
“DEATH IS SO PERMANENT. DRIVE CAREFULLY.”:
EUROPEAN RUINS AND AMERICAN STUDIES CIRCA 1948

Internationalism versus Transnationalism

Calls for a transnational approach or the “worlding” of American studies have become commonplace, even obligatory. It is a point of professional consensus that students of U.S.-American culture and history should move beyond the nation as the primary unit of analysis.¹ While this new consensus may signal a paradigm shift, it also obscures the fact that internationalism, and especially trans-Atlanticism, was prevalent in the field during the Cold War, when thousands of scholars taught and lectured abroad through Fulbright fellowships, the Salzburg Seminar, and other venues and lecture circuits sponsored by the State Department. The first issue of *American Quarterly* (1949) contained Henry Nash Smith’s essay on the Salzburg Seminar, alongside essays with titles like “On What It Is to Be French” (Grace Flandrau), “The Projection of America Abroad” (Max Beloff), and “The Reputation of America Overseas (1776–1869)” (Merle Curti). The third issue contained an article by Harry Levin on “Some European Views of Contemporary American Literature” and a relatively positive review by R. C. Stephenson of a history of American literature published in the Soviet Union. Tremaine McDowell’s 1948 book *American Studies* situates the field in the context of regionalism on the one hand and internationalism on the other, or what today we might term the local and the global.

There are significant concerns to be raised about how international this early internationalism actually was. First, it often displays the exceptionalism—the notion that the United States is qualitatively different from other nations—that is one of the main concerns of contemporary transnationalism.² Even McDowell, a committed internationalist, claims exceptional status for American optimism: “the temper of our idealism, the form of our government, and perhaps our ignorance of the difficulties of international cooperation bred by our geographical detachment, encourage us to dream more often and more rosily of a republic of man than do the citizens of any other nation” (92). David Riesman, in a 1953 *American Quarterly* article on “Psycho-

logical Types and National Character," warns against the ideological abuse of the concept of national types so prevalent during World War II, but then goes on to suggest that American friendliness is linked to American egalitarianism, speculating, in parentheses, that Europe might become nicer after becoming more democratic (327, 338). Even *Partisan Review*, outspokenly European and modernist in its orientation, could sometimes sound an exceptionalist note. Introducing the famous 1952 symposium "Our Country and Our Culture," the editors extol the United States as the only political—and perhaps cultural—bulwark between Europe and "Russian totalitarianism": "Europe is no longer regarded as a sanctuary; it no longer assures that rich experience of culture which inspired and justified a criticism of American life. The wheel has come full circle, and now America has become the protector of western civilization, at least in a military and economic sense" ("Our Country" I, 284).

The triumphalism evident in this formulation raises a second concern—one related but not identical to the problem of exceptionalism. In the context of the Cold War, criticism seemed to lose some of its critical bite, and even formerly dissident intellectuals began to treat U.S.-American culture as an advertisement for midcentury American democracy. An exception to this trend was C. Wright Mills, who objected to the "stateman's-like worry" evident in the framing of the *Partisan Review* symposium; his contribution stresses the importance of maintaining communities of dissent in a time of political consensus, an argument that he would make more famously in his "Letter to the New Left," a 1961 attack on "NATO intellectuals" ("Our Country" II, 447; Mills, "Letter," 249). However, Cold War politics made for strange bedfellows, and former left-wing thinkers whose anticommunism would soon move them in the direction of neoconservatism also objected to the exceptionalist tone of the *Partisan Review* editorial statement—not because it undermined intellectual independence but because it was bad policy. James Burnham, the *Partisan Review* advisory editor who was already working for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and would in 1983 receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom from Ronald Reagan, raised the following question: "Are we going to imply to European—and Moslem, Hindu, and Chinese—intellectuals that it is illicit to prefer American political institutions and politics to Soviet unless at the same time they are ready to laugh with Berle, honor Thomas Wolfe, and smack their lips at Coca Cola?" (Saunders, 87–88; "Our Country" I, 291). Leslie Fiedler argued that Europeans were smacking their lips more than they admitted. He claimed that the "specter" haunting Europe wasn't communism but Gary Cooper, adding—in a version of Malcolm Cowley's argument updated for an age of cultural expansion—that "the end of the American artist's pilgrimage to

Europe is the discovery of America" ("Our Country" I, 294, 295). Such unabashed exceptionalism was, however, the exception. The middle ground, neither New Left nor neoconservative, neither expatriate nor patriotic, was represented by Joseph Frank, who argued in favor of "mak[ing] the Goethean concept of *Weltliteratur* a reality—as American foreign policy is trying to make a reality of the hypothetical unity of Western Europe" ("Our Country" II, 434).

These debates over cultural policy illustrate a deeper consensus—with the important exception of Mills—about Cold War politics. Thinkers who disagreed about the effectiveness or propriety of cultural exceptionalism agreed that cultural criticism was a legitimate means of promoting a Western alliance against the Soviet threat. This was, in fact, one of the basic premises of postwar internationalism more broadly conceived. The international perspective in postwar American studies was linked to a postnational orientation in trans-Atlantic scholarship whose goal was to shore up the Western geopolitical alliance. Irving Kristol and Stephen Spender's opening salvo in the first issue of *Encounter* magazine (1953), which we now know was secretly funded by the CIA and its British equivalent, MI6, envisioned a postnational age, cautioning its readers against "the dominion of national pride in a world where the nation is plainly an anachronism" (Spender and Kristol, 1; Saunders, 381–90). Postnationalism was, in fact, one of the central themes (and major conflicts) of the infamous Congress for Cultural Freedom conference held in Milan in 1955. In his report on the conference, which first appeared in *Encounter*, Edward Shils claims that "for the Westerners, nationalism was an unfortunate distraction, at worst a source of great troubles springing from the passions, at best a worthy actor in the 19th century drama which was now over" (57). Nationalism was seen as an anachronism, at least insofar as it conflicted with U.S. interests. The aim was to forge an international, anticommunist coalition extending as far into the third world as possible.

This type of Cold War internationalism is a far cry from what contemporary critics mean by transnationalism. Even during the Cold War it was criticized as nationalism by another name. In *The Great Evasion*, a 1964 attempt to rehabilitate Marxism as a critical perspective relevant to American history, William Appleman Williams argued that modern American internationalism had its roots in Western expansion and was actually a twentieth-century version of imperialism: "America did not become internationalist as it entered upon that particular new frontier at the turn of the twentieth century. It merely became super-nationalist" (14). In a 1973 essay in *New Literary History*, Soviet critic A. N. Nikol'yukin provided a literary-historical account of American supernationalism much in keeping with Williams's: "After World War II the idea of the 'denationalization' of the American lit-

erary heritage received widespread attention in America. . . . Essentially, it serves the claims of the United States to a literary and, beyond this, an ideological rule over the world" (587).

