

position as a member of a French Canadian community that was unwelcome in the United States. Rather than viewing Kerouac as a representative of hegemonic whiteness, Melehy sees him as “heavily marked by the culture of *survivance*,” so that “the history and culture of Franco-American New England, and more broadly of Francophone North America, are always in the background and frequently in the foreground of his writings” (15). Melehy’s Kerouac is an outsider in the United States, marginalized by language as well as culture, who is compelled to wander endlessly in a futile search for a fixed identity. Like Proust, he writes remembrances, in this case recovering a sense of his French Canadian past in fictional representations of his early life such as *Dr. Sax* (1959), *Maggie Cassidy* (1959), and *Visions of Gerard* (1963), and tracing the roots of his name in his trip to France, as depicted in *Satori in Paris* (1966), but always discovering that geography, language, and history conspire to ensure that such a selfhood remains elusive. As Melehy concludes, (for Kerouac) “*survivance*, contrary to what it purports to be, can only be a matter of reconstruction, and hence of construction or performance” (160), an observation that could also be applied to di Prima’s autobiographies or to many other Beat texts.

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***The Practices of Hope: Literary Criticism in Disenchanted Times*. By Christopher Castiglia. New York: New York Univ. Press. 2017. xi, 223 pp. Cloth, \$89.00; paper, \$28.00; e-book, \$28.00.**

***Nightmare Envy and Other Stories: American Culture and European Reconstruction*. By George Blaustein. New York: Oxford Univ. Press. 2018. vii, 281 pp. Cloth, \$99.00; paper, \$34.95; e-book, \$33.99.**

The Janus-faced nature of hope and its embodiment in the United States’ post-war cultural projects constitute the subject matter of two wonderful new books, Christopher Castiglia’s *The Practices of Hope: Literary Criticism in Disenchanted Times* and George Blaustein’s *Nightmare Envy and Other Stories: American Culture and European Reconstruction*. Both are concerned with what it meant, and what it might mean, to be engaged as a scholar of American culture in the aftermath of World War II. Both offer—albeit far from didactically—lessons for contemporary scholars of the same, lessons

stemming both from the books' considerable strengths and, much less often, from their minor weaknesses. What is perhaps most notable and praiseworthy about these books is that both authors manage to avoid the deflationary tendency of much contemporary criticism and, indeed, criticism of that criticism, offering accounts that inspire without ever losing their clear-eyed understanding of, and tough-minded engagement with, the problems of the worlds and values they describe and champion.

As the title of his book suggests, Castiglia offers the most explicit and extended set of reflections on the concept of hope and its relationship to the practice of cultural critique. He demands a return to hope as a critical tool in order to reinfuse idealism in both literary criticism and public life. Arguing that the Cold War brought with it a hermeneutics of suspicion, a right-wing sense that there was some hidden meaning lurking behind the actions of the United States' enemies and even its friends (the most obvious example being the excesses of Joseph McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee), that needed to be unmasked and exposed in order that it be defeated, Castiglia suggests that this same hermeneutics took over on the cultural left, where it infected the practice and politics of American literary criticism. Describing this development as one of "disenchantment," Castiglia compellingly connects it to a form of "knowing" literary criticism in which "knee-jerk suspicion" (1) drives critical engagement with texts of all kinds: "critics scrutinize a text's purported depths for ideological wrongdoings (and, less often, subversions thereof) by abstract and clearly distinguishable agents locked in easily schematized struggle" (1). Thus, he suggests, such criticism becomes "rote and often cynical predictability, arising from professionalization into a discipline in which a tone of self-congratulatory indignation is taken as the sign of critical acuity and topical relevance imagined to be requisite for publication, job placement, and academic advancement" (2). It is, nevertheless, a testament to the author's critical acuity and self-awareness that he does not dismiss this approach in its entirety but simply calls for a return to idealism. Acknowledging that the latter can be seen as a sign of naivete by those engaged in the hermeneutics of suspicion, Castiglia engages such critics in a conceptual jujitsu, showing how all critique is driven by a commitment to standards against which a text or claim is found wanting. Castiglia's innovation is a call to do consciously what has hitherto been done unconsciously and turn what is currently an inward-looking force of disenchantment into an outwardly oriented force for construction.

