

# INTRODUCTION TO THE *ELN* FORUM: THE ADVISORY BOARD

---

LAURA WINKIEL

Since its founding in 1963, *English Language Notes*, under the sponsorship of the University of Colorado Boulder, has provided a respected forum for criticism and scholarship in every field of English studies to a broad audience of academics and general readers. It has been unique both in its breadth of audience and subject matter and in its emphasis on shorter articles of wider interest than typical scholarly writing. In 2005, *ELN* underwent a substantial revision in its style, substance, and format. A new editorial board embarked on a biannual special issue format that preserved the shorter “notes,” often no more than ten pages in print, that has long distinguished *ELN*, while adding longer articles, clusters, and creative pieces. These special issues were often interdisciplinary in nature and included topics such as: “Genre and Affect,” “Queer Spaces,” “Juris-Dictions,” “Transnational Exchange,” “Pseudo-Science,” “The Shape of the ‘I,’” and “Graphia.” In recognition of *ELN*’s successful transformation, the journal received The Council of Editors of Learned Journals’ (CELJ) *Phoenix Prize* in 2008.

In 2012, *ELN* continued its transformations. We are now a peer-reviewed journal with an advisory board comprised of internationally recognized scholars from across the disciplines of English and Comparative Literature. We are devoting this special issue, “*ELN* Forum: The Advisory Board,” to showcasing the exceptional abilities and range of scholarly endeavors of the generous group of scholars who have agreed to support *ELN* as it transitions into its next stage of development. These Advisory Board scholars have been chosen based on their previous contributions to *ELN* special issues, including those named above, as well as on the basis of their general stature in their respective fields. In this special issue, our advisory board members have contributed articles and notes ranging from historical and formal readings of new communication media including telegraphy, photography, typewriting, and graphic novels to queer readings of the serial killer family on the contemporary Showtime television show *Dexter*.

As disparate as these topics may seem, several trends emerge. In the first grouping, “Circulations,” we find scholars transforming national paradigms and linear histories of literary scholarship into transnational and transhistorical fields of inquiry. Their innovations are made possible, in part, by the recent awareness of the phenomenon of globalization. While globalization, which can be defined as the increasing interplay between cultures and

larger social, economic, and technological forces across the world, may be said to have existed as far back as the sixteenth century (and, for some, even earlier), the extent of integration, felt as the compression of time and space, has penetrated deeply into literary critical consciousness during the past two decades. This burgeoning awareness enables many new avenues of inquiry. The first innovation, as discussed in Jeffrey C. Robinson's essay, "A Burst of Romantic Poetry," is the work of cross-periodization: the traveling through time and space of a particular kind of poetry. Posing the question, "How does the phenomenon [of globalization] affect the life of *form*?" Robinson reflects on the creation and dissemination of *Poems for the Millenium, Volume 3: The University of California Book of Romantic and Postromantic Poetry* that he edited with Jerome Rothenberg. Calling the volume an assemblage, Robinson remarks on how it "redistribute[s] 'Romantic poetry' horizontally, as it were, across many nations, cultures, and decades [from the mid-eighteenth century to about 1910]" (11). This reconfiguration of Romantic poetry disorients and revitalizes a poetic movement that most consider long past and situated only in Western Europe. Rather than fixing the movement in a particular point in time and location, Robinson, borrowing from André Breton, finds that "Romanticism asserts itself as a *continuum*" (12, italics in original), appearing in modern and postmodern poetry and poetics as well as in South American, Eastern European, Russian, Scandinavian, and Asian poets. The volume promotes both a chronological reading and "the spatial practice of comparison and juxtaposition" (15) and thus sets the stage for the essays on global circulation in the section.