This Cold War critique of American internationalism as a form of imperialism—and literary cosmopolitanism as cultural imperialism—has been taken up by transnational American studies. Ann Douglas describes the expansionist logic of American nationalism in these terms: "A nationalism as intense, ambitious, and successful as that of the United States was almost certain, paradoxically, to undo itself, losing its precise boundaries as its global reach extended" (77). John Carlos Rowe, in much the same vein, describes the difference between postwar internationalism and contemporary transnationalism as follows: "An older international American studies in the 1950s and the 1960s often drew on the cosmopolitanism of Euroamerican modernism, but its implicit cultural mission was to 'enlighten' the foreign cultures from which it drew many of its most avant garde materials and ideas. The new American studies requires a new internationalism that will take seriously the different social, political, and educational purposes American studies serves in its different situations around the globe" (172).

These criticisms are well-founded. The international orientation of mid-century American studies is vulnerable to charges of exceptionalism; and even its anti-exceptionalist variants are open to charges of cultural imperialism. However, there is another strain of postnationalism that I want to explore in this essay—one that does not endorse the exceptional quality of American culture, or serve the geopolitical goals of the Cold War, but instead tries to make sense of the redistribution of cultural products, institutions, and people in a postwar political context where the nation seemed to play a diminishing role. This dissident internationalism is compatible with the situational approach called for by Rowe, although the issues were different at midcentury. Contemporary scholars of transnationalism are likely to focus on corporate expansion, migratory patterns, and the differential permeability of borders to capital, labor, and the military. Postwar scholars were confronted with other transnational phenomena: first and foremost the emergence of new geopolitical blocs, but also the expansion of universities, the emergence of exchange programs, the rise of mass media, the international circulation of cultural products, and the migrations of displaced persons (DPs). Prewar scholarship could confront international phenomena in terms of conceptual dichotomies grounded in theories of national or modernist culture: Babbitts and expatriates, labor and capital, the usable past and making it new. The postwar cultural-political landscape was uncongenial to these established conceptual dichotomies, and transnational forces generated new categories and distinctions—such as the overlapping but in no way

identical groups of visiting professors on the one hand and displaced persons on the other—that could not simply be reduced to the old dichotomies.

The strain of postnationalism that emerged to confront this new cultural-political landscape was a dissenting view. Its conceptual and political stakes become clear in the way some of the *Partisan Review* contributors resist and modify two key terms established by the editorial introduction: “mass culture” and “alienation.” The editors imply that American culture might be considered superior to European because the United States is the most powerful nation on earth; however, it is threatened from without by communism and from within by the mass culture that alienates intellectuals and breeds conformity among the wider population (“Our Country” I, 284–85). Irving Howe and Sidney Hook—another pair of strange Cold War bedfellows—both questioned the extent to which intellectuals, in an expanding media economy, could be called alienated; the former recommended critical Marxism as a solution to feelings of estrangement, the latter urged anticommunism (“Our Country” III, 572, 575). Lionel Trilling went so far as to argue that intellectuals were closer to the sources of political and economic power than ever before (“Our Country” I, 320). Others relativized the threat posed by mass culture by placing it on a continuum with the high culture being institutionalized in universities. Delmore Schwartz hinted at the importance of looking at the relation of mass culture to New Criticism (“Our Country” III, 595); Philip Rahv spoke of the “*embourgeoisement* of the American intelligentsia” (“Our Country” I, 306), and Louise Bogan of “the bohemianization of the outlands,” by which she meant suburbs but also college towns (“Our Country” III, 565). As Richard Chase pointed out, the postwar cultural landscape could no longer be divided into pro- and contra-, artists and philistines, patriots and traitors like Van Wyck Brooks and Ezra Pound; those camps were anachronisms of high modernism (“Our Country” III, 567–68). By midcentury one had to speak about institutional positions rather than cultural oppositions. The old antagonisms that helped define cultural exceptionalism and high modernism—U.S. versus Europe (or the USSR), avant-garde versus kitsch—had to be rethought in terms of cultural, professional, and political continuities.

The theory most readily applicable to these changes in the cultural-political landscape was the emergent theory of totalitarianism. Hannah Arendt was among the first to stress the significance of the various “pan” movements during the heyday of European nationalism following World War I; she also argued that the continuities between the concentration camps and the gulag were more significant than the ideological and national differences between communism and Nazism (445). The theory of totalitarianism that emerged to explain these continuities also enabled comparisons between mass murder and mass culture; Bruno Bettelheim’s linkage of concentration camps

and American cities through the concept of “mass society” is an example of this approach, as is Betty Friedan’s portrayal of the housewife as the prisoner of a suburban concentration camp (Bettelheim, 262; Friedan, 305–306). Such comparisons reveal a level of abstraction that from today’s perspective seems insensitive to important differences of situation and experience. Nevertheless, they are based on an insight whose relevance is difficult to dispute. As Arendt argued, one of the main problems of the twentieth century has turned out to be the problem of statelessness: “like it or not we have really started to live in One World. Only with a completely organized humanity could the loss of home and political status become identical with the expulsion from humanity altogether” (297). The concrete problems of displaced persons were to some extent obscured by general theories of alienation. However, Arendt and other thinkers stressed the importance of considering the circumstances of people deprived “of a right to have rights”—a condition she described as “the abstract nakedness of being human and nothing but human” (296–97). This abstract nakedness—and its relation to the problems of political and cultural representation that emerge when the nation is no longer capable of preserving traditions or guaranteeing rights—is the subject of the forgotten strain of postnationalism that is the subject of this essay.

I will explore some of the issues and problems of this postnationalism by focusing on three midcentury travelogues of Americanists abroad: F. O. Matthiessen’s *From the Heart of Europe* (1948), Edmund Wilson’s *Europe without Baedeker* (1947), and Alfred Kazin’s “Salzburg: Seminar in the Ruins; A Report on the European State of Mind” (1948). These scholars visited Europe in more or less official capacities directly after the war and were confronted by new, troubling phenomena of “abstract nakedness” in “One World”: namely, the ruins of centuries-old European cities and traditions, the large populations of displaced persons, the imposition of American administrative and cultural strategies to deal with these problems, and the apparent inability of modernist art to confront the modern catastrophe. These literary scholars could see that culture and politics were undergoing a massive reorganization, but how to describe the displacement of people and cultural traditions? Their metaphor for the reorganization was close at hand: the roads that Americans were rebuilding in Europe and the signposts regulating their use.

