

## From the Editor

This issue begins on a poignant note, as its first essay, “Planes, Politics, and Protofeminist Poetics: Muriel Rukeyser’s ‘Theory of Flight’ and *The Middle of the Air*,” is posthumously published. Lexi Rudnitsky died suddenly and very prematurely three years ago while she was undertaking a biography of Muriel Rukeyser and while this essay was in the revision stage with *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*. It took some time for us, in consultation with her family, to determine how best to approach the publication of this essay. David Goldstein, a friend of Rudnitsky who at the time was an assistant professor of English at the University of Tulsa (he has since, to my sadness, moved on to another university), graciously offered to prepare the essay for publication. I owe him many thanks for serving as the primary editor of this essay and for working with Sarah Theobald-Hall and me on copyediting and proofs. I am most grateful to Alexander Stille, Rudnitsky’s husband, who gave us permission to publish the essay and who answered many queries as we took the essay through the editorial process. I never had the pleasure of knowing Lexi Rudnitsky, but overseeing this essay’s publication has convinced me that the scholarly community has lost a great deal from her early death.

“Planes, Politics, and Protofeminist Poetics” is an examination of Rukeyser’s fascination with flight in two of her works: “Theory of Flight,” a poem (and the title of her poetry collection) published in 1935, and *The Middle of the Air*, a play performed in 1945. Through insightful readings of both texts Rudnitsky argues that Rukeyser “was . . . among the first to invoke the discourse of technology to stake out a protofeminist position.” Her approach was antinostalgic, “recasting the airplane as an instrument for political, sexual, and poetic liberation” that allows women to break away from traditional roles and behaviors through new technology. Her work also was consciously and directly antifascist, arguing for example that planes can facilitate democracy, while it developed a new poetics that dealt directly with the politics of art. As Rudnitsky notes, Rukeyser is an important and overlooked writer who was often denigrated in her day for overstepping the bounds of her gender, and who inspired later poets including Anne Sexton, Sharon Olds, Adrienne Rich, and Stephanie Strickland. This essay does much to reposition Rudnitsky within a modernist canon while it advances our understanding of the feminist potential Rukeyser found in a technology often regarded in opposition to femininity.

Laura Heffernan shares with Rudnitsky a desire to rectify the exclusion of women from the modernist canon. Her focus, however, is on the

way in which “the institutional formation of modernism eclips[ed] not just literary styles, but alternative modes of interpretation and critical practice.” In “Reading Modernism’s Cultural Field: Rebecca West’s *The Strange Necessity* and the Aesthetic ‘System of Relations,’” Heffernan asks, “What would it mean to position West as a forgotten critic of modernism?” West’s opposition to the “ideology of aesthetic formalism” associated with T. S. Eliot and the New Criticism is not the counterpart to a valorizing of personal or less formalized writing so often marked as feminine. Rather, the starting point of West’s criticism is an acknowledgment that “literary value does not arise from a work’s internal form, but is rather manufactured within a social field.” A deeply nuanced and attentive reading of *The Strange Necessity*, a text that Heffernan argues has been interpreted chiefly through oppositions between personal and impersonal aesthetics, yields West’s “articulation of an aesthetic theory that incorporates a model of the cultural field within which aesthetic value is formed.” The result is not only an assertion of West’s still undervalued significance as a modernist author, but also a new appraisal of what might constitute a modernist feminist aesthetic.

