

AMERICA AND DEEP TIME: ALTERNATE GEOGRAPHIES,
TEMPORALITIES, AND HISTORIES

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“But where/is the human place/in geologic time? Is there /some quality in me that / links I am / to the remainder? – to whatever/ is left over? Left out. What / in the world / have I left out of me?” (Gander 2024: 73).¹ The question posed by “Rift zone”—the poem by Forrest Gander from *Mojave ghost* (New Directions 2024) which opens this issue—situated the speaker, both literally and conceptually, at “a disturbance zone” (Gander 2024: 73) where the human selfhood confronts deep inhuman temporalities of the Earth. Perched at the edge of an earthquake fault, his feet “dangling over the edge” (Gander 2024: 75), the speaker evokes at once the seismic geographies of the Mojave Desert—Gander’s current home—and more-than-human scales that destabilize the anthropocentric perception and spatiotemporalities.

The poem itself becomes a “rift zone”, as the imagery “slides”, “widens” and “cracks” under the pressure of the syntactic displacement, ontoepistemological uncertainty, and affective anguish.

The earth
keeps stretching, knuckling, stretching
out from under itself, hungry
for a new shape, a new address. (Gander 2024: 75)

Here the long immeasurable breath of the earth mingles with the “quick breath” of the human observer and “the small breaths” of the desert growth and stones. What seems the ground in one line “slip[s] from sight” in another: “[t]he fissures run through everything”, including the landscape, the bodies and time; and the speaker’s path is a *via obscura*—a dark descent into the unknown. The speaker’s confession—“My time is here and /not” (Gander 2024: 75)—forces us to rethink

¹ We are grateful to Forrest Gander for permission to reproduce “Rift Zone,” originally published in *Mojave Ghost* (New Directions, 2024), in this special issue of *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*.



our existence and futurity beyond autobiographical time, and beyond the human imprint on an uncertain futurity of the planet.

“Rift zone” thus reflects on deep time not as an abstract scale but as an ethical, creative and ontoepistemological challenge. How to read and frame the earth’s more-than-human messaging, if the ecological “script” is emergent, fractured and increasingly illegible—“hungry /for a new shape”? (Gander 2024: 75). How to listen across human and inhuman temporalities? Gander’s answer is a sustained and recursive effort: “Why not apply? Apply myself. Over and over” (Gander 2024: 75). This insistence on attunement and attention to the processual, the unmeasurable, the durational provides a generative starting point for the essays gathered in this issue of *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, each of which interrogates how literature, theory, and culture negotiate deep time, transnational horizons, and the ethical demands of inhabiting a world whose temporal scales no longer align with the human alone.

For this special issue devoted to Deep Time, the point of departure was not only a conceptual horizon but also a lived encounter. In October 2023, Forrest Gander’s visit to Poznań, coinciding with the annual conference of the Polish Association for American Studies “America and Deep Time: Alternate geographies, temporalities, and histories”, created a rare space in which poetry, ecological thought, and scholarly reflection converged with unusual intensity. An evening of poetry and conversation at the Faculty of English unfolded as a shared act of listening: to language shaped by geology and eros, to temporalities that transcend the human, and to forms of intimacy that bind bodies, landscapes, and histories across deep evolutionary scales. Gander’s reading, interwoven with Polish translations by Julia Fiedorczuk, was less a performance than a resonant dialogue, one that made palpable the poet’s conviction that lyric utterance is always already part of a planetary chorus.

The mesmerizing joint reading, followed by a conversation on ecological intimacies, more-than-human time, and the ethics of attention, left a lasting imprint on the intellectual imagination from which this volume emerged. It is therefore both a privilege and a gesture of gratitude that Forrest Gander has contributed the poem “Rift zone” to this issue. Gander’s poetry stands as a tectonic trace of that Poznań encounter: a lyric formation in which eros, fracture, and deep geological time are held in dynamic suspension. Its presence here acknowledges not only the poet’s generosity, but also the generative force of an evening in which poetry became a medium for thinking (through) Deep Time: intimately and dialogically.

The volume’s intellectual and theoretical architecture emerged also from our encounter with Prof. Wai Chee Dimock (Harvard University), who delivered a keynote lecture at the same conference. Prof. Dimock’s scholarship has shaped the critical vocabulary through which Deep Time enters literary studies. Ranging

across American and world literature, environmental humanities, public health, indigenous studies, and the evolving entanglements of human and more-than-human intelligence, her work has persistently challenged the idea of American literature as a self-contained, nation-bound formation. Instead, her work articulates a radically expanded temporal and spatial frame, one in which literary histories unfold across planetary scales and species histories, responsive to microbial life, ecological vulnerability, and uneven survival. From *Through other continents: American literature across deep time* (the book that directly inspired the theme of the Poznań conference) to *Weak planet*, which reflects on fragile planetary futures, Dimock's thought offers a mode of criticism attuned to weak agency, ethical commitment, and long durations of risk and care.