Their travelogues are literally attempts to map the emergent political and cultural landscape in terms of these roadways and signposts. The road was already a common trope for explaining the cultural and political stakes of the war, for instance in the poetry of W. H. Auden (“New Year Letter [1940]”) and that of Pulitzer Prize-winning war poet Karl Shapiro (“Elegy for a Dead Soldier”), and in the dystopic visions of Henry Miller’s *Air-Conditioned Nightmare*. Driving would in fact become a master trope in the

1950s, when postwar expansion created the U.S. interstate freeway system and everyone from Kerouac to Updike seemed to go “on the road.” However, the roads that Mathiessen, Wilson, and Kazin encounter do not lead where one might expect, and certainly not back “home” in the way Cowley or Fiedler intended. Rather, these Americanists abroad discover the limits of the nation-state and the proliferation of transnational systems, structures, and victims. They could describe this new situation but not fully explain it, and this failure registers both the need for a new critical vocabulary and the difficulty of voicing dissent in the bipolar context of Cold War, when all arguments threatened to devolve into the reciprocal melodrama of capitalism versus communism, us versus them. But the narratives of Matthiessen and Kazin in particular do begin to articulate the new language that would emerge to resist this bipolar logic—the language of identity. I see these thinkers not as exceptionalists or Cold Warriors but as bridge-builders to a postliberal age of identity-based cultural and political analysis.

My argument is that postwar American studies deserves a second look. In this I ally myself with European and particularly German scholars who have argued that postwar internationalism was less exceptionalistic—and contemporary transnationalism less inclusive—than is usually maintained.³ It was already clear to some significant postwar thinkers that the midcentury cultural-political landscape would require a new critical cartography, one that accounted for the way organizational structure began to replace national tradition as the determinant factor in cultural analysis. What follows is an attempt to explicate some of the central problems and issues of postwar internationalism and to trace the forgotten links between this line of thinking and contemporary transnationalism.

Death Is So Permanent: American Studies and European Ruins

When considering the accounts of postwar travelers, it is essential to emphasize the sheer scale of death and destruction, which Stephen Spender, for instance, described as the “result of co-operation between nations” to create an international urban form as characteristic for the twentieth century as Gothic cathedrals are for the Middle Ages (Spender, 7).⁴ It is precisely the scale of this destruction in Munich that Matthiessen calls “the kind of waste land produced only by our time,” prompting him to comment on the U.S. Army road sign that serves as a title for this essay:

One of the crudest ironies was that official army road sign over the still-standing arch of the gate into what was the old city. DEATH IS SO PERMANENT. DRIVE CAREFULLY. With tokens of hundreds, probably thousands of deaths visible

in every direction, with virtually no traffic at all now at any hour of the day or night, that sign, which protected only the occasional reckless GI in his jeep, spoke with a horrible obtuseness. Maybe the death of a city is assumed, in our odd American speech, to be only fairly permanent. (37)

Wilson also mentions the signs, which he attributes to an American advertising executive, lumping them together with other roadside billboards campaigning against the spread of flies and a free lemonade stand set up by the Red Cross (Wilson, 390). Kazin points to a similar sign in Salzburg as evidence that nobody is at home in the postwar landscape, neither perpetrators, victims, nor liberators: “The world suddenly seemed nothing but one great DP camp. Who belonged here—the Austrians, the homeless Jews waiting for a ‘contact,’ the bored-looking American liberators roaring past in their jeeps and shiny new Cadillacs?” (Kazin, “Salzburg,” 58, 63; see also *New York Jew*, 171). The road signs are attempts on the part of the victors to navigate the ruins they have produced but also to disavow them. If they suggest that Americans are in some ways oblivious to the destruction, they also hint at a more worrisome complicity. The unintended irony of the signs shows that the organization capable of producing mass destruction refuses to register its deeper significance. This failure of representation is not only the result of modern warfare—it may be one of its causes. Modern warfare is a process of systematic destruction, and military occupation a matter of systematic reorganization, but it is precisely the systematic nature of these efforts that destroys traditional structures and meanings, rendering entire landscapes as inhospitable as vast DP camps.

I would like to discuss the significance of these signs through what might seem like the detour of art and its relation to destruction, the modernist *Waste Land* compared to the modern waste land, or the Gothic cathedral to the bombed-out city. Matthiessen turns to precisely this issue in the paragraph following his mention of the sign. “In the railroad station was an image even more haunting,” he begins, then continues to describe “the main waiting room, with its tall pillars still standing, but with much of its roof open to the sky,” which he says resembles but alters “Orozco’s kind of empty desolation” (38).⁵ Inside the exposed waiting room is a black market with young boys and girls between fifteen and twenty engaging in illicit trade: “They were the lost boys and girls of destruction”—the adjective suggesting Matthiessen was aware of the role prostitution played in the black market even if he does not mention it. What he does mention is that the cigarettes serving as currency must have come at some point from American GIs. Then another cultural analogy:

This crowd looked like the pictures, from the early nineteen-twenties, of the wild boys of Russia. But here in Munich there was no creative transformation

yet at work. A painter hoping to recapture for our time the intensity of a medieval inferno, with its grotesque and lurid darks and lights, could find here his controlling image. He could find also the horrifying look of bestial hopelessness on the faces of the damned. (38)

The absence of creative transformation marks the difference between reality and art, but also between violence redeemed by revolution and violence leading nowhere. Matthiessen controversially claimed in this book that the Russian Revolution was the twentieth-century heir to the American Revolution: "What gives the central drive to my desire to find a political position to correspond to my philosophy is that, unlike most Christian Socialists, I accept the Russian Revolution as the most progressive event of our century, the necessary successor to the French Revolution and the American Revolution and to England's seventeenth-century Civil War" (82-3). He also included a long footnote, excerpted from the letter of a Czech acquaintance, that many interpreted as an apology for the communist takeover in Prague. This made him no friends in the United States. Irving Howe, in the pages of *Partisan Review*, went so far as to label him the kind of intellectual who paves the way to the concentration camps (Howe, 1129).⁶ Without yet analyzing the political implications of Matthiessen's argument, it is clear that his modernist conception of art commits him to a theory of representation that is at once political and cultural. Matthiessen evaluates aesthetics and politics in terms of their ability to transform desolation—a transformation he repeatedly compares to religious epiphany.