Hope is at the heart of Castiglia's project. It is, however, a complex understanding of the same, one that stands in stark contrast to its shallow cousin, optimism. Hope, he says, "relies on disappointment and failure." It is, he continues, "a continuous dissatisfaction; unlike wants, it cannot be satisfied. Instead, hope, as a perpetual openness to the as-yet-untried, is an end in itself. Hope is a disposition toward the imaginative value of dissatisfaction and the social value of illusion" (4). Hope, moreover, goes hand in hand with disappointment; Castiglia cites Ernest Bloch's assertion that without disappointment "it would not be hope" (8). It is here, however, that the book's most

significant omission comes into view. Disappointment is inevitably a function of expectation: if one does not expect a positive outcome, one cannot be disappointed when it fails to materialize. This is not, however, synonymous with hope, for there is a tradition of African American hope that neither requires nor incorporates disappointment into its understanding. My criticism is not meant to engage in a “woker-than-thou” dismissal of Castiglia’s position—not least because to do so would be to engage in the sententious and suspicious critique he so rightly exposes as problematic—but I mean simply to suggest an additional angle on his analysis that would deepen and enrich his claims. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W. E. B. Du Bois identifies a “hope, not hopeless but unhopeful” (Seattle: AmazonClassics, 2017, 98) a categorization echoed in *Exodus! Race, Religion, and Nation in Early Black America* (2000) by Eddie Glaude Jr., who locates a “hope against hope” captured “by the commonsensical understanding that a radical transformation of American society was implausible.” For Glaude, that hope is grounded “in a regulative ideal toward which we aspire but which ultimately defies historical fulfillment” (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 112). Such hope is tragic and entirely devoid of disappointment. It is instead an inoculation against dashed desires: it never expects its goals to come into being, even as it recognizes that the disposition—to borrow Castiglia’s term—that such a worldview engenders is a precursor to the informed engagement with the world that Castiglia seeks.

George Blaustein’s *Nightmare Envy* is also concerned with the postwar emergence of American studies and literary analysis. Unlike Castiglia, Blaustein pays significant attention to the problem of race, itself a major issue for an American polity that would present itself as a bastion of Jeffersonian-Lockean liberal freedoms abroad, while making its black population second-class citizens at home. In an approach that would undoubtedly find favor with Castiglia, Blaustein aims not to “expose” the United States. Rather, he seeks to show how the United States’ cultural response to the conditions of the Cold War helped to shape the emergence of American studies, while nevertheless refusing to reduce the discipline and its analyses to Cold War political concerns. Most telling, perhaps, is Blaustein’s definition of “nightmare envy,” which suggests that even as there is considerable value in the American ideals championed by Castiglia, among others, the United States also drew inspiration and insight from Europe, because “one can also find an enviable authenticity in another’s experiences of disaster” (2). Blaustein’s analysis is exhaustive—and occasionally exhausting—in its detail, but it is hard to imagine a more thorough engagement with the questions he raises.

For both these authors, hope is imbued with a degree of optimism: there is always room for ideals and analysis that might help to change the world in which cultural criticism takes place. A more tragic sense of hope, one that recognizes the inevitability of failure, might offer even more. Negotiating this not hopeless but unhopeful dialectic suggests the possibility of an even deeper engagement with the questions these excellent books pose for their readers.

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***Paraliterary: The Making of Bad Readers in Postwar America.* By Merve Emre. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press. 2017. 286 pp. Cloth, \$85.00; paper, \$27.50; e-book available.**

***History Comes Alive: Public History and Popular Culture in the 1970s.* By M. J. Rymysz-Pawlowska. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press. 2017. xiii, 241 pp. Cloth, \$90.00; paper, \$29.95; e-book, \$19.99.**

Though neither of these books explicitly frames itself as such, when read together they provide an occasion to ponder the future of American studies in the context of the current interrelated crises of the academic humanities and the US constitutional order. For what purposes do we read American literature, and how do our modes of reading impact our social institutions, our public communication, and our reckoning with matters of existential political import? How do we conceptualize the American past, and how might a heightened engrossment with national history inform our efforts as citizens in the contemporary sociopolitical system and as agents and stakeholders in the nation's future? These are the kinds of questions that arise from reading Emre's and Rymysz-Pawlowska's absorbing books while abiding regular lamentations from the dean's office about declining English and History enrollments, and at the same time confronting the outrageous fact that most members of Congress will not read the 2019 Mueller Report.

In her strikingly innovative book, Emre provocatively proposes that the rise and consolidation of American global power in the mid-twentieth century hinged in part on an eruption of "bad" reading. The bad readers Emre spotlights approached American novels, stories, and poems not as the self-contained aesthetic objects that New Criticism-besotted English professors might have taught them as under the auspices of "good" scholarly reading (or what we now call critical reading) but rather as instruments of emotional resonance, identity fashioning, self-improvement, and practical instruction. Emre's bad readers are the well-educated elites who propagated alternatively haloed and vexed figures of America that subtended and beclouded Cold War-era soft power: Seven Sisters college women traveling in Europe on pioneering study abroad programs, Fulbright scholars, Ivy League-trained military intelligence officers and American studies professors, already-canonized and soon-to-be-famous countercultural and activist writers. The American figures who produced a complex but largely alluring figure of America include Sylvia Plath, F. O. Matthiessen, Robert Spiller, Gregory Corso, Erica Jong, Flannery O'Connor, Curtis LeMay, William Faulkner, Saul Bellow, and