“Dreaming Gender: Kyōgoku School of Japanese Women Poets (Re)Writing the Feminine Subject” is an exciting departure in both geography and chronology from the modern and Western literature usually studied in *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*. In this essay Joe Parker examines the work of two women poets from the Kyōgoku school of Japanese poetry: Kyōgoku Tameko, who lived from approximately 1250 to 1315, and Retired Empress Eifuku, who lived from 1271 to 1342. This essay is in part an exercise in revisionist literary history as it “question[s] the dismissal of Japanese women’s writing after the [mid- to late-] Heian period” from 794 to 1185. While it features the work of two women from a school within which women were known to figure prominently, it also argues that these two authors creatively altered the depiction of gendered subjectivity within a highly formalized genre. As Parker writes, “while androcentric conventions in court love poetry demanded that feminine subjects resign themselves, in love affairs, to a course of events that gave agency to male subjects, we will see that the feminine subjects constructed by these two women poets refuse such resignation.” Central to this process were depictions of dreams, which are central to the Buddhist notion of life as a state of illusion, but which also provided an arena for a protofeminist imaginary. This article thus presents a reconsideration not only of the role of women poets in Japanese literary history, but also of the ways in which these poets altered gendered roles and outlooks within what appear to be restrictive and deeply conventional forms of writing. Joe Parker, I should note in closing, merits particular thanks from the journal for undertaking some fairly extensive revision to make the article more accessible to read-

ers with little knowledge of Japanese literature. I am grateful for his efforts and very happy to be publishing this essay on a topic new to the journal.

The creative expansion of female agency and imagination within the bounds of a restrictive literary genre also is at the heart of “‘The Remembrance Haunts Me Like a Crime’: Narrative Control, the Dramatic, and the Female Gothic in Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s *Mathilda*.” In this essay Kathleen A. Miller attempts a feminist recuperation of the female gothic—a genre marked by many scholars as essentially conservative in its presentation of female victimhood—through a provocative reading of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s novel *Mathilda*. Miller considers *Mathilda* as both the narrator of and actress within her own story, “imagin[ing] and then orchestrat[ing] a series of female gothic encounters” in which she performs weakness but in truth gains a sort of empowerment to seize control of her own narrative. While seeking to expand our generic understanding of the female gothic, asserting “that connections between drama and the female gothic are more substantial than has been previously noted,” Miller considers the hazards and potentials of a narrative that seeks female self-determination through the staging of weakness. In the end, she argues, “*Mathilda* successfully internalizes the female gothic heroine’s desire for liberty and control, bringing into play the philosophy of victimization feminism in order to break the ‘silken’ fetters that constrain her.”

The effort to break through female narratives of powerlessness plays an equally central role in Merri Lisa Johnson’s “Dismembering the Heterosexual Imaginary: A Feminist Cultural Anatomy of the Infidelity Narrative in Nancy Mairs’s *Remembering the Bone House*.” Johnson builds upon the scholarship that already has been done on Mairs’s memoir through the lens of disability studies by considering it as a “feminist heterosexuality memoir.” When viewed from this perspective, the memoir’s treatment of a body damaged and a person socially marginalized by multiple sclerosis parallels and amplifies a critique of “the ideological strictures—of daughter, of woman, of wife, of mother—that prevent women from speaking honestly, earnestly, and authentically about our conscription into the dominant fictions of heterosexual gender roles.” The woman at the story’s center emerges as a figure “crippled” in more than one way. The story of Mairs’s infidelity to her husband sharpens this critique “by acknowledging betrayals, frustrations, and epistemological conflicts with her husband without concluding that women must fully submit to institutional heterosexuality or opt out in order to achieve self-actualization.” To read the story of her marriage one must let go of any attachment to heterosexual romantic cliché. In this way the memoir performs “a feminist intervention into hetero-romantic ideology.”

The Archives section in this issue includes two essays featuring two scholars’ separate research on the same publication, the *Bean Na h-Éireann*,

an Irish woman's periodical first published in 1908 by the women's nationalist organization *Inghinidhe na h-Éireann*. In "Finding Order through Serial Fiction: Literary Detective Work in the National Library of Ireland," Emily Janda Monteiro explains how her reading of a narrative, "The Deathmark," which took place over four issues enabled her to correct an error in the library's pagination of the journal and locate a "lost" issue. In "National Treasures and Nationalist Gardens: Unlocking the Archival Mysteries of *Bean Na h-Éireann*," Lisa Weihman describes her work on the journal at the National Library of Ireland, at Kilmainham Gaol Museum, and at University College, Cork. While recounting her ultimately frustrated efforts to locate a complete run of the journal, Weihman explains how another text she found at the National Library can help determine who authored one column within the journal. Together these essays serve to illustrate the many paths that can bring researchers to the same sources in the same libraries and archives, providing markedly different reading experiences as the basis for scholarship.