There is a similar passage in Wilson where the horror of destruction proves to be beyond the limits of artistic representation. But where Matthiessen finds hope in the analogy of religious transformation, Wilson fears that art's failure ultimately makes it indistinguishable from advertising. The occasion is his meeting with the surrealist artist Leanor Fini in Rome:

One day Signorina Fini showed me a copy of *Vogue* which she had just received from America and expressed an amused astonishment at an article on Buchenwald, with pictures of human incinerators, piles of tangled emaciated corpses and bodies hung up on hooks, followed immediately by new flowered hats and smart bathing brassieres, with an article that ran over into the back among the cosmetic ads. This was embarrassing to me as an American, but her instinctive reaction to it was not itself, I thought, without a certain incongruity, for she had just been engaged in executing, with a good deal of finesse and elegance, a series of pen-and-ink drawings for the *Juliette* of the Marquis de Sade. . . . The Surrealists had cultivated deliberately a sadism of the parlor and the gallery, but now the times had over-taken and passed them. (244)

The crisis of representation described by Wilson, and attributed to Fini, has to do with the compromised role of art after the historical catastrophe.

Where Matthiessen hopes to redeem art through a transformational aesthetic that is religious as well as political, Wilson instead turns to the traditionally oppositional role of the avant-garde. The problem is that when actual destruction is more lurid than sadist fiction and more shocking than surrealism, art seems to degenerate into reportage or—even worse—titillation. At issue here is not only the difficulty of “representing the unrepresentable” but also the continuity between mass murder and mass society: the difference between “objects of art that the lover of art will enjoy, with a shudder of pleasure or pain” and horrors “served up as if they were detective thrillers or merely a whet to the appetite in the enjoyment of articles of luxury” (244–45). Here the Wilson of 1947, despite his well-known aversion to dialectics after *To the Finland Station* (Dabney, 259), comes extremely close to the Adorno of 1949, whose famously misunderstood dictum “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” points to the continuity between totalitarianism and total society, or what we would now call consumer culture.⁷

This is also roughly Kazin’s argument, at least in the first account of his experiences at Salzburg published in *Commentary* in 1948. Kazin praises the efforts at the Salzburg Seminar to move away from the “psychosis” of race (61) and the error of nationalism (“we were all making an effort to get away from national labels and fears and to define the nature of a common experience” [58]). Like his colleague Henry Nash Smith, he remarks on how the national topos of the seminar—the United States—opens up a space of international dialogue where former enemies can put aside their antagonisms and discuss matters of common concern. However, Kazin is not at all optimistic about the American soldiers, whom he describes as bored tourists, or with evidence of American “improvements” such as the road sign (63). He is even more critical of the sign and all it represents in the revised version of the essay that appeared in *New York Jew* thirty years later (171–72). The difference between these two versions helps underscore what was emerging, for Kazin, as the one redeeming figure in a world turned into “one great DP camp”: the Jewish survivor (“Salzburg,” 58).

The redeeming presence of the survivor constitutes the major difference between Kazin’s account and Wilson’s—and the most surprising similarity to Matthiessen’s. Kazin strongly identifies with the Jewish refugees he meets in the camp close to his lodgings, going so far in the revised version to draw attention to the physical resemblance between one survivor and his father (*New York Jew*, 173). Another change is equally telling: the renaming of “Passover Haggadah” to “Holocaust Haggadah” to designate the testimony of a family of actual survivors, whose name he also alters (“Salzburg,” 64; *New York Jew*, 172). This revision signals the process, widely discussed by Peter Novick and others, whereby the Holocaust became increasingly cen-

tral to the identity of American Jews in the 1960s and 1970s (see, for instance, *New York Jew*, 258). Through Kazin's revisions, identity—forged through an identification with the survivors of mass murder—begins to emerge as a point of resistance to the leveling effects of mass culture. Identity is also the locus where the kind of political and aesthetic transformations invoked by Matthiessen can take place—something I will return to in a moment.

In the earlier version Kazin is not primarily interested in establishing his Jewish identity. Kazin invokes Jewishness in 1948 not as a metaphor of identification but as a metonymy of the world-turned-DP-camp. His analysis of the postwar world as refugee camp, like Wilson's analysis of the surrealism of contemporary events, links mass murder to mass society and to the inability of intellectuals, artists, and politicians to come to terms with the destruction. The road sign is striking because it indicates a general lack of orientation. It is evidence of the American inability to correct a European catastrophe, but also—on closer analysis—a sign that the catastrophe is not, strictly speaking, either European or American but international. The inappropriateness of the sign seems to point to the concluding passage in *New York Jew*, which relates how the guests of a party in a Manhattan skyscraper drink cocktails while watching a fire rage on the New Jersey shoreline. Kazin recalls that the guests chatted about Lina Wertmüller (probably *Seven Beauties*) and the “neurotic guilt of survivors” (295). Kazin's sardonic tone suggests the chitchat is neurotic—not the surviving. The Holocaust would not become a common term for the mass murder of the European Jews until decades following the war, and Kazin's own process of self-identification as a Jew would keep pace with naming process. This self-identification can be understood as a belated response to the fear he shared with his friend Wilson, namely that the new American system would “correct” the horror by trivializing it (road signs, ice cream stores, and lemonade stands in occupied territory; neurotic chitchat at home). Trivialization, in both writers, is tantamount to violence because it creates the conditions in which violence can occur. The alternative to supporting this creeping indifference, or resigning oneself to its vagaries, is identifying with the victims.

Wilson doesn't identify with anybody. The crisis of representation that seems to call avant-garde art into question becomes his point of entry into the critique of mass society, which moves him to link the U.S. to the USSR, describing both countries as postnations, “systems” rather than states, mirroring each other in their power to reorganize political and cultural geography (Wilson, 163–64), and producing careerist psychologies in American millionaires and Soviet bureaucrats alike (405). Matthiessen also sees a connection between the U.S. and the USSR, linking, for instance, Soviet socialist

realism to Hollywood movies in their parallel commitment to the belief that thought is dangerous (Matthiessen, 51, 173). (Wilson would add Luce and the *Saturday Evening Post* [13]). But while Matthiessen seeks solace in an aesthetic that envisions art as breaking through “the identity of official opposites” to the real, a real he links to Melville’s and Hawthorne’s commitment to showing what is “evil and tragic” in man, Wilson can only fall back on an outworn distinction between art and politics (Matthiessen, 158, 52). Thus he criticizes Italian politicians for the “intellectual laziness” of turning everything into literature and Churchill for the melodrama of his rhetoric (Wilson, 84, 365–66).

