importance I am ascribing here to economic themes, I maintain that Powers in *Gain* narrates the concerns articulated by New Economic Criticism and writes a novel that beckons us to explore its possibilities. However, just as he remarked in the *Salon* interview that there were books dealing with economic themes published before his novel, in like manner we can say that the economic theme had always inevitably been with us. Acknowledging its ubiquitous presence opens up a field of inquiry which I believe has been eclipsed by readings of literature motivated by other supposedly more sophisticated but, as the present world crisis has made us see, hardly more relevant agendas. The *Salon* interview as well as *Gain* itself prompt me to return to Powers’s earlier novels and ask whether the economic theme is present in the earlier publications. A good point to start is Powers’s autobiographical novel *Galatea 2.2*.

Narrating his role as a writer in residence in an institutional setting where a neurologist proposes to model the human brain by employing computer-driven neural networks, Powers relates his personal experience and in an offhanded manner remarks upon his previously published opus. These cursory remarks steer clear of any direct engagement with the economic thematic. However, the account of his employment status, which synecdochically maps the position of the humanities in the emerging

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 266.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 351.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 355.

conjuncture, could be mustered as evidence for its presence. Further corroboration of this presence can be found in snippets scattered throughout the text: “resources to spare, the office cost them a little,”¹⁹ “trust fund,”²⁰ “stock exchange,”²¹ “fifty million dollars of real estate,”²² “consumer goods,”²³ “dead drop from middle class to *Grapes of Wrath*,”²⁴ “hedged,”²⁵ “leveraging profit,” “market and mad brokers.”²⁶ On a higher level of complexity, Powers makes a comment on the Netherlands, a multi-significant site in his narrative that derives from economic history: “The great middlemen, your Dutchmen. Bought and sold all races, colors, and creeds. Tell me. How does it feel to live in a country that peaked three centuries ago?”²⁷ The question appears in an exchange between Powers and the neurologist who queries why the novelist does not write about “real countries”: “The whole global economy is out there, chain-dragging on its own economic exhaust pipe. It’s North against South, you know. Haves versus have-nots. How about a swing through the tropics? The lands of the 6 percent population growths and the two-hundred-a-year incomes?”²⁸ As a final remark, in paying obeisance to his former professor, to whom he owes his Shakespeare and Yeats, Powers adds to this roll call “my Marx and Freud.”²⁹

Another thematization of the economic dimension in *Galatea 2.2* occurs when Powers registers the intrusion of the market into the writer’s vocation: “It killed C. to read that I was a fresh commodity to keep an eye on.”³⁰ This echoes his lover’s reaction to the publication of his first novel *Three Farmers on Their Way to a Dance* (1985): “It killed her to watch those farmers make their way into the brutal market.”³¹ In that first novel Powers’s characteristic way of interweaving different story lines and what he has called “a jump-shift in epistemic levels”³² are not only anticipated

¹⁹ Richard Powers, *Galatea 2.2*. (New York: Picador, 1995), 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²² *Ibid.*, 10.

²³ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 204.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 213.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

³² Stephen J. Burn, An Interview with Richard Powers, *Contemporary Literature*, Volume 49, Number 2, Summer 2008.

but deployed in full. Inasmuch as the novel explores twentieth century developments and ideas, it comes as no surprise that the book has to thematize the economic problematic. As if setting the opening of the narrative in Detroit and mentioning cars in the second sentence of the text were not enough, Powers on the very next page mentions “a cyclical occurrence paralleling America’s boom/bust economy.”³³ If the reader picks up this narrative thread, due weight will be given to the narrator’s ruminations in the foyer of the Detroit museum: “It was an odd marriage: Edsel Ford, whose father was the first among capitalists, in cahoots with Rivera, the notorious revolutionary who secured Trotsky’s political asylum in Mexico.”³⁴ Although Powers’s use of Ford in the narrative in itself substantiates my argument, I draw attention to a remark that evinces the role Powers ascribes to the economy in the transformative processes of the twentieth century. Powers at one point states that “Morgan, an old creditor, closed an era when he died in 1913,” expands this contention with a roll call of inventors, writers and entrepreneurs and then adds: “Ford alone remains an enigma, the improbable meeting of pragmatist and idealist, innovator and reactionary, peacemonger and war profiteer.”³⁵ On one level it can be said that the novel seeks to fathom that enigma, to understand the emergence of Fordism and its material, spiritual and intellectual manifestations. It is on the backdrop of Fordism that Powers narrates the 1980s as the present of the novel and the decade’s economic turbulence (“this godforsaken slump,”³⁶). That turbulence is referred to as “the steady crumble in capital value,”³⁷ with allusions to “market mania,”³⁸ “double-entry bookkeeping,”³⁹ “compound interest.”⁴⁰ The last appears in the chapter entitled “And We Have Come into Our Heritage,”⁴¹ which is saturated by economic terms and which brings together the different story lines in a comic denouement that underscores the fictitious nature of money value. How that development diverges from the earlier workings of capital is diagnosed in an exchange where we read: “Brokers are after

http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/contemporary_literature/v049/49.2burn.html