Wai Chee Dimock's keynote lecture in Poznań powerfully established Deep Time not only as an analytic lens, but as an ethical demand on criticism itself. Inspired thus by her seminal scholarship and the planetary intimacies in the poetry of Forrest Gander, this special issue explores how American literature and culture, across periods and genres, engages with the concept of deep time and the planetary scales that unsettle the boundaries of region, nation, and chronology. Deep time, Dimock explains, "gives us a set of coordinates" which function "both above and below the plane of the nation. The subnational and the transnational come together here in a loop, intertwined in a way that speaks as much to local circumstances as it does to global circuits" (2006: 23). Effectively, "the subnational and the transnational" (Dimock 2006: 23) intertwine, producing a literary cartography that complicates linear temporality and bounded geography. American texts, when read through the lens of deep time, reveal themselves as nodes in a vast network of circulation.

American literature's regional traditions may thus be reframed as part of larger circuits. It is precisely this reorientation that guides the opening essay of the issue. In "Mrs. Shortley's new planet: Alternate geographies and deep time in southern modernism", Wiesław Kuhn re-situates the literature of the American South between 1919 and 1945 beyond the familiar confines of regionalism. Rather than turning inward upon its own past, writers such as William Faulkner, Zora Neale Hurston, and James Agee emerge as participants in a transatlantic modernism shaped by the aftermath of the First World War and the cartographic reordering of the Treaty of Versailles. Kuhn demonstrates how southern modernism was decisively marked by alternate geographies and long durations, including those of evolutionary biology and political theology. Works such as Faulkner's *A fable* (1954), Hurston's *Moses, man of the mountain* (1939), and Agee's *Let us now praise famous men* (1941) extend beyond the territorial South to imagine a planetary South, one that critiques agrarian ideology, segregation, and endemic poverty by situating them within broader transatlantic and Anthropocene contexts. In this account, southern modernism becomes a "weak modernism"

in Paul K. Saint-Amour's sense: a modernism that unsettles connections marked by strong genealogies, insofar as "the various loads borne by weakness can productively decenter what they encounter" (2018: 438). The *longue durées* of theology and biology recast the American South as traversable and planetary, countering the "solid South" of plantation and the Gothic. By opening the issue with this essay, we foreground deep time as a mode of reading that unsettles boundaries, situating American literature within greater (and thus more productive) scales of history and materiality.

Continuing the exploration of deep time and transatlantic affinities, the issue proceeds with the discussion of Sylvester Judd's *Margaret* (1845). In "Deep Time in New England: Sylvester Judd's *Margaret* (1845) and Early Modern English Utopia", by analyzing the novel through the concept of deep time as conceptualized by Wai Chee Dimock, Andrzej Sławomir Kowalczyk argues that Judd's romance is both a distinctly American text—as the most successful novel of Transcendentalism—and a novel that resonates with the utopian tradition of Early Modern England. By approaching genre in Wittgensteinian terms of family resemblance rather than Aristotelian categories and conditions, Kowalczyk demonstrates how the representation of utopia in *Margaret* shares more with the British tradition than is initially apparent and that, in terms of genre, the novel can in fact be traced even further back to much older traditions. By the same token, Kowalczyk demonstrates that American literature can be understood as part of a broader, transhistorical network of affinities. Drawing on Artur Blaim's study of Early Modern English Utopias (2013), the essay highlights the complex design of Judd's story-world, its polyphonic texture, and the ways in which its critical reception has been dominated by the national frame. Also, the very protagonist of the romance is analyzed as a deep time character: *Margaret* is proffered as both an embodiment and a mediator between the cultural and spiritual values of New England settlers, the Native Americans, and the European traditions (i.a. the Greek and Roman mythology). By re-situating *Margaret* within a denationalized space, Kowalczyk shows how both its female protagonist and her utopian community are simultaneously grounded in New England and universalized across temporal scales. In this light, American literature exceeds the confines of national lineage and its thematic focus and opens onto unexpected and varied kinships.

