

Abstracts

An Arab American Neo Slave narrative?: Usable Pasts in Laila Lalami's *The Moor's Account*

Dr. Martina Koegeler-Abdi, University of Copenhagen

Laila Lalami's *The Moor's Account* (2014) is a revisionist counter narrative of Cabeza de Vaca's *La Relación* (1542), the official report of the disastrous Narváez expedition, which had set out to discover Florida in 1527. Lalami's narrative presents itself as a recovery of the erased historical voice of the Moorish slave Estebanico – one of the four only survivors of the expedition who roamed the American South West for years under varying degrees of Native captivity. Published in 2014, *The Moor's Account* also offers a fictional rendering of the past that speaks directly to contemporary political struggles, for example, the rebounding nativist sentiments and the increased marginalization of Arab Americans as 'un-American' after 9/11. In this paper I explore how Lalami uses adaptations of multiple US-specific literary genres, such as Royall Tyler's barbary captivity narrative *The Algerine Captive* or the orientalist translations of the *Arabian Nights*, to stake out a claim for Arab American national belonging. The politics of her adaptations challenge white, Eurocentric hegemony in how national history and literary canons are imagined, but Lalami also uses African American slave narrative conventions. Can *The Moor's Account* be read as an Arab American neo slave narrative? And if so, how do we rethink the relations between Arab and African American literatures this specific adaptive choice?

Martina Koegeler-Abdi is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Copenhagen. She holds degrees in American Studies, Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies as well as Women's and Gender Studies. Her dissertation *Adaptive Agency and Arab American Womanhood, 1893-1967* explores the cultural histories of Arab American women and she has published on US multi-ethnic literatures, performance studies, transnational feminism and the politics of adaptation. Koegeler-Abdi also co-edited the book *Interculturality: Practice Meets Research* and a special issue conversation piece on *Place in American Culture*. She was a Fulbright Fellow at SUNY Stony Brook as well as a visiting research fellow at Brown University and received various grants and awards for her work.

Contingent Archives of Unfreedom and Experimental Aesthetics

Dr. Silvia Schultermandl, University of Graz

In my previous work on transnationalism as aesthetic experience I have been interested in what literary texts do to and with readers when it comes to critiques of national paradigms that impact the protagonists' identities by making them feel un-American, marginal, confused about what American identity actually is, frustrated with essentialist identity categories and their real-life impacts, or compelled to subvert prevalent ideas about identity in general. More recently, I have deepened my interest in aesthetics in relation to what I think of as contingent archives where dominant narratives about liberty and democracy have overwritten and covered up counter-hegemonic narratives about various conditions of unfreedom and marginalization. I am using the term unfreedom to denote all kinds of systemic violence, including slavery, indentured labor, and colonial biopolitics. And my idea of contingent archives is indebted to Michel Foucault's insistence that archives are governed by rules—what he terms the “system of accumulation, historicity, and disappearance”—and that these rules are implicated in the constituency of every archive. To this end, I have selected four recent texts which are part of an intriguing direction of critical thought in American Studies: Karen Tei Yamashita's *I Hotel*, Lisa Lowe's *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, Saidiya Hartman's *Loose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, and Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. These texts allow me to move from a discussion of experimental fiction and contingent archives to scholarly work which attends to the long history of unfreedom through innovative form. As texts, they exemplify scholars' own practices of contributing to the recovery of lives and narratives that take readers into the historical origins of contemporary conditions of unfreedom and social injustice.

Silvia Schultermandl is an associate professor of American Studies at the University of Graz, where she teaches courses in American literature/culture studies. Silvia is the author of a monograph on the representation of mother-daughter conflicts in Asian American literature and the (co)editor of five collections of essays which explore various themes in transnational studies, American literature and culture, as well as family and kinship studies. She is currently preparing for publication with Routledge a monograph on the aesthetics of transnationalism in American literature from the revolution to 9/11 and is developing, with May Friedman, the Palgrave Series in Kinship, Representation, and Difference.

Climate and the Body in the American Tropics during the Second Cholera Pandemic, 1828-1835

Dr. Michael Boyden, Uppsala University

Recent work in the health humanities has shown how the global cholera pandemic of the 1830s triggered an epistemic crisis that upended governing assumptions about disease transmission (Altschuler 2018). But the cholera crisis also occupies an understudied place in the genealogy of modern environmental thought. Significantly, the word environment became a freestanding concept during this period. Before the rise of germ theory, physicians relied largely on neo-Hippocratism, which understood health in terms of the dynamic interaction between climate and the body. The rise of experimental and stochastic medicine would gradually discredit this paradigm and, along with it, a mode of climatic awareness that the environmental humanities is now trying to recuperate. The second cholera played a crucial role in this epistemic shift. Originally understood as a tropical disease, the cholera upended the moralized geography of diseases as its trajectory confounded established epidemiological models. This paper traces this transition from a climatic regime towards a more dualistic understanding of the world in the journals and letters of American invalids in the Caribbean and the American South written during the 1820s and 1830s (in particular Abiel Abbott, Edward Bliss Emerson, and Sophia Peabody). I argue that these writings dramatize the uncoupling of climate and the body at a time of intense anxiety regarding the origin and communication of the cholera and, in so doing, anticipate the forgetting of the climate that defines our modernity. By way of conclusion, I discuss how these new understandings of health and the body infiltrated into nineteenth-century American literary culture.