Wai Chee Dimock's far-reaching essay, "Recycling the Epic: *Gilgamesh* on Three Continents," traces the circulatory paths of "world literature" since comparative literature's recent planetary turn. Her reconceptualization of world literature involves not so much thinking of literature *laterally*, via "a far-flung network of redistribution, recombination, and recontextualization" (19) that comprises the global circulation of texts. Rather, Dimock looks backward in time, considering texts from antiquity—in particular, the oldest known epic, *Gilgamesh*—as a rich compost heap of reusable material that feeds the present and resignifies the past. Moving from the multiple origins of this Mesopotamian epic, Dimock also investigates various recent translations of the source material and new adaptations, from the stage adaptation co-authored by Chad Gracia and Yusef Komunyakaa and performed by the Silk Road Theater Project, to the recent novel *Gilgamesh* (2001) by Australian author Joan London, and, briefly, to *Star Trek*. In so doing, Dimock develops an exciting lens for re-examining the epic genre. Rather than viewing the epic as a hopelessly outdated genre, good mainly for Hollywood blockbusters and nostalgia for the classical age, Dimock argues that the epic genre is alive and well today. Evoking the science of evolution, Dimock "loosen[s] the criteria for species membership" (31) and suggests that contemporary rewriting of the epic shifts the center of gravity to the "lower ranks" and radically redraws the boundaries between god, human, and animal.

Rebecca Walkowitz's essay begins with the question of how contemporary novelists adapt aspects of modernism (early twentieth-century experimental literature) for a transnational

audience. Why is it that some contemporary authors, such as J. M. Coetzee, eschew idiom (vernacular aspects of English that resist translation, a central feature of modernist innovation) but embrace other modernist techniques such as parataxis, recursive narration, and collage? Walkowitz argues that these formal adaptations foreground the transnational impulses already present in modernism and provide a powerful tool for thinking about literature's relationship to globalization. Comparing the multi-generic texts Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* (1938) and J. M. Coetzee's *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007), Walkowitz demonstrates how their idiosyncratic combinations of fiction, political philosophy, and documentary produce a conceptual framework for thinking about political agency, social embeddedness, and literary production. In Walkowitz's treatment, these discordant forms articulate a range of social scales—from the microscopic scale of everyday life to the macroscopic scale of global warfare—that generate “narrative structures of comparison” that allow for “new paradigms of transnational belonging” (36). Her essay, first published as a short note in *ELN's* special issue on “Transnational Exchange,” is an important contribution to World Literature studies because it advocates new ways of reading the world by taking its cue from the literature that opens national paradigms to the world. In Walkowitz's treatment, literary forms do not just circulate transnationally, they also instruct their readers in how to read the world in a comparative frame.

This section concludes with an essay on the medium perhaps most given to global circulations: television. Steven Bruhm's essay, “Serial Killing Serial Children: *Dexter's* Counterfeit Families,” demonstrates that the structure of the nuclear family in need of protection is “not just opposed to killing, it also enables it” (54). What circulates in this television serial is family trauma. It does this by means of the nuclear family, “a social institution [that] endangers the very constituents it is supposed to protect” (54). In tracing the logic of counterfeit children, an overdetermination of “the child” produced through the repetition compulsion of childhood trauma, Bruhm also reveals a positive side. As the show exposes the dark elements of “family-bound ideology” (56), it also “fashion[s] queer alignments, identifications, and expansive sympathies with people who are themselves haunted by the Dark Passenger of domestic purity's impossible demands” (56). Such sympathies, Bruhm concludes, “might be useful for thinking about the queer [and the queer family], provided we could think such sentimentalism beyond the usual sticky-sweet qualities” (58).

The next section, “Mechanical Reproductions,” examines the role of technology in literature, photography, painting, digital, and performance art. Richard Menke begins this section with an essay that analyzes how nineteenth-century ideologies of media constructed “electrified” language—the belief that language transmitted via electronic telegraph was endowed with scientific and journalistic objectivity. His case study—popular representations of Paul Julius Reuter, the founder of the eponymous new agency—exemplifies the contradiction between disembodied technology and human agency. Despite anxiety that the telegraphed word was so mechanical as to mechanize its chief disseminator, Mr. Reuter, Menke argues that the belief in the electric word's objectivity continued to spread. He demonstrates that

the connection between telegraphy and objectivity “was generated by the telegraph’s conjunction of *high technology, distance, immaterial transmission, and interconnectivity*” (66, italics in original). As Reuter’s news service spread, the repetition of the same news service stories appearing in many newspapers only served to confirm the purported objectivity of the telegraph service and produced “part of the pre-history of that modern complex that links technology to mass audiences: the media” (71).

