

*Traditions sur mesure*  
*Exploration des poétiques expérimentales américaines, de H.D. à Michael Heller*  
*Tailor-Made Traditions*  
*The Poetics of U.S. Experimental Verse from H.D. to Michael Heller*

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This edition of French academic journal *Anglophonia-Caliban*, entitled *Traditions sur mesure : Exploration des poétiques expérimentales américaines, de H.D. à Michael Heller*, mirrors anglophone studies in France: the main title, the journal itself and its layout (table of contents at the end of the journal) are French, and most of the papers originate from scientific events on American poetry in France. Yet all articles are written in English. They are preceded by summaries in French and keywords in English. Bibliographies are also marked by this dual input as many echo each other by resorting to both American criticism on modern poetry (Charles Altieri, Marjorie Perloff) and classic French critical theory such as Gilles Deleuze. Echoes of Walter Benjamin, Ezra Pound, and other poet-critics such as Jonathan Williams, Jerome Rothenberg, Michael Heller are also to be found in more than one article.

Clément Oudart, a specialist of modern(ist) American poetry, coordinated this issue. His excellent introduction provides a dense and precise insight into canon formation and historiography on twentieth-century poetics, while giving a useful reminder of the central notions of Ezra Pound's poetic program and influence, the poet being a frequent reference in the rest of the volume. As Oudart explains in his introduction, the papers gathered in the volume were first presented in two different instances: a "Tailor-Made Traditions" conference and the "Transcendence Without God: Poetry and Mystical Aspiration" panel of the AFEA (French Association of American Studies) annual conference. The first event took place in Toulouse on January 25th, 2013 and the summaries of all original papers (some of which are not in the *Anglophonia* journal) which were originally presented at this conference can be read [online](#). The AFEA conference was held in Angers in May 2013. Three of the papers in the volume, written by specialists of American poetry (Carbajosa, Finch and Robinson) were not presented at these conferences.

Despite the overall excellent quality of the individual articles in the volume, it is sometimes hard to see the link with the general title of "Tailor-Made Traditions"; this may have to do with the different occasions on which the articles were written. The volume does constitute, as the French title suggests, an "exploration" of American experimental verse, from the Modernists to contemporary poets such as Michael Heller who features both as critic (and author of an article) and as poet interviewed by Fiona MacMahon. This survey of twentieth-century American poetry encompasses studies of Jewish poets, as well as Objectivist, Conceptual and Language poets, to mention but a few "schools". The volume tackles the way traditions – here taken as religious, poetic, cultural and critical – are taken up and appropriated to fit particular poets' goals and programs.

The volume, which is composed of an introduction, twelve articles, and an interview of poet Michael Heller, will be of particular interest to H.D. scholars and readers. Indeed, the first three articles deal with H.D.'s poetry, while two more are comparative readings of H.D. and other female poets.

The first article in the collection is written by Antoine Cazé and entitled "The Translation Paradigm in H.D.'s Writing". After giving an overview of French translations of H.D.'s works, thereby showing the lack of global editorial policy and coherence (which in turn, Cazé argues, has obscured H.D.'s role within modernism), the author shows how translation is at the very heart of H.D.'s poetic practice: appropriating Greek culture enables her to place herself in a position of liminality toward modernism, and to make this very notion central to her aesthetics, all the more so when one reconsiders H.D.'s *Notes on Thought and Vision*.

In "Ecstasy's Alembic : H.D.'s Poetics of Magic and Psychoanalysis in World War Two", written in a flowing and enjoyable style, Jane Augustine traces the influence and importance of mysticism and spiritualism on H.D., in her private, spiritual, sexual and literary life from the poet's Imagist phase to her post-World War II works. Augustine also dwells on H.D.'s sessions with Freud, which greatly contributed to the development of female personae in her poetry.

Matte Robinson extends the analysis on H.D.'s mysticism by focusing on "H.D. and Robert Amberlain : Doubles in H.D.'s Late Work". In this article, Robinson studies the impact of H.D.'s readings of the esoteric texts of Robert Amberlain, in which H.D. found "the idea of the *double*" [52], which constitutes a leading thread to analyze the many figures and symbols in H.D.'s *Hermetic Definition* and *Ave Vale* in particular, and helped the poet make sense of traumatic events and organize esoteric experiences in a coherent poetic framework.

In her excellent, clear and stimulating article entitled "Refracting the Religious : Reworking Origins in H.D., Djuna Barnes and Laura (Riding) Jackson", Claire Conilleau analyzes the way these three poets, whose relation to religion or spirituality are conflictual or problematic, rewrite biblical allusions. The comparative approach problematizes the female poets' subversive relations to patriarchal and biblical traditions, while delineating the singularity of each of the studied poets as they construct a figure of the female demiurge questioning the origins and originality of poetic creation.

Natalia Carbajosa, in "Extremes of the Avant-Garde : H.D. and Rae Armantrout", compares "two poets whose production marks the chronological limits of the American avant-garde" [85] and whose "works signal the transition from early modernism to current postmodernist poetry" [86]. Carbajosa starts by acknowledging the difficulties inherent in such a comparison in a debated critical field. She then points out the major differences – temporal, cultural, poetic – between the two female poets in order to show that the same reference, *i.e.* the Bible, is used in various ways and in completely different cultural contexts: H.D. favours intertextuality, while Armantrout resorts to hypertextuality, yet both are concerned with the ethical dimension of poetry and the possibilities of the poetic language.