These complaints are part of a wider critique of mass society linking commercial advertising to communist propaganda, consumerism to totalitarianism, but also Hitlerism to Stalinism, in a manner that would become increasingly typical for liberal intellectuals, including war refugees like Betheheim and Arendt, and for authors appearing in the pages of journals like *Partisan Review* and *Encounter*. Eventually Wilson’s account of mass society would expand to include the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the Modern Language Association (MLA), and the entire alphabet soup of Cold War bureaucratization. At times his criticism of mass society borders on mere cantankerousness (Kazin, *New York Jew*, 245), and although he never fully abandoned the role that one biographer describes as “independent radical,” he was pessimistic that, despite prospects for a humane socialism, the U.S. would end up fighting another world war (Dabney, 274). *Patriotic Gore* (1962), his book on Civil War-era literature and rhetoric, which should rightly be understood as a revisionary critique of Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance* (1941)—an attempt to make some of the figures at the center of the American canon face the violence at the midpoint of American history—analyzes the relation between war and language in a way that leaves very little hope for peace.⁸ Wilson argues that West Point training and battlefield experience chastened American prose of its lingering romanticism, but that the resulting practical, business-like language, deprived of its conceits and flourishes, also enabled a pragmatic and ultimately more ruthless approach to warfare. In the introduction to the book, he goes so far as to articulate a biological determinist argument about the inevitability of war, criticizes American involvement in World War II, and links the American Civil War to later global conflicts. Kazin, among others, took him to task for this cynical leveling-out of all conflicts to a matter of natural drives (*New York Jew*, 247). Wherever this argument led Wilson, it seems likely that it had its origins in the language he experienced firsthand when traveling the roads of war-torn Europe: Death is so permanent. Drive carefully.

Ideology, Identity, and American Studies

Patriotic Gore, originally published by Oxford University Press, was never reviewed in *American Quarterly* and received only limited scholarly attention—perhaps because of Wilson’s well-publicized animosity to the MLA. But the book was also unfashionably pessimistic about the damage done to language by war. The trend in American studies in the 1960s was to reactivate culture as a point of radical resistance—something Gene Wise would later call “culture therapy” (313). Wilson, however, feared that culture could withstand neither the decimation of modern warfare nor the bureaucratization that went along with it; so while he sharpened his political criticism (and skepticism) in the 1950s and 1960s, he distanced himself from the avant-garde theory that art could change politics or society. This probably made his research seem less relevant to American studies.

Wilson’s fear about the political irrelevance of art also marks the major difference between *Europe without Baedeker* and *From the Heart of Europe*. It would be possible to distinguish Matthiessen from Wilson on the basis of their attitudes towards the communist revolution, Matthiessen seeing it as a continuation of the American Revolution, Wilson as typical of the atrocities of the twentieth century (Wilson, 403). Both call themselves socialists but of different sorts. Matthiessen, recognizing the importance of political labels, recommends “radical democrat” as an alternate term and supports the foundation of a “nation-wide American Labor Party” (Matthiessen, 91). Wilson, wary of unified parties, envisions socialism on the federalist model, with local staffs counterbalancing the dictates of central authorities (Wilson, 411). The major difference between these midcentury thinkers, however, is not their politics per se but the political role they envision for art. Unlike Wilson, Matthiessen subscribes to a transformational aesthetic that places art at the center of politics. This insistence on the political significance of art is one of the factors behind his ongoing relevance to American studies, but it also makes him vulnerable to criticism from two sides. Contemporaries like Howe accused him of sanctioning communist atrocities, although admittedly more for his reportage than for his aesthetics. More recently, scholars have accused him of aiding and abetting American exceptionalism. It is precisely here, at the crux of communism and exceptionalism, that American studies has located the difference between internationalism and transnationalism.

I have already suggested that one of the distinguishing features of mainstream internationalism in the postwar years was its anticommunist orientation. There were always scholars, like Irving Howe and William Appleman Williams, who insisted on the relevance of Marxism to the study of Ameri-

can history and culture, but not until the end of the Cold War was there a concerted effort to reactivate the radical tradition in American studies that went back to at least the 1930s. Michael Denning’s *The Cultural Front*, a late but key book in that effort, argues that Cold War–era American studies “was captured by the discourse of national character and American exceptionalism” (447). The figure Denning singles out to mark the shift in American studies from 1930s radicalism to 1950s exceptionalism is Matthiessen. Harvard professor, Yale PhD, self-proclaimed Christian socialist, and homosexual, Matthiessen defined the subject and methodology of American studies with the publication of his *American Renaissance*, but in a way that ultimately proved incompatible with the kind of contradictions that plagued his life until his suicide in 1949, four years after the death of his lifelong partner, the painter Russell Cheney (Marx, “F. O. Matthiessen” and “Double-Consciousness,” 237, 240–41, 247–50). The argument is that Matthiessen, defining American culture with the goal of forging a Popular Front consensus, produced a normative model of American ideology—really an ideology of individualism—that ultimately left little room for his non-normative identity.⁹ Matthiessen did not move to the right, but he described American culture in a way that enabled the field to subtly shift in that direction after the sacrificial death of its founding father.

This revisionary account of Matthiessen emerged in the 1980s, near the end of the Cold War. Denning cites Jonathan Arac’s influential 1985 essay “F. O. Matthiessen: Authorizing an American Renaissance,” which is largely responsible for inaugurating this account of the field: “A mobilization intended as oppositional became incorporated hegemonically; American studies gained power by nationalistically appropriating Matthiessen” (99). One could also point to Sacvan Bercovitch’s 1985 Salzburg lecture announcing the publication of the new *Cambridge History of American Literature*. Claiming that the “truths” Matthiessen helped consecrate as self-evident—American individualism and self-reliance—were actually ideological formations inimical to his own brand of Christian socialism, Bercovitch went on to assert that “American ideology has achieved a hegemony unequalled elsewhere in the modern world” (636).¹⁰

This critique of Cold War exceptionalism and cultural imperialism in the 1980s helped establish the direction transnational American studies would take after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The volume *National Identities and Post-Americanist Narratives*, published nearly a decade after the Salzburg lecture, builds directly on Bercovitch’s critique of consensus ideology in the name of “dissensus” and non-normative identities. The agenda-setting introduction by editor Donald Pease describes postnational American studies as scholarship conducted by and for those identities excluded from domi-

nant American national narratives (called ideologies by Bercovitch): American Adam, virgin land, errand into the wilderness, nature's nation (3–4). This is an important argument, and it has proven influential. Janice Radway's presidential address to the American Studies Association in 1998, featured as the first piece in Pease's subsequent edited volume *The Futures of American Studies* (2002), argues that the nation is a barrier not only to political and cultural inclusiveness but to scholarly inquiry. Radway argues that American studies—if the name is still relevant—should concentrate on the subnational and transnational identities formed in cross-border linguistic communities, through migration, and at the margins of mainstream national discourse.

