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Review of *Cary Nelson and the Struggle for the University: Poetry, Politics, and the Profession* edited by Michael Rothberg and Peter K. Garrett (SUNY Press, 2009)

Leah Schweitzer

Most of my experience with Cary Nelson comes from his scholarship on the state of the university and his activism, culminating momentarily with his current role as president of AAUP. What *Cary Nelson and the Struggle for the University*, a collection of essays which came out of a conference held at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, makes immediately clear is that all of his professional work, not just his activism, is inspired by his desire to recover, listen to, call attention to, and fight for the marginalized. Whether it be in recovering poets of the 1930s or acknowledging the contingent labor that the academy routinely ignores, Nelson's mission is to lend his hand at giving voice to those who might not otherwise get one. This edited collection of essays, more a collection of essays by those inspired by Nelson than a direct examination of his work, is largely a call to continue the work that Nelson has started.

The volume is divided into three main sections: the politics of poetry, the politics of the university, and the politics of mentorship. The authors who contribute to the first part of this collection cite the groundwork laid in works such as *Repression and Recovery*, focusing on both the content and the methodology for archival work that they demonstrate, crediting Nelson for "expanding—and equally important unsettling—the literary canon" (42) as well as developing "a key methodological means for assessing a poem's cultural work" (83). Every essay acknowledges *Repression and Recovery* and other works by Nelson as a seminal work which inspired and guided its own; and each discusses its own recovery project. The essays highlight the way in which this kind of recovery work focuses on the collective experience rather than privileging the individual voice, calling attention not only to the forgotten poet/author but also to the ignored, marginalized culture that poet/author represents. Michael Thurston's "Contexts, Choruses, and Katabases (Canonical and Non-): Some Methodological Implications of Cary Nelson's Recovery Work" argues that reading work within the context of a chorus, as Nelson did in *Revolutionary Memory*, allows us to see even well-established poets anew, to understand them differently:

[R]ecovering the broader katabatic chorus of which their [major poets like Pound and Eliot] works were only a few voices, we can see how [...] the apparently conservative or reactionary political poetics [...] can be rearticulated to programs of social change, and how [...] the katabis can help a poet work his way out of the shadows of Pound and Eliot and into what MacNeice's friend Auden, in his own poem on Spain, called "to-day the struggle." (90)

Thurston argues not only for contextualizing known and unknown voices within the chorus but also within the context of their publication. He picks up on Nelson's methodology for examining not only the poem but the entire artifact in which the poem is found, making the words of the poet just a part of the larger political and social story.

It is this kind of reading and re-reading that all of these essays in the first section advocate, recasting what is often considered mediocre (or "no good," as Grant Farred writes) as valuable and instructive. At times, it is hard to garner the kind of appreciation for the recovered poetry that some of these scholars have. For example, the poetry quoted in "The Lives of Haiku Poetry: Self, Selflessness, and Solidarity in Concentration Camp Haiku" by Karen Jackson Ford, is never convincingly presented as "good" poetry. However, she does convincingly argue for the social value of the haikus written by the forgotten, interned Japanese whose voices have gone largely unrecovered and unacknowledged. Ford, like Thurston, argues for reading this poetry as a collective and thus recasts the poetry from the Japanese internment camps as not only a commentary about that experience but also as a condemning look at the American government:

The official wartime view of the people of Japanese descent as "resident aliens" and the reclassification of Japanese American servicemen as "enemy aliens" are racist locutions turned back on the government in these poems where the country itself is the enemy land, the source of betrayal and alienation. The Kaiko poets in the internment camps explored America's racial dynamics in poetry even as they simultaneously pressed their haiku to rise above the terrible circumstances racism produced. (68)

It is this attention to the political ramifications of poetry that Nelson's scholarship has encouraged in all the scholars who contribute to part one of this volume.

Those who contribute to part two of the collection are equally inspired by Nelson's political activism, but in this section the attention is turned to the university. Most of these essays make connections between the corporate world and the university, showing how it is becoming more and more difficult to distinguish between the two. These chapters demonstrate that the system of university administration mimics the stratification of power often found in the business world; lament the demise of the humanities as the sciences prove their more immediate corporate worth; and argue for ways to make obvious the value of cultural studies to the corporate world in order to garner the same kind of monetary rewards and notoriety the sciences have procured for themselves.