Mark Wollaeger’s essay addresses technology by means of D. H. Lawrence’s love-hate relationship with machines, in particular, the typewriter. In his astute reading of *Women in Love*, Wollaeger not only reads against the usual understanding of Lawrence as a neo-Romantic who spurns technology altogether, but uncovers “fictional explorations of the techno-human interface [that] distinctly anticipate the posthuman perspective [. . .] in terms of sexuality” (75). Birkin’s desire for the frozen body of Gerald, according to Wollaeger, figures Lawrence as a closet-Futurist, an ambivalent lover and hater of technology. Birkin’s attraction to Gerald, the industrialist, in the novel signals Lawrence’s need for an “impossible compromise between the human and nonhuman, between the auratic and the mechanically reproduced, between the blood image and the technological image” (89). Following Wollaeger is Jans Baetens, whose essay on the graphic novel *The Playwright* by Eddie Campbell and Daren White (2010), acknowledges the ambivalence surrounding electronic media and challenges the progressivist logic that new developments in electronic media necessarily entail the forgetting or supersession of older print technologies; rather, “it reshuffles the whole media field, producing new uses of old media” (93). We can see this in the hybrid visual print narrative of graphic novels. In particular, *The Playwright* reproduces handwriting as the trace of the storyteller, a connection that fuses form with content. But rather than a simple nostalgic return to handwriting, Baetens calls this fusion of written word and visual sign *graphiation*, a neologism for “visual enunciation” or “graphic expression” that makes visible the hand, the body, indeed, the author’s entire personality. These stylistic shifts can be read as a form of free indirect discourse given the ways in which it provides oblique commentary on the story it tells.

Jennifer Green-Lewis’s “Eye to Eye with the Trilobite: Time’s Texture and the Matter of Early Photography” returns us to the Victorian period and considers “Victorian responses to the newly invigorated ‘historicity of things’” (124). Tracing an interest in time’s texture from the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scientists’ fascination with ruins, geology, and fossils to the poetics of literary modernism, Green-Lewis argues that early photography was particularly adept at making the texture of things and the simultaneity of time visible. Given that early photography was itself textured, it, too, “grows a material presence over time that may have little or nothing to do with what it represents” (29). By attending to the materiality of the photograph, the fossil, or the text, we may come to experience and apprehend “how time and emotion may turn an object into a thing which then becomes a marker for presence, or an embodiment of absence” (124).

In the next essay, Tirza True Latimer seeks to mark an absent present from standard histories of modernist innovation through a reading of Faith Ringgold's painting *Dinner at Gertrude Stein's* (1991). The painting remythologizes one of modernism's most famous sites: 27, rue de Fleurus, Paris, where Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas held their salon. This revisioning of modernism, Latimer writes, "is based on an incontrovertible truth: African-American artists and writers *were* active participants in modernism's formation" (130, italics in original). And they did so via the queer networks available through Stein's salon and beyond. Latimer's essay addresses questions of canon formation, artistic self-fashioning, the reciprocal relations of avant-garde aesthetic experimentation and African-American rhythmic speech, and the significance of homosexuality and homophobia in the shaping of creative lives. Reading queerly, as Latimer's analysis of Ringgold's painting suggests, subjects past narratives to historical critique and allows new affiliations to emerge. Also revising our recent modernist history, Shawn Michelle Smith's essay on "Booker T. Washington's Photographic Messages" takes us back to the first essay in this section in which the objectivity of the technological reproduction of text was first established via telegraphic journalism. Smith's essay, by contrast, considers how many prominent African-American intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century used photography to make visible new social and political identities and also to situate those identities fully within the scope of modernity. She begins with a consideration of *Working with Hands*, Washington's 1904 sequel to *Up from Slavery*, illustrated with 32 photographs, mostly made by Frances Benjamin Johnson, and argues that the "photographs show not only the 'Tuskegee method,' but also how [progress] will be reproduced and circulated" (141). In contrast to the formal, quiet posed images in this collection that seem to offer evidence of serene material progress, Smith turns to the kinetic images from Washington's final speaking tour in the fall of 1914. There, she argues that (unheard) sound mixes with active images so that the viewer is struck not by the content of Washington's lectures, but by their performance: the commanding, energizing presence of Washington's body.