Michael Boyden is an Associate Professor of American literature at Uppsala University. Boyden is the author of *Predicting the Past: The Paradoxes of American Literary History* (2009). He is currently completing his second book entitled *Climate and Sensibility in American Literature, 1780-1860*. He is also assembling a collected volume on climate in American literature and culture for Cambridge University Press. He has a new research project underway dealing with environmental illness in American literature.

Cape Cod's Savage Borders

Dr. Christa Holm Vogelius, University of Copenhagen

Cape Cod (1865) opens with Henry David Thoreau's announcement that he began his travels "wishing to get a better view than I had yet had of the ocean, which, we are told, covers more than two-thirds of the globe"(3). And so while most of the narrative resides in the space between land and ocean, on the sandy beaches that form the shore's jagged coastline, the true investment is in the much more tenuous substance of water, which "was never more wild than now...was equally wild and unfathomable always"(148).

The ocean as wilderness offers a subversive counter-argument to narratives of deep history that saturated American literary projects during the years that Thoreau was writing. While Margaret Fuller, for instance, could write in *Summer on the Lakes, in 1842* (1843) that "The earth is full of men...You have only to turn up the sod to find arrowheads and Indian pottery"(52), Thoreau, with his eyes cast eastward rather than west, goes to pains to negate this stratified history: "We do not associate the idea of antiquity with the ocean, nor wonder how it looked a thousand years ago, as we do for the land...The Indians have left no traces on its surface" (148). In the ocean, the neat layering of history gets upended, and careful nationalist attempts to understand history and lineage are undone. When Thoreau writes that "There was nothing but that savage ocean between us and Europe," this statement needs to be taken in the context of a work where the sea represents not a historical space, but a sublime and timelessly violent one (44).

This paper considers Thoreau's complex brand of nationalism in *Cape Cod* (1865) in relation to contemporary ideas of the environment. In documenting a land mass that was gradually being etched away by the sea, and in which salt water comes to saturate all forms of life, Thoreau challenges the stability that writers elsewhere—including himself— were aiming to establish in the American soil. The ocean is for Thoreau very literally a border space, separating a quantifiable American history from an equally contained European past. But the savagery of this site, and its persistent tendency to erode and infuse the coastline of the seascape that Thoreau documents in the course of this narrative, undermines the stability of the kinds of national narratives that writers persistently constructed during this period. And *Cape Cod's* opening, which documents the drowning off the coast of Cohasset by hundreds of Irish immigrants, argues for an understanding of the sea as a site that maintains a distinction between American and Europe, at the same time as it renders meaningless national and even personal particularities. The ocean for Thoreau is both link and barrier, and his fascination with

this transitional space reveals the lure of a nationless site in a Western world increasingly defined by nation states.

Christa Vogelius is an assistant professor of American studies at the University of Copenhagen where she works on nineteenth century literature and visual culture. She has articles out on nineteenth century poetesses in the current issues of *Poe Studies* and *ESQ*, and is beginning a project on the photojournalist Jacob Riis.

Styling Melville

Dr. Rasmus Rahbek Simonsen, Copenhagen School of Design & Technology

Whether in the case of a book's binding or an article of clothing, textures and colours mattered to Melville. This paper puts into conversation Melville's personal aesthetic anxieties concerning clothing as described in his journal with his musings on dress and cultural ambiguity in his novel *The Confidence-Man*. To complement my textual observations and analyses, I will make references to contemporary fashion designers who express something of the Melvillean in their choice of cultural and material references. On the face of it, the connection between nineteenth-century American literature and contemporary fashion design may seem unexpected or perhaps even disingenuous. However, my approach follows recent tendencies in Melville scholarship to engage in imaginative and sometimes speculative readings in order to explore the broad span of Melville's interests in aesthetics, history, philosophy, and technology. Focusing on *The Confidence-Man*, his most stylistically ambiguous text, my intervention follows the 'speculative' turn in Melville criticism to consider how Melville looked at and represented garments with a view to establishing a visually and historically transcendent gateway between the gangplank and the runway.

Rasmus R. Simonsen is Lecturer in Communication Design and Media at the Copenhagen School of Design and Technology. He has published in journals such as *Design and Culture*, *Leviathan*, *Children's Literature*, *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, and *American Studies in Scandinavia*. Moreover, he has contributed to a number of edited collections. Most recently, he had an essay included in the collection *Approaches to Teaching Bechdel's Fun Home*, published by the Modern Language Association.