Only one of the essays, Jane Juffer's "Everyday Life at the Corporate University," takes issue with Nelson and in doing so, stands out in a collection which mostly heralds his influence and asks to be considered within the light of his work. Juffer argues that the humanities, especially cultural studies, should seek partnership with corporate America. She reads Nelson's work (especially his collaboration with Stephen Watt in *Academic Keywords*) as creating a binary between culture and job training. She argues culture should engage with the corporate world rather than lie in opposition to it:

Note the set of binary characteristics here: globalization is aligned with job training and profit, while the humanities are aligned with culture and critique. The critic's job as tactician is ensured. Yet the desire to "stop" the erosion of these binary oppositions may prevent the effective critique. We must look rather for the *intersections* of globalization, job training, cultural production, and ethical engagement (a phrase I prefer to "critique," which assumes an outside). (147)

Juffer looks particularly to her own work in Latina/o studies to provide suggestions for how these intersections could be created, focusing mostly on the corporate world's need to understand diversity in order to best manage its work force. Most interesting about Juffer's argument is her focus on how students, more than professors and scholars, are able to productively traverse the gap. Her argument suggests that cultural critics, including Nelson, continue to perpetuate the divide between corporate and culture while her students find productive ways to introduce a culture of diversity to the corporate world while still critically examining how that corporate world can appropriate and erase cultural diversity. Criticizing Nelson and Watts for failing to recognize "the contradictions and complexities of everyday life and their generative, if not always reconcilable, possibilities," (152), her essay stands in opposition to what she sees as Nelson's evasion of corporate power and encourages active engagement with that which Nelson seeks to critique from outside.

The remaining essays in part two of this collection directly build on Nelson's scholarship about and activism within the university and makes many of the same kinds of observations which Nelson has recorded in works such as *Will Work for Food* and *Manifesto of a Tenured Radical*. Marc Bousquet, in "Worlds to Win: Toward a Cultural Studies of the University Itself," makes connections between the twofold corporatization of the university: commercialization (via apparel sales, sports marketing, pension plans, etc.), and organizational culture in which the management (i.e., administrators) establishes values and practices for faculty to adopt. He adds to Nelson's scholarship by analyzing the effect of virtual programs that allow users to play at university management and arguing, a la Nelson, that these games suggest the potential for faculty to act as a counter-culture to the administration, while negatively noting that very little of a faculty-culture even exists from which to garner such hope. In his essay "The Organization Man," Michael Bérubé presents Nelson's role as an activist as part of his professional duties and encourages readers to see taking up the fight for the disenfranchised as part of their responsibilities as well. He makes connections between the work Nelson does recovering labor and leftist poetry and the work he does advocating for adjuncts, graduate

students, and others in the academy who go largely unnoticed and badly compensated. Stephen Watt's essay, "The Humanities, the University, and the Enemy Within," builds on work he and others have undertaken along with Nelson to demonstrate the demise of the humanities and the rise of the sciences, placing the power of the corporate world at blame:

It comes as no surprise, then, that while most humanists are more or less strangers to the trustees, they are on a first-name basis with powerful scientists. Yet these same scientists, for the most part, are not the "enemy within"; rather, the ethos of corporate science, and the idea of the university as first and foremost a hub of new business, is. (129)

Watt's view of the corporate university is perhaps the bleakest in the collection, suggesting the general apathy of the few enfranchised faculty is part and parcel to the epidemic. While he offers suggestions to "improve our chances of survival at the contemporary university" (136), he still concludes with a sense that we may be too far gone to recover. Andrew Ross picks up on the perilous rise of corporatization of the university in "The Rise of the Global University," demonstrating that this is not a phenomenon unique to the United States, but rather a global problem which must be combated. He traces how "market liberalization" has affected the structuring of universities around the world, allowing many western universities to build on foreign, or virtual, soil creating an even larger gap between those who manage the universities and the labor who work for them.

The essays in part two are an elucidation and expansion of work Cary Nelson has done and continues to engage with; however, they do leave the reader a bit depressed about what the future holds. The third part of the collection does little to counter this feeling of being deep in a hole; its encouragement to be the kind of mentor Nelson has been during his career seems to come from a sense that few professionals in the academy are as generous of spirit and with time as Nelson has been throughout his career. The third section of essays isn't nearly as critically engaging as the other two, partially because they simply reiterate the obvious impact of Nelson's wide-ranging influence on those interested in rescuing and heralding the voices of the disenfranchised; Nelson has had a profound impact on scholarship and activism and has encouraged many, directly and indirectly, to follow in his footsteps. Nelson's own concluding essay, "Activism and Community in the Academy," cites the ways in which he sees this collection of scholars continuing and building on his work and he is characteristically generous about the contributions these scholars have made to the fields he's already traversed:

This book is a modest example of such a community, one embracing all those who produce, interpret, and disseminate ongoing humanities research. The work these scholars do extends well beyond major publications to include teaching graduate and undergraduate students, reviewing and evaluating the scholarship of others, and interrogating the state of the university, a field of discipline as a whole. (224)

What this collection of essays makes abundantly clear, as Nelson does in his afterward, is that there is still much work left to do. It's going to be an uphill battle engaged in by the very laborers and leftists Nelson has spent his career recovering and giving voice to.

Leah Schweitzer is assistant professor of English at High Point University where she teaches composition and creative writing.