The article that follows, written by Zachary Finch, also has language as its central focus and is entitled "Caliban's Gait : The Postcolonial 'Progress' of American Exploratory Poetics in William Carlos Williams' *The Great American Novel*". While occasionally comparing Williams' work to the poetry of Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot or Lyn Hejinian, Finch analyzes the linguistic "practice" and movement at work in Williams' subversive *Great American Novel*, published at the same time as *Studies in Classic American Literature*, where D.H. Lawrence raises the question of literary traditions for American writers "freed from a colonial European parentage" [102]. Finch shows in what sense Williams' work is an anti-novel, "an untamed discourse" [105] striving toward a crude form of language which cannot be expressed through the conventional and used form of the novel but only through "an authentically 'novel' writing (*i.e.* poetry)" [114].

Xavier Kalck, in "Formalism as Mysticism : Reading Jewish American Poets Louis Zukofsky and Charles Reznikoff", starts by underlining the limits of formal analyses that sought to read Jewish poets with history, or politics, or ethnicity as their central preoccupation. Kalck exposes and defines this "formalist mysticism" (and its inherent methodological problems) in order to show that Jewishness – and its problematic definition – should not produce decontextualized readings of American Jewish poetry; nor should it focus solely on issues of identity. The article tackles very specific notions of Jewish culture in accessible terms and gives particularly interesting readings of the interaction between Yiddish and English in Zukofsky and Reznikoff.

In “Unsayings : Mystical Aspiration and Negativity in Paul Auster’s Poetry”, François Hugonnier analyzes Auster’s mysticism, paradoxically expressed through a poetry that foregrounds silence, negativity, the absence of images, linguistic failure and inadequacy. Hugonnier, through insightful comparisons of Paul Auster with Charles Reznikoff, Paul Celan or Edmond Jabès, shows how Auster’s poetics is one of “unearthing”, and is teeming with “*un-words*”. Hugonnier thus shows that Auster’s emphasis on nothingness, which is “developed at length in Auster’s novels, [was] initiated in his poetry” [149], where language is synonymous with alienation.

Ross Hair, in “Thick of Trees : Kinship and Place in Transatlantic Press Poetry Networks”, focuses on the poetic works of Lorine Niedecker, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Roy Fisher and Stuart Mills and the role played by small presses in publishing the works of these poets from distant areas of the English-speaking world. Hair convincingly suggests that Jonathan Williams’ Jargon Society, for example, constitutes such a “utopian and intertextual ‘terrain’” [160], a transatlantic and eccentric meeting place for “poets, publishers, and artists” [161], far from mainstream centers of publication but gathering a constellation of artists. The Wild Hawthorn Press (which published the *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* little magazine) and *Certain Trees : The Constructed Book, Poem and Object 1964-2006* (a 2006 exhibition in France) are also analyzed by Hair, who emphasizes the collaborative dimension of such enterprises.

In “Robert Creeley’s Refusals”, Will Montgomery comments on the use of “short form” – by which he means lines, stanzas and poems – in Creeley’s poetry, which takes up the Poundian notion of condensation or compression and is written in “a language that is characterized by refusal, negation and hesitancy” [180]. Montgomery shows that this language integrates both private and social elements, in order to provide a political comment on the American culture of the 1950’s and 1960’s.

Dealing with American poetry from the 1970’s, Hélène Aji’s article is entitled “‘If You Know What They Mean,/ Things Make Sense’ (Bob Perelman) : Language Poetry v. Conceptualisms”. Aji shows that the Modernist heritage, claimed both by Language and Conceptual Poets, also constitutes a “source of strong antagonism” [198] between the two groups of poets. Both show a particular concern for the appropriation and recontextualization of existing texts (in all their variety, as radio speeches, poems in books or computer-generated texts), or “re-purposing” – such are the leading threads of the article – and Aji underlines the political claim behind this poetic act which supposes different reading and writing methods.

In “*Now-Time Poetics : Under the Sign of Benjamin*”, Michael Heller comments on several aspects of Walter Benjamin’s writings and philosophy, starting with the motion or errand which has often been analyzed in Benjamin, and which Heller sets as a parallel for the modern poet, whose task is to “relate the tale of the tribe’s uncertainty” [212] given our socio-political and historical context. Heller explains how some concepts in Benjamin – being both “in time” and untimely, for example, together with the notion of Messianic arrest – can be relevant for modern poetry and for his own poetic work.

Michael Heller is also present in the next chapter, entitled “A Conversation with Michael Heller : *This Constellation is a Name*”, where he is interviewed by Fiona McMahon. It is preceded by an introduction where McMahon explains the circumstances of the interview and provides an interesting complement to the preceding article by Heller. The interview deals with his poetics of place and the notion of heritage, with the relation between “intellectual inquiry and lyricism” [231] in Heller’s poetry, the concept of “lostness” (evoked in different terms in Heller’s article), as well as memory, historytelling and the definition of culture.

*Traditions sur mesure : Exploration des poétiques expérimentales américaines de H.D. à Michael Heller* therefore provides a broad range of articles that show the variety of experimental twentieth-century American poetry and its relation to poetic, cultural and religious traditions.