This brief genealogy—from Arac and Bercovitch through Pease, Denning, and Radway—is intended to show how American studies distanced itself from Cold War exceptionalism by turning to those identities excluded from dominant national narratives or ideologies. Identity, in the way the term is typically used in American studies, refers to those groups emerging at the margins or limits of the nation-state—groups more or less denied the privilege of individual rights because of their minority status within the nation or migrant status without.

I think contemporary criticism is correct in paying attention to these groups—the exceptions to exceptionalism—but I am suspicious of the way it narrates its own origins. Matthiessen is usually described as a *fellow traveler* who inadvertently abandoned the radical potential of Marxist analysis and paved the way to 1950s Cold War consensus. What I want to stress is that he was also a *traveler* shocked by brutalities of World War II and unsure about the American role in mass destruction. His postwar travelogue is an American studies “quo vadis?” It begins to shed the critical baggage of exceptionalism and individualism to concentrate on the personal testimony that is, after all, the travelogue's dominant trope. *From the Heart of Europe* announces the search for someone in the tradition of Hawthorne and Melville who can articulate not just democratic ideals, but demonstrate the disturbing intimacy of good and evil. His last book would ultimately find this figure in an unlikely poet: Ezra Pound.

Mathiessen's *Oxford Book of American Verse* (1950), the last major project he saw to press, appeared just in time to include passages from Pound's *Pisan Cantos*. A scandal was already brewing around Pound's book, which was awarded the first Bollingen Prize in 1949 while Pound was locked up in a federal mental institution—facing treason charges for the pro-fascist and anti-Semitic diatribes he broadcast for Rome Radio during the war. The award was widely condemned in the popular and middlebrow press; Robert Hillyer contributed two exposés to the *Saturday Review of Literature* whose purpose was to draw attention to what he believed to be a powerful fascist

conspiracy of New Critics and modernists (Hillyer, “Poetry’s New Priesthood” and “Treason’s Strange Fruit”). Many liberal critics defended the Bollingen committee on the grounds that determinations of aesthetic value ought to be immune from political considerations (Barrett, “A Prize for Ezra Pound” and “Further Comment”). Matthiessen’s rationale, however, was a different one; he thought Pound’s postwar poetry was significant *because* of its politics. He understood the *Pisan Cantos*—wrongly, I think—as a confession of wrongdoing on Pound’s part, a personal reckoning with political mistakes.

Matthiessen violated his own editorial principle in assembling the anthology—the principle not to excerpt from longer poems—by including only the final, lyrical section of Canto 81. This section begins with the famous lines “What thou lovest well remains, / the rest is dross,” and continues:

Pull down thy vanity, it is not man
 Made courage, or made order, or made grace,
 Pull down thy vanity, I say pull down.
 (Matthiessen, xiii, 739)

The textual evidence suggests these lines were not meant to be apologetic. The *Pisan Cantos* are outspokenly anti-Semitic and openly nostalgic for Mussolini (Bush, 69–70). Nevertheless, Matthiessen sees in these lines a confession of almost Christian suffering and humility:

These lines, from one of the latest volumes to be published before this anthology was made, are some of the most remarkable in the entire course of American poetry. They show Pound at last reaching a fusion between his great technical gift and a content worthy of his skills. They demonstrate that out of the aberration of his Fascist politics, he has at last experienced suffering and learned humility. They are lines to be borne in mind as we move into the second half of our menaced century. (xiii)

Matthiessen’s enthusiasm for Pound is doubtless connected to his ongoing devotion to modernism, evident, for instance, in his praise of the “union of opposites” achieved in Eliot’s verse (xxxiii). But the central figure in the introduction is Pound, not Eliot, and Pound’s crime, his imagined confession, and his incarceration provide Matthiessen with the opportunity to consider the changing relation of culture to politics in a way that Eliot’s ascendancy—he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1948—does not. Pound is a displaced person (he was kept in a cage in an American prison camp outside of Pisa before being incarcerated in a mental institution outside Washington, D.C.), and he embodies many different forms of dis-

placed and contradictory culture: transplanted Americanism, incarcerated cosmopolitanism, and above all a style of modernism that seems criminal after the war. An expatriate under indictment for treason, Pound is also pushed to the margins of the dominant postwar national narratives of victory, patriotism, and democracy. He is both perpetrator and victim, and in this sense embodies the identity of opposites that Matthiessen believes is often lurking behind official contradictions. It is because Pound does not fit into official categories—except the category of prisoner—and because he is confined at the boundary of American society, that Matthiessen places him at the center of a new, postwar American tradition.

And in a sense Matthiessen was right. Other critics at the time, such as Louise Bogan, admitted the “human pathos” of Pound’s “partial humility” in the *Pisan Cantos*, but argued that his political ideas probably negated his significance as a writer (108). Matthiessen’s anthology, however, establishes the narrative of twentieth-century verse that has remained influential to this day. He concludes the anthology with Robert Lowell, accurately designating the next major figure in the roster of American poets. But the succession is less important than the continuity it suggests. Pound’s imagined confession and Lowell’s style of verse, soon to be called confessional, both articulate a particular relation of identity to history, a particular structure of lyrical voice. Modernist poetry strives for impersonality, and the modernist persona is supposed to be the anonymous mouthpiece of tradition. Confessional poetry, however, is spoken by an outsider: “the victim of history” rather than the author of tradition.¹¹ In its initial formulation, the generalized poet-victim was as abstract as the complementary notion of alienation in prose. Nevertheless, it engendered a concept of identity opposed to official narratives or ideologies, and then established identity—identity as displacement, alienation, marginality—as one of the key concepts in twentieth-century poetry. Richard Ellmann, in his revised version of Matthiessen’s anthology, argues that the modernists were actually being personal when they thought they were being traditional, and the confessionals were being traditional when they thought they were being personal (xxix–xxx). These terms, vague as they are, confirm Matthiessen’s postnational distinction between personality and history—the distinction that is constitutive of current conceptions of identity. The chiasmus between personality and history, emerging out of the ruins of the modernist and national traditions, occurs at precisely the location of Pound’s alleged confession.