The contribution by Elizabeth Abel brings us into the era of the Civil Rights Struggle. Analyzing aspects of the struggle's visual archive shown at the summer 2010 exhibit at the International Center for Photography, Abel problematizes the obvious emphasis on visuality in photographic media. Building on Fred Moten's powerful reading of sound in African-American photography and Eve Sedgwick's theory of affect, Abel asks whether we can think about the "particular intimacy" between textures and emotions presented in these photographs in which "feeling becomes affect becomes skin: that permeable interface between touching and feeling, inside and outside, self and other" (148). This intimacy not only allowed the movement's moments of pain and triumph to get "under one's skin," but, importantly, "skin also functioned as a site of mediation that was instrumental to the movement's politics. Refusing segregation, the activists staged a politics of proximity: bringing skins of diverse hues into transgressive contact, they dramatized a new social body" (149). Rather than constructing the viewer as a passive recipient, Abel argues that these photographs reach out, grab our attention, and elicit an active, participatory response. Moreover,

Abel writes that this physical crossing over might be understood through the work of French phenomenology as a series of reversible exchanges, a queering of sorts, that tempers—albeit only momentarily—the racializing gaze of the photographic medium and awakens “the impulse to cross hands across the boundaries of race and medium” (167).

Esther Gabara concludes this section by thinking through the relation of fiction and the law through the digital and performative medium of activist art. She begins by tracing the contradictory etymology of *emancipation*, a word whose history has meant both to set free, but also to enslave. This perilous ambiguity often results in critics eschewing the term altogether in favor of *liberation*, but Gabara suggests otherwise. The double bind inherent in the term, she argues, provokes “compelling forms of fiction that connect performance to [legal] court, and art to law” (173). By so doing, these fictions “produce forms of freedom within the law that the law did not imagine” (173). Mainly focusing on the work of Ricardo Domínguez—who is part of the Critical Art Ensemble and member of the BANG Lab and collaborator with the Zapatistas in Chiapas, México, Gabara suggests that the activist art actions these groups have waged “offer tremendous potential: alternative epistemologies, powerful aesthetics, and radical politics” (179), though she cautions that working within the interstices of the legal system leaves such actors vulnerable to the “whims of a state” (179).

The final section, “Reappropriations,” features novel ways in which critics can recover elements of the past or of other cultures through literature. Adéḗkò Adeḗkò begins this section with a comparison of a Yoruba incantation that accompanied a healing session in Nigeria in the late 1980s with Claude McKay’s famous sonnet “If We Must Die” (1919). After detailing the complex speech functions of the incantation, Adéḗkò situates McKay’s poem next to this Yoruba animist tradition. He reads the poem as an “incantation that joins malediction and benediction” in a manner that reconciles “the incongruity of the poem’s unruly content and [ ] stolid sonnet form” (189). He argues that the malediction in McKay’s poem protests against “conditions that license social death”; while the benediction “calls for revolutionary self-investment” (189). By linking the Afro-Caribbean protest poem to an African healing practice, Adeḗkò foregrounds the often-neglected black Atlantic influences and unconscious appropriations that connect Africa to the New World. Next, Rebecca Totaro, in “The Meteorophysiology of the Curse in Shakespeare’s First Tetralogy,” reconfigures another speech act function—the curse—in the context of early modern psychophysiological and meteorological understandings. Moving from the macrocosmic to the microcosmic, the curse was both “a material product of a sublunary body out of balance” (191) and an element of bodily contagion, a “volatile, breath-based product of an ailing body” (192). This contagion is demonstrated in *Richard III* as Queen Margaret teaches Queen Elizabeth to curse by means of directing the precise meteorophysiological mechanisms that lie within the body. Totaro concludes with a look at Richard III himself whose microcosmic body runs out of sync with macroscopic processes, a threat to the entire cosmos.

