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Foreword

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The present issue contains an eclectic selection of six substantial essays by European, American and Canadian scholars on 20th century Irish, British, Caribbean and American stories. It also contains a review of Lucy Evans' *The Caribbean Short Story* by Marie-Annick Montout and Kasia Boddy's *The American Short Story Since 1950* by Jean-Yves Pellegrin.

2In "Images of Blankness in Joseph Conrad's 'The Warrior's Soul', 'Prince Roman' and 'The Tale'" Fiona Tomkinson discusses the representation of blankness under the aspect(s) of whiteness, silence and/or obscurity. In "The Warrior's Soul" it is the terrible, muffling whiteness of the snow through which Napoleon's Grand Army makes its ill-fated retreat; in "Prince Roman" the narrator's childhood encounter with the hero is set against the background of snow framed by the window of a country-house, and also against the unremitting blankness of Prince Roman's deafness; whilst in "The Tale", the sea fog and the obscurity which it symbolizes function as both background and agent in the unfolding of the tragedy. Fiona Tomkinson discusses the use of the above images firstly as an interrogation of the phenomenological status of what can be called "an image of imagelessness"; then through what she calls their "existential functions." According to Fiona Tomkinson the image of blankness has here a double function of concealing and unveiling, corresponding to the Heideggerean concept of *aletheia*, and such unveilings provoke existential crises within the protagonists as they are exposed to an overwhelming mood of horror, wonder, indifference, or confusion.

3In "Food and Painting in Two Stories by A. S. Byatt" Carolyn Levy and June Sturrock put to the fore A. S. Byatt's parallel treatment of food and painting in "The Chinese Lobster" and "Christ in the House of Martha and Mary." The role of aesthetic pleasure in alleviating the pain of existence becomes apparent in "The Chinese Lobster" through discussion of Matisse's painting - and a Chinese meal. While this story concerns the pleasure of the consumer of art, "Christ in the House of Martha and Mary" concerns the rewards of the producer of art. In this ekphrastic narrative, a painter communicates to an unhappy cook the contrast between mere existence and the vital engagement with the world that is open to them both through their arts. Byatt's concern with the value of the awakened senses and of aesthetic experience is articulated in these two stories through an interaction between painting and cooking that challenges the normal hierarchy of the arts and of the senses.

4In "The Inquisitional Impulse: Bernard MacLaverty's 'Walking the Dog'", Richard Haslam discusses the title story from MacLaverty's collection *Walking the Dog* (1994) which depicts a man's abduction and interrogation during the Northern Irish "Troubles." The story has been praised by many reviewers, but in addition to praise, Haslam notes, the story has provoked disagreement concerning what the protagonist conceals from his abductors, and what the author conceals from his readers. In his paper, Haslam traces the critical divergence through the lens of rhetorical hermeneutics, which Steven Mailloux defines as "a version of cultural rhetoric studies that focuses on the tropes, arguments, and narratives constituting the interpretations of texts at specific times and places." Haslam's analysis of the antithetical readings of "Walking the

Dog” contributes to the debate about the particular properties of the short story form.

5The fourth essay, “Locating the Short-Story Cycle” by Jennifer Joan Smith, discusses how Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* (for a long time considered as the ‘first’ short-story cycle) fits in a tradition of similar books of “limited locality” as Smith calls it. According to Smith, the short-story cycle originates in nineteenth-century village sketch narratives, which served to incorporate towns, distanced from cultural centers, into the national imaginary. Even after the frontier closes, later cycles continue to introduce places marginalized by economic conditions. These cycles, Smith argues, depend upon the construction of a restricted geographic terrain to contain and ground the narratives; in other words, they stake out a limited locality to encompass the stories. Through their pronounced interest in place, these cycles question the extent to which geographic proximity produces communal affiliation, which is often imagined as an antidote to the poisons of industrialization. Both regionalist and modernist cycles of locality deploy a self-conscious sentimentality—or, what Smith calls, “critical nostalgia”—to signal and respond to the issues of nation and formal experimentation that pervade the genre throughout its historical lifetime.

6In the fifth essay, Hyacinth M. Simpson discusses the role that the BBC’s *Caribbean Voices* program (1945-1958) played in the development of an oral aesthetic among West Indian short story writers in the 1940’s and 1950’s. Simpson identifies this aesthetic as the defining characteristic of a substantive body of short fiction produced during these two decades, and argues that the development of an oral aesthetic has since then become a defining feature of West Indian literature as a whole.

7In the last essay, Marie-Hélène Petit discusses Steven Millhauser’s short stories. They are filled with what the author calls “replicas” in one of his essays: those secondary objects mimicking and substituting themselves to primary (authentic) objects. But the presence of his replicas is so insistent and so pervasive that the department stores, museums, towns and other such imaginary places which the author creates in his fiction eventually present themselves as replicas of the world itself. Disturbing traditional boundaries between the authentic and the artificial, replicas distort the characters’ worldview and raise fundamental questions about the nature of reality. What is reality? Can we escape an artificial relation to reality? Playing on the powers of illusion, Millhauser uses replicas to suggest a deeper truth about the world than the so-called transparency realism used to express. Marie-Hélène Petit offers to consider replicas as part and parcel of Millhauser’s aesthetics, but also as a postmodern reinvention of Hawthorne’s romance: the encounter the author describes in his preface to *The Scarlet Letter* between the Actual and the Imaginary.

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