³³ Richard Powers, *Three Farmers on Their Way to a Dance* (New York: Perennial, 2001), 10.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 328.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 322-330.

lucre, which is only about getting, consumption. The other—going back to school to study science and all—that’s about making things. Use. Production.”⁴² I offer a final quote to substantiate my claim that Powers inscribes the economic problematique into his first novel: “If one buys nothing else from Marx, whose ideas may be the trigger point of economics applied to itself, he is at least untouchable on quantitative changes becoming qualitative ones.”⁴³

The evocation of the 1939 New York World’s Fair in *Prisoner’s Dilemma*, “a septic hotbed of the Progress disease”⁴⁴ echoes, with a difference, the Chicago Exhibition in *Gain*. The difference derives from the higher stage of development which is registered in the text by the itemization of new economic breakthroughs. Although I am not proposing a reductivist reading of the novel, a reading which would ascribe the intricacies of its drama to purely economic motives, I believe that these are not to be ignored. Thusly I point to those places in the text where the economic domain is directly mentioned: “escapism from economic hardship,”⁴⁵ “obsolete cultural practice of cash on delivery,”⁴⁶ “bank-underworld liaisons.”⁴⁷ I add Powers’s remark that the world of Disney, “the manufacturing of enchantment,” a recurrent theme in the novel, “becomes especially tricky under the threat of complete business collapse.”⁴⁸ The extent to which the economy is a source domain for various pronouncements is evident in a reference to mothers of children fallen in the war: “Their losses, debits carried over in public accounting, had been posted so long ago that they were struck from the active book, transferred to the dead ledger.”⁴⁹ Considering the significance of the father’s pet project Hobstown in the narrative it is indicative that it is related to the experience of debt and credit. His wife comments on this as follows:

She, if anyone, pulled the purse strings. Every cent of cash he had he gave her willingly. He simply could not live under the umbrella of credit, owning the unpaid for. Ailene, with a sense of wonder that grew daily, found she had married the last man in America who couldn’t owe money.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 200.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁴⁴ Richard Powers, *Prisoner’s Dilemma* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 82.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 161.

That was *his* golden rule: no one deserved to draw on what wasn't there to begin with [...] Hobstown was the only sovereign state ever to practice the principle of complete self-sufficiency: sacrifice everything, pare it away until all that's left is the unencumbered mystery of getting along with, for, and by yourself.⁵⁰

Therefore, one can say that the father's hobby, Hobstown, is his way of finding a respite from the encroaching indebtedness of American citizenry. To counter the objection that I am giving undue weight to a chance observation I draw attention to a remark in *Three Farmers on their Way to a Dance*: "As the last remaining individual who refused to use credit."⁵¹ Both utterances stem from an unease brought about by the transformation of a world in which one lives according to one's ability and means into a society based on debt.

Near the beginning of Powers's *The Gold Bug Variations* (1991) there is a direct allusion to the mantra of Reaganomics: "the current administration's promised economic prosperity, trickle down."⁵² Although the novel foregrounds the discourse of computer science, in a passage that deals with disciplines we read the following: "A faction of me secedes, insists that political science can be understood only in terms of constituent economics. But the study of goods, services, and distribution produces more problems than prescriptions."⁵³ Powers does not delve into the said problems but issues of the commercialization of science, allusions to "the postindustrial shimmer"⁵⁴ and to the "North American financial network"⁵⁵ indicate that the economic sphere is registered and given due weight. I draw attention to that section of the book where computer specialists are snow bound and unable to attend to their tasks at the New York center dealing with financial transactions:

The minor crisis, which industry analysts hope is now over, reveals the vulnerability of increasingly interdependent fiscal networks. Particularly sensitive are same-day overdrafts, when institutions transfer massive amounts of money they do not have, under the assumption that they will receive similar transfers to cover them in the immediate future.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁵¹ Richard Powers, *Three Farmers on Their Way to a Dance*, 294.

⁵² Richard Powers, *The Gold Bug Variations* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992): 28.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 373.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 435.