Moving next to the Victorian period, Rob Breton’s essay “Utopia and Thomas Carlyle’s ‘Ancient Monk’” reappropriates the notion of totality to proffer a reading of Carlyle as a rad-

ical conservatist, attuned to totalizing notions of reforming the social whole. He calls Carlyle's brand of utopianism a "Tory utopianism," what today might be called dystopia: it features a strong state and social order rather than social freedoms. Whatever we might think about this Tory scheme of things, Breton makes a strong case that "the value of [ ] totalizing social critique is not lessened by the threat of a totalizing system because without the insight to employ a totalizing critique—an insight that utopia fosters—we can never understand when [and how] we are part of a totalizing system" (16). Following this essay, Emily Allen and Dino Franco Felluga argue for the paradox of a practice—"call it death, narrative, portraiture, photography, anthropology—that simultaneously kills and preserves, kills *to preserve*" (223, italics in original). Examining one particular death—that of the Romantic poet Lord Byron—and how he remained very much alive in the Victorian period, albeit problematically so. In order for Byron the revolutionary to become a vital figure for the Victorian novel, "[it] must not only cancel out or write over poetry and romanticism both, but must also carry over, work through, and preserve the aesthetic and political legacy of Byronism" (223). Their example is the 1864 novel by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *The Doctor's Wife*, which not only kills Byron but also makes him immortal. However, "by offering a death plot for Byron, the Victorian novel substitutes a developmental narrative of proper Victorian mourning for a revolutionary persistence of a Byronic melancholy that refuses to let go of its lost object" (229). After mourning the loss of Byron, the surviving characters may go on with their small-scale existence, content to perform good deeds and live long, uneventful lives.

Concluding the special issue, David McWhirter's "Woolf, Eliot, and the Elizabethans: The Politics of Modernist Nostalgia" offers a backward glance at modernism and its investments in the Renaissance. Comparing Eliot's and Woolf's lifelong engagement with Elizabethan literature and culture, McWhirter demonstrates how both Eliot and Woolf looked to the Renaissance in order to historicize the present and to find the remnants of what modernity, with its "torment and division," had failed to preserve (233). But while for T. S. Eliot the Elizabethan age was almost completely "a moment of catastrophic loss" (235), for Virginia Woolf, who also mourned this history as loss, it held future possibilities, too. Indeed, she "celebrates it as a narrative of exuberant, expansive, and unruly possibilities, a disorderly fecundity signaled by the very proliferation of writing" (235). Likening Woolf's celebration to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, McWhirter extrapolates her enjoyment to a democratic ethos "premised, as she argues in 'Anon' and elsewhere, on a loosening, rather than a hardening, of class and gender distinctions" (236). Comparing Eliot's "East Coker" from *Four Quartets* and *The Rock* (a pageant commissioned by the Church of England) to Woolf's *Between the Acts*, McWhirter argues that Woolf speaks back to Eliot. The chaotic conclusion of her novel "is less a reflection of a fragmented modernity than an image of the wholeness of historical process, less a bitter echo of the end of *The Waste Land*, or of the horrified vision of *The Rock*, than a parody of Eliot's nostalgia for a lost, hierarchized coherence and stability" (241). In so doing, Woolf's reappropriation of the Elizabethan age points toward the future, as its once and future age.

Taken all together, these essays showcase the work of the fine group of scholars who comprise *ELN's* advisory board. The editorial collective at *ELN* is honored to be able publish this sampling of their accomplishments.

Laura Winkiel

University of Colorado Boulder