(Othered) Girls on Fire: Dystopia, Reality, and Imagination in American Culture and (New) Orleans

Dr. Sarah Hentges, Fulbright Distinguished Chair of American Studies at the University of Southern Denmark and Associate Professor of American Studies at the University of Maine at Augusta

American dystopia is not difficult to imagine in our contemporary world. But we can find hope through speculative and creative fiction and the power of Girls on Fire—the real and fictional girls of color protagonists who work toward more just futures. This presentation draws from my interdisciplinary study of dystopia and American culture in *Girls on Fire: Transformative Heroines in Young Adult Dystopian Literature*. Here, I'll consider the bigger picture of American dystopia as well as the ways contemporary American cultures are complicated, interrupted, challenged and transformed by real and fictional Girls on Fire.

Riffing and expanding on the Girl on Fire in the 2013 young adult dystopian novel, *Orleans*, I'll consider three other fictional/artistic representations of Girls on Fire in New Orleans: the 2012 film *Beasts of the Southern Wild*; the 2011 novel *Salvage the Bones*; and the epic 2016 album and film by Beyoncé, *Lemonade*. Considering the intersecting themes of these four texts (and, specifically, the theme of motherhood and mothering) that center female protagonists in the American South (New Orleans), illustrates the ways in which girls and women counter dominant narratives of dystopia as well as of reality. More, we can consider how Girls on Fire connect dystopia, reality, and imagination through place, across time, across genre, and toward power and empowerment—a specific example illustrative of the power of the symbol of Girl on Fire and the actions of real-life Girls on Fire.

Sarah Hentges is an Associate Professor of American Studies at the University of Maine at Augusta and the Fulbright Distinguished Chair of American Studies at the Center for American Studies at the University of Southern Denmark. Sarah has several books about American culture: *Girls on Fire: Transformative Heroines in Young Adult Dystopian Literature* (2018); *Women and Fitness in American Culture* (2013); and *Pictures of Girlhood: Modern Female Adolescence on Film* (2006). She also teaches fitness and yoga and blogs regularly via her website: www.cultureandmovement.com.

Transnational Geographies of Literary-Cinematic Adaptation: the West Country and the Deep South in *The Siege of Trencher's Farm* and *Straw Dogs*

Dr. Martyn Bone, University of Copenhagen

Straw Dogs (2011) opens with TV actress Amy Sumner returning home to Blackwater—“pronounced Backwater, Mississippi”---where Amy and her husband, screenwriter David, plan to redevelop her childhood home, the Wilcox farm. The plot soon narrows into a tale of tension between this California-based, creative-class couple and working-class, white male Mississippians. Amy becomes the object of a masculine struggle between “creampuff” David and Amy’s ex, “redneck” Charlie Venner. The lurid scenes of violence will be familiar to many viewers of Rod Lurie’s film, recalling as they do the Hollywood trope of “the ‘redneck menace.’” Yet Lurie’s *Straw Dogs* is not based on a southern novel: it is a remake of Sam Peckinpah’s notorious 1971 film, which derived from Scottish author Gordon Williams’ novel *The Siege of Trencher’s Farm* (1969). Whereas Peckinpah drastically revised Williams’ “rotten” book, Lurie’s remake is largely faithful to its cinematic predecessor, except with the obvious change of setting: the Mississippi location of Lurie’s *Straw Dogs* departs from Peckinpah’s film and Williams’ novel, both of which were set in England’s West Country.

This presentation will trace the transnational, intertextual geographies of adaptation in and between these three texts, focusing on parallels between the West Country in Williams’ novel and Peckinpah’s film, and the Deep South in Lurie’s movie. The first *Straw Dogs* draws on a deeply rooted discourse of Cornwall (where it was filmed) as a primitive, rebellious space within and against the nation. The two versions of *Straw Dogs* exemplify how the county of Cornwall and the state of Mississippi have figured as heightened versions of what Leigh Anne Duck terms “the nation’s region.” Both films offer variations on the “fantasy” through which a backward, recalcitrant region is figured as “an *internal other* for the nation” (Jennifer Greeson). *Straw Dogs*’ American hero must overcome Cornish “yokels” and Mississippian “rednecks” alike as they contradict “the national ideal.”

Martyn Bone is associate professor of American Literature at the University of Copenhagen. He is the author of *The Postsouthern Sense of Place in Contemporary Fiction* (2005) and *Where the New World Is: Literature about the U.S. South at Global Scales* (2018); the editor of *Perspectives on Barry Hannah* (2007); and the co-editor of *The American South in the Atlantic World* (2013), *Creating Citizenship in the Nineteenth Century South* (2013), and *Creating and Consuming the U.S. South* (2015).