It is Matthiessen’s longing for confession that distances him from Wilson and brings him close to Kazin’s identification with Jewish DPs. Both Matthiessen and Kazin stress the significance of identifying with figures of exclusion in order to respond to the ravages of modern warfare and bureaucratization.

Confession, in Matthiessen, is the personal testimony of these ravages, the lyrical expression of exclusion. His Pound is not the equivalent of Kazin’s Jewish survivor—the comparison would involve the leveling of differences Kazin was trying to escape through identification—so much as his precursor. I don’t mean this in a historical sense, but in terms of the genealogy of critical concepts in American studies. Pound’s “confession” articulates an abstract model of identity. This identity is the personal or lyrical expression of displacement; the lyrical structure was subsequently filled with ethnic content. This is evident in the way postwar poets, writing in the Poundian legacy established by Matthiessen, begin to “confess” their outsider status by identifying with Jews. Significantly, the poets who are most remembered for this ethnic impersonation were not themselves Jewish: Sylvia Plath (“Daddy,” “Lady Lazarus,” and “Getting There”), John Berryman (“The Imaginary Jew,” a short story), Randall Jarrell (“In the Camp There Was One Alive,” “A Camp in the Prussian Forest”), and William Snodgrass (*The Fuehrer Bunker*) (Gross, “Imaginary Jews”). This trend began with Lowell, who is credited with discovering his personal voice in *Life Stories*, a book containing a long prose section entitled “91 Revere Street” speculating on a possible—and very distant—Jewish ancestor. The widespread fascination with “imaginary Jews,” to borrow Berryman’s term, was partially elegiac in nature, and should be understood as an early, sympathetic response to genocide (Gubar). It should also be connected to the immense postwar popularity of Jewish American fiction, whose primary representatives were the novelists Malamud, Bellow, and Roth.

My argument is that what we today call identity emerged as a lyrical expression of exclusion before it was filled with specific ethnic content, and this can be traced back—via Matthiessen—to the need to find a replacement for avant-garde provocations and national traditions in a postwar landscape that seemed increasingly transnational in its destruction and reorganization. Identity emerges at the margins of history, tradition, or ideology as that which cannot be reduced to the national, the avant-garde, or the “official opposites” of the Cold War.

Identity is generally portrayed as a leftist term of revolt—a conceptual tool useful for shifting American studies first from abstract individualism; then from exceptionalism; and finally from Cold War internationalism. It should be noted, however, that in addition to being a postwar concept, identity also emerges on the right. An example would be Norman Podhoretz’s 1963 review of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, which he frames as a critique of Arendt’s concept of totalitarianism (too fascinated with fascists and too hard on Jewish victims) and as a manifesto for Jewish pride (he ends by criticizing Arendt as a self-hating Jew) (206–208). As Walter Benn Michaels has pointed

out, identity claims are in no way incompatible with conservative politics (13). It is also worth noting that identity claims were consistent with administrative attempts to restructure the university during the student protests of the 1960s. Clark Kerr's famous concept of the "multiversity" acknowledges the multiple funding sources and educational goals of higher education, but also the diversity of interests and cultural groups in urban universities. Kerr describes the students of these universities as follows: "They identify less with the total community and more with its subgroups. . . . These subcultures are not mutually exclusive, and some of the fascinating pageantry of the multiversity is found in their interaction one on another" (42). Identity has an old tradition in cultural criticism and the academy, and although it is often presented as a term of leftist critique, it has long been compatible with neoconservative and centrist agendas.

The long postwar tradition and diverse applications of identity-based thinking have been obscured by a number of revolutionary gestures in American studies. Critical manifestos often hark back to the Declaration of Independence, with each new generation of American scholars establishing its territory by revolting against its predecessors (Ickstadt, 545). A certain logic sets in that sooner or later renders any statement about American culture to be "always already" a form of crypto-conservatism, a way of shoring up binary oppositions between "us" and "them," "democracy" and "totalitarianism." It would be possible to analyze this permanent revolution under the psychoanalytic rubric of filial rebellion or "the anxiety of influence." However, there are also important institutional factors involved. Winfried Fluck links the obsessive radicalization of arguments in the humanities to the "race for professional distinction through difference" (212). Heinz Ickstadt has observed that American studies seems to be calling its intellectual premises into question at the very moment it faces institutional disintegration in the United States, with old programs giving way to the subspecializations they engendered (551). These institutional-based perspectives seem to offer the most promising way out of the dilemma of permanent revolution by drawing attention to not only the pathos of the "tenured radical" but the structural necessity of his or her political outrage.

The transnational turn in American studies has done important work. It provides us with the tools to analyze Cold War ideology, and it has been responsible for reorienting the field in terms of migration histories, border exchanges, cultural hybridism, and American literatures in languages other than English. However, it also involves the ritualized repetition of certain revolutionary gestures that have become predictable enough to warrant our suspicion. These gestures obscure the continuities between postwar internationalism and contemporary thought. The repressed or forgotten history of

internationalism should at the very least serve as a cautionary tale. There is no reason to believe that contemporary transnationalists are any less susceptible to the forces of globalization than our precursors were to the dictates of the Cold War.

The willingness of Cold War–era Americanists to consider the links and similarities between the United States and Europe—and even the US and the USSR—is not what we mean today by transnationalism. Nor would we want to reproduce their approach. While Matthiessen, Wilson, and Kazin are all critical of the “psychosis” (Kazin) of race and the dangers of nationalism, they are extremely vague about what this means in the United States, avoiding the analysis of particular instants of oppression for a more general analysis of alienation and mass society. Nevertheless, it seems shortsighted to simply dismiss as exceptionalism their common response to World War II, which involved calling into question the connection between culture and nation. On closer consideration, the radical comparativism emerging from Wilson and the move from alienation to identity evident in Matthiessen and Kazin have all found resonances in contemporary criticism. American studies has, perhaps without knowing it, followed Kazin and Matthiessen into a theory of identity as one viable response to contemporary crisis. Kazin, in particular, sought to identify with victims of the Holocaust in order to formulate a critique of culture in a world he found increasingly indistinguishable from a refugee camp. Contemporary American studies also feels compelled to speak for victims and refugees. The arguments now gaining currency have their roots in a postnationalism that is at least fifty years old, but by claiming that these earlier arguments were about something else, for instance Cold War ideology or American exceptionalism, it is as if we were discovering a new world.

