

**Editor's Introduction****DOI: 10.54664/WYAC5200****Jelena Šesnić**

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In many ways it is the west, and particularly the Anglo-American scene within it, that circumscribes the scope of global modernity, as quite a few historians of culture and other areas would contend (see Braudel; Ferguson; McCarragher; Taylor). The topic of this issue argues a similar point in bringing to our attention some moments in the long duration of modernity, points of rupture at which the economy and technology and the social upheavals caused by them come to interact with nature perceived as the expected, settled, and archaic run of things. These ruptures happened at two points in the relatively recent past: the one point was the late eighteenth-century Industrial Revolution originating in England, an epic process that irrevocably and stunningly transformed the lives of all of our ancestors and initiated a chain of processes which we still labor under. In a longer trajectory, a parallel process could be observed on the other side of the Atlantic, where in the course of the nineteenth century another culture, the offspring of England and more generally speaking, the British Isles, but also their wayward child, struggled to forge its own path toward industrial modernity and soon after, global dominance.

In his ambitious project of writing a global history, the French historian Fernand Braudel remarks that such an attempt is contiguous with a parallel history of capitalist modernity, which again calls forth the western stage, placing it in dialogue or contestation with the adjacent or more distant areas, as Braudel brings them into discussion – Russia, India, China, the Islamic world, Africa, and Latin America. We shall narrow down our scope and look at some specific points in the continuum of modernity as it played itself out in the Anglo-American sphere in the last few centuries, mindful of the longer and broader narrative that might have been told if other parameters had been taken into consideration. Our inquiry, however, will take as its several points of departure significant changes in England, the United States, and Canada over the last two centuries. As Godfrey Hodgson points out, the myth of any country's isolationism and exceptionalism must wane before the currents of international and global intersections, and so should also be acknowledged in this constellation (155).

Without intending to either uncritically glorify or blatantly criticize these processes of transformation and rupture, we offer these essays as investigations of several points of access to and considerations of different facets of latter-day Anglo-American modernity. We have asked our contributors to examine the ways in which this particular modernity, whose ideas and notions we have inherited even as we see them further transformed and transposed into new socio-cultural and socio-economic constellations, came to be grasped and conceived in literary and cultural formations and artefacts in British, U.S. American, and Canadian contexts. Furthermore, this focus will hopefully illustrate not only the points of difference drawing on specific cultural elements or disparate temporalities encompassed in the contributions, but also the points of intersection and similarity despite cultural and temporal distances. In assembling these cross-cultural yet symptomatic readings, we hope to offer a tapestry of transformations that attended the

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rise of an Anglo-American modernity that is being commemorated in the literary, visual, and cultural archives analyzed here.

Now to individual contributions. Maria Dimitrova's elegantly argued piece "Bodies in Service: Representations of the Servant's body in Two Victorian Novels" sits at the intersection of several transformative currents taken up by an emergent form of the Victorian novel and its forays into new representational modes. It is notably the images of class and gender, as argued in the article focusing on George Moore's *Esther Waters* and the Mayhew brothers' *The Greatest Plague of Life: Or, The Adventures of a Lady in Search of a Good Servant*, that are affected by the new developments and require literature's special attention. In the course of massive social changes, the Victorian novel became an important and potent vehicle of reporting and bolstering the narratives of disruption, mobility, instability, and transformation in a society poised between the continuity of class structure and its fragility in the face of economic pressures. The article thus explicitly uses the novel's potential not only to mimetically capture a new social reality, as was its indisputable cultural role, but also to allow for an imaginative play of perspectives and positions with an uncertain outcome pointing to a degree of experimentation and inquiry at its core. The article's tenor therefore corresponds to what a recent study of the Anglo-American novel has identified as a central interest of the genre: "value and representation" in tandem with "emphatic imagination" (Comyn 2).

The article specifically looks at the social formation of servants whose ranks swelled after the Industrial Revolution and anointed a new, industrial business class as its beneficiaries. Even though servants were always present and entrenched in the English class system, the new dispensation brought on new types of servitude, not readily available for forthright exploration in the novel. Dimitrova's contribution is therefore valuable also for bringing to light some of the (supposedly!) unremarkable characters of the Victorian novel whose plight was presented in realistic and tragic but also humorous ways. The work of imagination allows us to traverse an often great gulf in English society between the two worlds – those of masters and of servants – both caught up in a swirl of changes after the reset of the Industrial Revolution.

The four contributions that follow take us across the Atlantic but do not quite sever the imaginary, cultural, and material ties between the two worlds embroiled in the transatlantic and global processes of long duration (Hodgson xvi). Even though the critical shifts of recent decades have considerably altered R.W. Emerson's canonical status by contesting his "aura" and problematizing his influence, Saša Simović's article "The Sage of Concord: Weaving Transcendental Thoughts" persuasively argues for the return to Emerson and some of the key concepts of his transformative contribution to modern American culture. In his investigation into the human psychology and spirituality that strive to transcend their social structures and strictures, as well as in his broad traversal of European and Asiatic traditions in order to gain a new understanding of the human individual in a materialist and commercial society, Emerson still must strike us as an uncannily modern and authentic writer, speaking also to the concerns of our times.

