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**New pathways in North American studies : introduction**

*Theory and Practice in English Studies*. 2019, vol. 8, iss. 2, pp. [5]-7

ISSN 1805-0859

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/141861>

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Access Date: 17. 02. 2024

Version: 20220831

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**INTRODUCTION:  
NEW PATHWAYS  
IN NORTH AMERICAN STUDIES**

THIS issue of *Theory and Practice in English Studies* is dedicated to select papers first presented at the 2018 graduate conference entitled “New Pathways in North American Studies.” This conference took place at the Department of English and American Studies at Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic.

The issue opens with Ivana Plevíková’s paper “Academia’s Ivory Tower within the Worlds of New Media and Popular Culture.” This paper further investigates the issues put forth in Brett Stockdill’s book *Transforming the Ivory Tower: Challenging Racism, Sexism, and Homophobia in the Academy* and contextualizes them within the space of New Media, with a focus on the psychological effects of the academia’s ivory tower on both its inhabitants and its spectators from afar. Her discussion of academic representation in online social media or within popular culture highlights various strategies that aim at drawing attention to academia’s limits of relatability and inclusiveness or that outright work to break them down.

The issue next presents Thomas Castañeda’s paper entitled “Christopher Isherwood’s Camp.” In his 1954 novel *The World in the Evening*, Isherwood first helped define “camp” as a system of subversive humor with features of the grotesque, aimed at empathy derived from the exclusion and marginalization of queer figures. In his paper, Castañeda traces the history of camp while exploring its notions and presence in Isherwood’s expatriate novels. While Castañeda’s exploration ascribes considerable importance to the surface qualities of people and objects and to camp’s relation to urban spaces, he also asserts that camp should be perceived as a political aesthetic that is specific to queer culture, by finding worthiness in objects, places, or people societally deemed less worthy or outright worthless.

The pathways continue with a paper entitled “What Else Can Nature Mean: An Ecocritical Perspective on Cormac McCarthy’s Fiction” by Kateřina Kovářová. Kovářová proposes a significant shift in the perception and interpretation of McCarthy’s novels, through reading them with an environmental awareness and through an eco-critical lens. Kovářová perceives nature in McCarthy as sensual, pointing to his aesthetic choices echoing the aesthetics of 19th-century painting, in order to depict nature in a unique way, evoking other senses than just sight. Kovářová then continues by proposing that McCarthy’s nature is not presented as pastoral but is rather depicted as a dynamic process, ending with the proposition that Whales and Men should be seen as his most environmental work.

## *Introduction*

Shifting from prose to poetry, Alba Fernández Alonso's "Langston Hughes's Literary and Ideological Turn in the Early 1930s: Poetry as a Means to Understanding and Conceptualizing the Poet's Identity and Self-Development," investigates Hughes's "communist turn" during that period. Fernández Alonso proposes that Hughes's radicalization, while reflecting the general pro-communist tendencies of the Afro-American community, directly aimed at an escalation of expression of racial and class issues. For Fernández Alonso, the overarching issues ranging over Hughes's artistic choices and tendencies are the questions of identity as well as of self-perception, not only of himself but also of his Afro-American comrades.

The next paper, entitled "Always To Be Passed Along: Aporias of Wagner, Heidegger, and #MeToo" by Jan Čapek, presents a philosophical angle of the post-structuralist break with identity. Čapek starts by introducing the Greek myth of aporia, a logical paradox or impasse, and continues with discussion of its engagement by Jacques Derrida in accordance with his anti-representational, anti-identitarian thought presented, among other writings, in *On Grammatology*, *Aporias*, and the paper "Sending: On Representation." Čapek then continues to apply aporia to controversial figures in various strata of Western culture, solidifying the concept as one functioning beyond law and morality and, therefore, productive through its undecidability, necessitating continuous discussion and pondering.

Moving on from philosophical themes, the next article, written by Martin Ondryáš, is entitled "After the Great Flattening: Aspects of Contemporary Saskatchewan Feature Film." Ondryáš's interest in regional Canadian cinematography stems from the disproportionate concentration of Canadian film production in Central Canada and the fact that marginal cinema, specifically the "margin of the margin" in Saskatchewan, does not receive much notice. Ondryáš proposes that films such as *Wheat Soup* or *Corner Gas – the Movie* work with the expression of influence as much as with the subversion of regional cinema as a locus of "Central Canadian cultural colonialism."

The closing paper of the issue is Marcel Koníček's "Japanophilia: Becoming the Other", a venture into the history of Japanophilia as well as a discussion of its significance within American culture. Through his investigation of Japanophilia and its historical roots in Japonism, one of its bases being a partial acceptance of Japanese identity, and by applying his lens onto the current impact of Japanese art and culture on North-American cultural production and consumption, Koníček exemplifies the magnitude of cross- and inter-cultural relations. This article provides a commentary on the kind of intersectionality which constitutes the "new pathways", for Koníček very much interdisciplinary pathways, between his interests in Japanese and American studies.

*Jan Čapek and Ivana Plevíková*

This special issue follows the primary aim of the conference itself – to provide space for budding academics in the field of American Studies as well as those whose research activities explore and contribute toward forming new perceptions of American culture or literature. The issue effectively presents a wide range of research interests and promises a bright future for the field, following in the wake of traditions while exploring new pathways.

Jan Čapek and Ivana Plevíková,  
Issue Editors



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