Notes

1. The transnational turn in American studies is described by Shelley Fisher Fishkin and Paul Lauter in the following terms: “Over the last ten years a web of contact zones has increasingly superseded ‘the nation’ as ‘the basic unit of, and frame for, analysis’” (Fishkin quoting Lauter, 21).

2. I follow Lipset’s definition and his genealogical tracing of the concept of exceptionalism back to Tocqueville (18).

3. On the history of exceptionalist criticism of the post–World War II generation of American studies, and its inaccuracies, see Günter Lenz’s “Internationalizing American Studies: Predecessors, Paradigms, and Dialogical Cultural Critique—a View from Germany,” and especially his discussion of McDowell, pp. 236–241. Also relevant to my argument is Lenz’s account of the midcentury theory of American individualism and its subsequent postmodern rejection in “The Politics of American Culture: Kulturelles Selbstverständnis und öffentlicher Diskurs im Amerika der achtziger Jahre.” Heinz Ick-

stadt has summarized the paradigm shift from Cold War-era to revisionary American studies as follows: "Although this so-called 'Myth-and-Symbol-School' did not in fact glorify American myths (as some of its present detractors maintain) but analyzed their hegemonic power, it came under heavy critical fire by a younger generation of American studies scholars who suspected that even a critical focusing on mythic structures implied ideological complicity" (547).

4. Spender: "The destruction is *serious* in more senses than one. It is a climax of deliberate effort, an achievement of our civilization, the most striking result of co-operation between nations in the twentieth century. It is the shape created by our century as the Gothic cathedrals are the shape created by the Middle Ages. Everything has stopped here, that fusion of the past within the present, integrated into architecture, which forms the organic life of a city, a life quite distinct from that of the inhabitants who are after all only using a city as a waiting room on their journey through time: that long, gigantic life of a city has been killed. The city is dead and the inhabitants only haunt the cellars and basements" (7). Randall Jarrell, in "The Angels at Hamburg," linked carpet-bombing to the extinction of city and state: "Hamburg is no longer a city, / There is no more state" (Jarrell, 36).

5. Matthiessen might have had in mind the Orozco murals at the Dartmouth library.

6. Kazin is both more forgiving and more critical of Matthiessen, whose taste he characterizes as "traditional to the point of being theological." He is a man whose personal intensity drove him to embrace ideology, consisting in the standard canon of American literature and, belatedly and mistakenly, in some versions of Stalinism. Kazin's conclusion is that it was Matthiessen's elegists, not Matthiessen himself, who politicized his death (*New York Jew*, 169-70).

7. The often misquoted "dictum" is usually taken out of context from the following passage in "Cultural Criticism and Society," written in 1949 and originally published in 1951: "The more total society becomes, the greater the reification of the mind and the more paradoxical its effort to escape reification on its own. Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today" (Adorno, 34). Fredric Jameson calls this controversial and often ignored aspect of Adorno's thinking the "convergence theory of the similarities between the United States of the New Deal and Hollywood, and Nazi Germany," something he links not only to "the similarities between American repressive conformism and the rapid stifling of opposition under Hitler" but also to "the originality of the nascent media technology . . . pioneered above all in the USA and Germany" (Jameson, 106; see also 140). Michael Rothberg makes a similar argument in relation to "Cultural Criticism and Society," the essay in question: "In this essay at least, Adorno places Auschwitz within his larger critique of capitalist modernity and the Enlightenment. . . . The specificity of Nazi barbarism does not rupture, but continues, the dangerous blend of instrumentally rational means and irrational ends that the Frankfurt School understands as the primary legacy of modernity" (Rothberg, 35-36). The main object of Adorno's critique is not only (some would claim even primarily) art's incapacity to represent genocide but its compromised status in "the sinister, integrated society of today," which he describes as an "open-air prison" where "ideologies in the authentic sense of false consciousness" have been rendered

obsolete by the "advertisements" designed by "hucksters of mass culture" (Adorno, 34). His "after Auschwitz" statement implies a continuum between totalitarianism and late capitalism and should be understood as a critique of the "culture industry" rather than as a theory of historical, philosophical, and aesthetic rupture (Rothberg, 21-22, 44-45).

8. "Wilson was an independent radical who opposed his country's expansionist tendencies, yet his writing on American subjects during the 1950s reflects the confidence of a society newly important in the world, one in which he was an actor, not a spectator" (Dabney, 362-63). See also the review of *Europe without Baedeker* by Nicola Chiaromonte: "Hitler and mechanized warfare, together with the phenomena of Stalin and Stalinism, have filled Mr. Wilson with a hopeless nausea" (247).

9. Individualism is an important framing concept for Matthiessen. He introduces Emerson in the first chapter of *American Renaissance*, "Optative Mood," as embodying the kind of individualism addressed by Tocqueville as a novel invention of democracy (6).

10. Bercovitch defines ideology as follows: "An ideology . . . arises out of historical circumstances, and then re-presents these, symbolically and conceptually, as though they were natural, universal, and right—as though the ideals promulgated by a certain group or class (in this case, individualism, mobility, self-reliance, free-enterprise) were not the product of history but the expression of self-evident truth" (636).

11. M. L. Rosenthal's influential 1967 definition of the confessional poet is the "individual as a *victim*" (15). For Rosenthal and his contemporaries, the act of poetic confession forges the link between the individual "experience of reality" and "symbolic embodiment of national and cultural crisis" (Rosenthal, 13). Robert Phillips takes the personal trauma of the victim-poet to be symptomatic of larger social dynamics. Society is sick, in other words, but only poets can admit it (xi-xiii). A. Alvarez is interested in how the assault on individuality by totalitarianism and mass society makes "men and women . . . as equal and identity-less as objects on an assembly line," producing an "anonymity of pain" (65). Plath and the other confessionals write from this position of damaged subjectivity. Diane Wood Middlebrook in "What Was Confessional Poetry?": "Confessional poetry was not overtly political, but it participated in the protest against Impersonality as a poetic value by reinstating an insistently autobiographical first person engaged in resistance to the pressure to conform" (635).

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