

# Introduction

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**A**t least since Roland Barthes, and the distinction between the writerly and the readerly text, “post” criticism has had to acknowledge modernity’s overlooked addressee—the open-endedness of the addressee pole, and thus the plurality of receptions/readings that any text can have. This situation, renee c. hoogland suggests, does not necessarily lead to an endless deferral of meaning. Following Mikhail Bakhtin and Félix Guattari by taking music as her example, hoogland, in “The Matter of Culture: Aesthetic Experience and Corporeal Being,” argues that reading is still about meaning-making—in and through the situation of the reader’s world. With the existential condition, or being-in-the-world, of the receiver/reader as her starting point, hoogland theorizes reading as a “practice of becoming, that is to say, as an ongoing process of making and doing that is indispensable to the continual co-production of both human beings and their variously interconnected material and socio-symbolic ‘outsides.’” The focus on reading in the opening essay of this *Mosaic* issue proves apt as an introduction to the nine essays that follow, where, in one way or another, reading—theory and practice—is always front and centre. In what hoogland refers to as “these so-called post-ideology, post-theory times,” analysis of reading must read theory itself, must take theory-as-reading into account: I am thinking of the way, in hoogland, Guattari’s re-reading of both structuralism and psychoanalysis is drawn into “an inherently affective, collectively produced, and essentially changeable human ontology.” Jean Witherow’s “A Dialectic of Deception: Edith Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence*,” also comes to mind here. To develop a psychoanalytic reading of Wharton’s work, Witherow turns to Slavoj Žižek’s reading of Lacanian psychoanalysis “into a critique of ideology, or the ‘superegoic voice,’ as central to the ideological imperative and as essential to our understanding of the real. Such an interpretation of Lacan, with its political and cultural inflections, enhances a Lacanian reading of *The Age of Innocence*.”

In several of the essays in this issue, the question of reading in these “post” times cannot be broached apart from re-negotiating modernity’s individual/social, private/public divide. In Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence*, Witherow remarks, “characters struggle with their particular realities as they adhere to the ideology of the society that forms and circumscribes them.” Sarah Broom’s reading of Tom Paulin’s poetry in “A Free Strenuous Spirit’: Liberty, Agency, and Community in the Poetry of Tom Paulin” considers “Paulin’s exploration of the relationship between the individual and the community and the implications of this relationship for freedom and agency” and argues that “Paulin’s poetry is shaped by a strong desire to envisage a form of liberalism that values individual rights but at the same time recognizes the energy and creativity of the social.” For Lisa Chalykoff in “No Place For a Girl’: Place and Gender-Identity in *The Channel Shore*,” concepts of place and gender provide useful means of examining the community’s inside/outside boundaries in Bruce’s regional novel. A number of binaries are at issue for Maria van Liew in “Defying the Past in Post-Franco Spain: The Interrogation of Aurora Rodríguez.” This essay explores, and attempts a reassessment of, the politics of sexual difference that is operative in and through readings of an act of filicide that took place in Madrid, Spain, on 9 June 1933. Another kind of reassessment emerges from Karen Ryan’s “The Devil You Know: Postmodern Reconstructions of Stalin,” where recent literary and filmic treatments of Stalin are examined for the challenge they present to the myth of his demonization.

In Hoogland’s essay, discussion of reading includes analysis of Paul Ricoeur’s recourse, through Hans Georg Gadamer, to the notion of play. In Graham Nicol Forst’s “‘Frye Spiel’: Northrop Frye and *Homo Ludens*,” play is reading’s central motif. For Frye, Forst contends, readers-selves see things holistically only when “playfully” detached, and literature “is the quintessential ‘playful’ medium because it is ‘detached from immediate action.’” Frye drew the notion of *homo ludens* from Johan Huizinga, Forst explains; but Frye also recast the idea of the player and enriched its understanding. As is the case in Forst, so in other essays in this issue, to rethink reading is to raise the often contentious question of the multi-layered give-and-take between the writerly and the source text(s). Look, for example, at Raleigh Whiting and Susan Ingram’s reading-analysis of Stanley Kubrick’s reading, and filmic adaptation, of Arthur Schnitzler’s 1926 novella, *Traumnovelle*, in “Schnitzler, Kubrick, and ‘Fidelio.’” Or, for another exploration of the relation of reading-writing to a source: Casey Clabough, in “Appropriations of History, Gothicism, and Cthulhu: Fred Chappell’s *Dagon*,” offers a provocative discussion of the “wide-ranging intertextuality,” the “myriad sources” and “various conventions,” that inform Chappell’s “most versatile” and “most ambitiously experimental” novel.

A final mention must go to Monica Chiu's "Trauma and Multiplicity in Hualing Nieh's *Mulberry and Peach*," which argues for a reading of Nieh's novel against the grand narratives of global mobility that are so current in theory today. *Mulberry and Peach* "does little to service a postmodern project that views subjects who resist, whether consciously or not, singular identification as liberated into positive multiplicity, borderlessness, and transnationality," Chiu writes. "Instead, this essay proposes how hegemonic, inter- and intra-national ideologies of 'woman' encourage duplicitous behaviour in women such as Mulberry who seek some personal enjoyment and freedom but often at psychosomatic expense." In the course of this reading, readership expectations, particularly those brought to Asian American novels, are themselves called into question.

Read, and enjoy, these writerly excursions into reading.