Extending the engagement with the utopian tradition, Katarzyna Więckowska in "Climate Crisis and Livable Futures: Ursula K. Le Guin's Modest Utopias and Solarpunk Fiction" challenges the dominance of dystopian and apocalyptic narratives in contemporary climate fiction, arguing that such bleak imaginaries often reinforce present-day stagnation rather than inspire activism. Instead, Więckowska turns to "modest utopias", that is to narratives that neither indulge in catastrophic fatalism nor embrace technooptimist fantasies of progress, but are

rather viable alternative ways of living in the future. Through a close reading of Ursula K. Le Guin's *Always coming home* (1985) and some of the science-fiction writer's key essays, the article demonstrates how Le Guin's work provides a conceptual and aesthetic foundation for imagining livable and relational futures beyond the Anthropocene. Więckowska further examines how Le Guin's relational worldview has shaped contemporary *solarpunk* aesthetics and ethics. In contrast to the rationalist Euclidean utopia based on control, mastery, and the construction of a completely new "perfect" world, *solarpunk* embraces Le Guin's commitment to non-hierarchical, process-oriented, and non-anthropocentric modes of imagining. It thus extends Le Guin's legacy and contributes to a broader (re)imagining of climate futures that emphasizes resilience and world-making.

Following these explorations, the issue turns to Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) as a site where alternative histories and material assemblages unsettle reality. If McGuire and Ware render crisis through layered chronologies, Dick's novel, as Piotr Płomiński shows in "Objects in Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* and the new materialist approaches to reality", stages a confrontation with the contingency of history through the agency of objects. In the climactic moment when Mr. Tagomi contemplates a piece of jewelry crafted by a Jewish artisan, the narrative opens onto a parallel timeline, dramatizing how inanimate things can act as agents of transformation. Drawing on Graham Harman's object-oriented ontology (2018), Jane Bennett's vital materialism (2010), and Francesca Ferrando's concept of the posthuman multiverse (2020), Płomiński argues that Dick's fiction anticipates new materialist philosophies by refusing essentialist hierarchies and foregrounding the entanglement of the human and the nonhuman.

Dominika Ferens's contribution "Sigrid Nunez's minority cosmopolitanism and the ethics of interest" frames Nunez's novels *The friend* (2018) and *What are you going through* (2020) within the transnational turn in contemporary American fiction and criticism, extending their ethical inquiry into a posthuman register. Once celebrated as an Asian American writer, Nunez was later sidelined for turning away from explicitly racialized subjects toward seemingly "unmarked" narrators and globally resonant concerns. Ferens sees this very displacement as highly productive. Thus, read through Susan Koshy's notion of "minority cosmopolitanism" which "emanates from not being at home in the world" (Koshy 2011: 608), the novels emerge as a meditation on ethical attention that addresses a dispersed, transnational public of strangers bound by shared structure of feeling and vulnerability rather than identity. Foregrounding *The friend*'s exploration of loss, grief, suicide, and care, the scholar reconfigures the intense interspecies relationship between a grieving narrator and a dog as an ethical stance that crosses national, cultural, and even

species boundaries. The reading aligns intimate affect, central to the plot and mood of the novel, with more diffuse temporalities of loss and more-than-human coexistence. Ferens's discussion of *What are you going through*, in turn, foregrounds a shift from cosmopolitan address to a planetary horizon, where multiple human crises intersect with the slow violence of ecological collapse. Through her focus on the formal and affective aspects of the novel, Ferens demonstrates how Nunez enacts this dilemma through a poetics of distraction and return, as interrupted thoughts fracture narrative time, allowing competing temporalities of illness, friendship, political anguish, and deep planetary crisis to destabilize the present.

Addressing the theme of ethnic belonging in "Dina Nayeri's *The ungrateful refugee*: A migrant's 'hyphenated' identity in between traditions and narratives", Mateusz Dudek discusses the questions and dilemmas of identity re/construction in the transnational space between Iran and the US and their respective cultures, languages, and religions. The author relies on Paul Ricœur's theory of identity, specifically the theorist's understanding of personal identity as *ipse* identity (juxtaposed with *idem* identity), to showcase the Nayeri's vicissitudes of literary and cultural self-transformation and self-construction in the narrative. Dudek analyzes how and to what effect both Western and non-Western storytelling patterns and customs affect the form and structure of the memoir. Furthermore, he discusses the techniques and devices Nayeri employs to represent the complex experience of Iranian migrants to the US. Interlacing her own story with the stories of a number of migrants, Nayeri's fragmented memoir provides a sense of integrity and dignity as she revisits and navigates the ruptured timelines, inconsistent roles, positions, and stereotypes that immigrants are entangled in. Dudek discusses the quandaries of citizenship, racism, and the concepts of "good immigrant" and "ungrateful refugee." These shape and illuminate Nayeri's account of a multinational life that crosses borders, since hers is a liminal experience that interrogates the operative categories of nation-states and explores the capacity of literary genres to accommodate varied forms of life experience.