The new editorial board is growing at a regular pace, and I am gratified to announce three new appointments. Eve Tavor Bannet is the George Lynn Cross Professor of English at the University of Oklahoma. A recipient of fellowships from the Huntington Library, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the University of Edinburgh's Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities, she is the author of several books and many articles pertaining to eighteenth-century British literature, literary theory, and transatlantic literature. The most recent of these books include *The Domestic Revolution: Enlightenment Feminisms and the Novel* (2000) and *Empire of Letters: Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence* (2005). She has followed the publication of her book on letter manuals with a four-volume edited collection, *British and American Letter-Manuals, 1680-1810* (2008), which will have important implications for our understanding of women as readers as well as letter-writers in the eighteenth century. Bannet has published extensively on women writers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, with recent articles on Susanna Rowson, Sarah Scott, Mary Shelley, Maria Edgeworth, and Charlotte Lennox. She is at work on a new book titled "Migrant Fictions: Transatlantic Narratives and the History of Reading, c. 1700-1800."

Jean M. Lutes is Associate Professor of English at Villanova University. A specialist in late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American literature as well as women's literature and feminist theory, she has done extensive work on women journalists and more broadly on the role of

newspapers in American culture. She is the author of *Front Page Girls: Women Journalists in American Culture and Fiction, 1880-1930* (2006) as well as articles on a wide range of topics, including the significance of lynching coverage in American literary realism, the role of consumer culture in Nella Larsen's and Jessie Redmon Fauset's novels, and the dynamic of spiritual and medical discourses in Anne Bradstreet's poetry. A recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, and the American Association of University Women, she has begun a new project on emotional history and U.S. women's fiction in the early twentieth century.

Susan Strehle is Professor of English at Binghamton University, the State University of New York. She has published widely on contemporary American and global fiction, with some focus on authors such as Jane Smiley, Margaret Atwood, and Barbara Kingsolver. She is the author of *Transnational Women's Fiction: Unsettling Home and Homeland* (2008) and *Fiction in the Quantum Universe* (1992). She has coedited an essay collection with Mary Panizza Carden titled *Doubled Plots: Romance and History* (2003). While pursuing this ambitious scholarly agenda she has served in several administrative roles at Binghamton University, including Vice Provost for Graduate Studies and Teaching, Department Chair, and Interim Dean of Education. It is therefore little wonder that she has received Binghamton University's Chancellor's Awards for Excellence in Teaching and in Faculty Service. Her work in progress includes a study of the representation of historical trauma in contemporary women's fiction.

I am grateful for the intellectual generosity that these new board members, along with our longstanding advisory board and our continuing editorial board members, have shown to the journal. I am excited to be working with all of them, and I look forward to announcing new appointments in the next issue.

It is a rare preface to this journal that does not call for me to greet a new graduate student intern or say goodbye to another. Through a pleasant accident of timing, however, the office is enjoying a semester free of staffing transitions. Karen Dutoi completes another semester as book review editor, Michael J. Griffin continues as advertising intern, and Seung-a Ji remains our subscriptions intern. As always, I would like to express my deep gratitude to them and to Sarah, our managing editor, for their hard work with this ongoing enterprise. I also would like to renew my thanks to the University of Tulsa and especially to our provost Roger Blais for continued support of the journal during this increasingly dire economy.

Amidst all this continuity, however, there is one transition that should be noted. This issue is the last one that will feature our original cover. We greet this change with apprehension and some sadness but also with excitement. Stay tuned for our twenty-eighth volume, which will feature a glossy new design that we hope carries *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* into its next twenty-eight years.

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