From his early questioning of the certainties of orthodox religion to his and other Transcendentalists' enthusiastic embrace of German – thus suspiciously foreign – ideas and works, to his ready disturbance of collective norms encased in institutions and traditions for their own sake, Emerson remains a quester, a thinker, a paradigmatic modern individual charting out heroic (that is, *self-reliant*) forms of personal and civic responsibility. He still seems to challenge us to recognize a divine spark within ourselves and act according to its mandate rather than relinquishing our responsibility as thinking Men (and Women). Lecturing and writing before and during the country's plunge into the vortex of the Civil War and the ensuing social and economic transformation, Emerson strove to encompass the vastness and variety of American experience and organize it in universal categories.

Forging ahead, Ksenija Kondali and Adna Oković's essay "Technological Encroachment and Social Changes in Late Nineteenth-Century American Writing" casts its eye on the late nineteenth-century social scene precisely at the moment that American literature began to find its particular valence, ready to draw on moments typical of the country's rural and pastoral scenery, as well as on crude and hectic but nonetheless captivating city images. Ranging from nature to society and evoking the earlier modes of pastoralism only to overlay them with the images of a reality requiring new modes of representation,

their contribution describes an arc moving from nature to a new urban civilization, while retaining the poignancy of earlier collective and individual longings.

American literature may have been tardy in adopting realism as a mode of representation; however, once it had caught up with the complexity of American reality in the aftermath of the Civil War, it could not but occupy itself with the immense and uncontrollable forces gripping the country and transforming it, over a relatively short period of time, into an exemplary modern society (see Mizruchi; Trachtenberg). As Kondali and Oković contend, for Sarah Orne Jewett, the effects of these prodigious processes reverberated in the almost pastoral scenes of rural America, while for Stephen Crane, the favorite scene of struggle and turmoil was an urban stage, enveloping his characters and directing their fates. Their fiction, alongside with that of some of their contemporaries, was an imaginative response to the transformations molding the country's future and, contrary to America's favorite myths (promulgated so forcefully by Emerson himself), taming and defeating the individuals exposed to them, as Crane's characters often are.

The Emersonian affirmation of individual consciousness, self-reliance, the inherent capabilities of the human soul, his affirmation of nature as a playground for human sensibilities and aboriginal faculties – these avatars of modern individualism permeate other experiments in American literature, as shown by Petra Sapun Kurtin's perceptive analysis of a paradigmatic New Orleans novel in her article "Pathos and Comfort of the City Against the 'Torrents of Progress': Ignatius Reilly's New Orleans in John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces*." While it would be almost a compliment to describe Toole's hapless protagonist as in any way "Emersonian," it would seem that the latter-day picaro of New Orleans sorely needs the qualities that would make him a competent individual. But it is also the case, as the urban labyrinth of New Orleans makes clear, that the post-war scene is much more complex to navigate than either mid-nineteenth or late nineteenth-century America.

Post-war, pre-Civil Rights, and already post-industrial New Orleans is entangled in its own history and mythology, both burdened and invigorated by its mixed culture, given over to nostalgia and pathos for the past, even when rushing into the future. The novel represents the city as a veritable character in its plot, hurling towards the indefinite future and negotiating change and rising instability. Activating the picaresque frame enables Sapun Kurtin to argue for a culturalist reading of the city, apart from more entrenched paradigms of American studies. The blend of medievalist, picaresque, Mediterranean, and Creole cultural codes provides for a startling view of one of the least typically "American" cities in the United States, with "suspended modernity" as yet another reason for its "untypicality."

A response to Canada's upheavals of modernity is illustrated in Krisztina Kodó's article "(Self-)Portrayals of Mixed Cultural Identities in the Works of Emily Carr and István Fújkin." The contribution specifically addresses the underappreciated and until recently suppressed contribution of First Nations' culture and mythology to the country's new and modern self-image. Kodó illustrates how this acknowledgment proceeds in two steps; the first is the tentative and almost genteel recognition of the native mythology and culture early in the twentieth century as the first rapprochement between the indigenous and the settler culture, coming together to create a new national imagery in the paintings of Emily Carr. Making a wide arc, it would seem that we once again must engage with "emphatic imagination" in order to mitigate the creation of a multifaceted collective identity.

Once that initial contact has been achieved, further encounters between the native and the settler/immigrant creative impulses occur as is exemplified in the work of the Canadian Hungarian immigrant artist István Fújkin, who unapologetically drew from the spring of First Nations' traditional and modern art. In all these borrowings, occasionally happening in the fraught conditions of "contact zones," as stipulated by Mary Louise Pratt, thus not immune to the relations of asymmetry, it transpires that First Nations' culture is also changing, molding itself to the conditions of modernity and rendering itself capable of entering into different kinds of negotiations with artists keen on exploring and experimenting with it.

Finally, the editor wishes to thank the individuals who have made it possible to finalize the project. My sincerest gratitude is due to Ludmilla Kostova, who, with her indefatigable scholarly nerve, recognized from the start a potential in this kind of project and kindly offered to host it on the pages of *VTU Review*. Furthermore, I would like to thank the authors of the contributions for their enthusiastic

response to the call for papers and their patient and efficient sufferance of editorial demands. Not the least, as in all such undertakings, the willing and competent colleagues were ready to step in as reviewers, for which I extend my sincere thanks to them. It is my hope that readers will find these selected episodes from the vast canvas of Anglo-American modernity a profitable and instructive lesson from the past for the present we inhabit.

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