Continuing the exploration of the United States as a multiethnic society, Klara Szymańko, in her paper "Transcending 'eccentricity'? Toppling the myth of white exclusivity in founding the nation—Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men*", examines the 1980 novel by the Chinese American writer. Szymańko addresses the myth of white exclusivity: the belief that white men were the sole founders and pioneers of the USA. This ethos the author foregrounds as challenged by Kingston's representation of the historical contribution of her Chinese American forebears to the nation's formation and growth. Known for her blending of Chinese folklore and family stories, Kingston asserts her ancestor's enduring legacy by portraying them as half-mythic, larger-than-life heroes who left tangible and verifiable physical marks on the American soil. Szymańko discusses

Kingston's depiction of the Chinese immigrant community in terms of spatial studies (Edward Soja, Barbara Hooper), the politics of location (AnaLouise Keating, David Roediger), as well as African American studies (bell hooks, Audre Lorde, W.E.B. Du Bois) relying on the latter to illuminate the situation of the migrant to the U.S. By juxtaposing the notions of center and margin in U.S. culture and examining the visibility and invisibility of ethnic minorities in general, and the Chinese American minority in particular, Szymański explores Kingston's narrative as a novelistic project of revisitation that exposes the lived realities of her ancestors and affirms their ongoing legacy. In this light, *China Men* is read as a corrective to the hegemonic historiography of the United States.

The last article in the volume examines issues facing Black Americans, linking their focus to the enduring legacy of slavery as a defining historical institution. In her article, "Reparations for slavery and post-slavery racial discrimination in the United States. Incorporating international human rights standards into domestic law", Aneta Dybska addresses the long-overdue question of compensating Black Americans for the losses suffered by their ancestors—losses of life, dignity, opportunity, and citizenship—and the continuing social, economic, and political consequences of these injustices. Dybska traces the origins of reparations debates to the Reconstruction era, noting that the issue has never been adequately resolved, leaving later generations to bear the responsibility for justice. She discusses contemporary initiatives by politicians and activists who seek to apply international human rights principles to the American context. Before addressing these efforts, Dybska offers a comprehensive overview of earlier attempts to secure reparations, beginning with the unfulfilled Reconstruction promise of "forty acres and a mule", through major grassroots movements, to the creation of N'COBRA (National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America). The latter introduced a transnational and human rights framework to the debate, though its results remain limited. Dybska emphasizes the potential of international human rights law to strengthen reparations claims but highlights a key limitation: the United States is not a signatory to several binding international treaties and thus is not required to enforce them. She situates the American case within a broader global context, referencing precedents such as the Native American Indian Claims Commission, reparations for Japanese Americans interned during World War II, the "comfort women" movement, and international restitution for Jewish victims of the Holocaust, as well as Raphael Lemkin's concept of genocide. Dybska also notes the two formal congressional apologies for slavery, in 2008 and 2009, neither of which addressed the issue of restitution. The article concludes with an analysis of two domestic legislative efforts reflecting the internalization of human rights principles: the Federal Reparations Study Bill, introduced repeatedly since 1989 but never passed, and California's Assembly Bill 3121, which established a task force to study and propose reparative measures.

We would also like to draw your attention to the three articles published as a thematically unified section in the previous issue of *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* (60/2025), which form a prelude to this volume: Ewa Kowal's "Housing crisis time in two graphic narratives: Richard McGuire's *Here* and Chris Ware's *Building stories*", Martyna Bryla's "A fable for our entangled world: Reading Gary Shteyngart's *Our country friends*", and Ewa Klęczaj-Siara, "In search of Black creativity and joy: Black urban space in African American picturebooks about the South Bronx". Ewa Kowal reads Richard McGuire's *Here* and Chris Ware's *Building stories* as graphic meditations on durational crisis and layered temporal habitation. Martyna Bryla approaches Gary Shteyngart's *Our country friends* as a fable of entanglement, foregrounding pandemic time and ecological interdependence, while Ewa Klęczaj-Siara turns to African American picturebooks about the South Bronx, tracing Black urban creativity and joy within spatial histories shaped by dispossession and renewal.

All these contributions trace a set of pathways and "rift zones" through which American literature and culture negotiate its place within vast temporal and material networks. They invite us to read literature not only within national or historical frames but across the *longue durées* of crisis, futurity, and materiality. Yet, deep time is only one axis along which these texts unsettle conventional boundaries. Equally crucial is the question of transnationality, the ways in which American literature emerges through crossings, exchanges, revisions, and affiliations that extend beyond the nation.

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