

No States

Curtin 108

Panel Chair: Erica Bornstein

Sophia Goodfriend (University of Chicago)

“Anxious Itineraries: Affect, Negation, and Belonging on Birthright Israel”

Since 1999 Birthright Israel has brought over 500,000 Jewry on free tour a land they are entitled to by law. Over the course of ten days, participants travel through and beyond Israel proper, dipping into the contested Golan Heights and the occupied West Bank. Seamless travel over infrastructures of occupation—segregated highways, separation walls, military checkpoints, illegal settlements, undetonated land mines—generates lasting bonds between the state of Israel and diasporic Jewry. Drawing from participant observation and interviews with past participants, I argue that Birthright Israel is emblematic of the contradictory affective experience of colonial governance. Jewish entitlements to Palestinian lands are enacted through a discursive negation of both Palestinian life and the constitutive violence of Israeli occupation. Yet Palestinian assertions of sovereignty are conjured up vis-à-vis everyday sensations of fear, anxiety, and surprise generated throughout the tour. This paper thus attends to the affective strategies by which the violent negation of Palestine life is simultaneously sustained and disavowed, emphasizing that the entitlements to land and citizenship Birthright Israel codes are in fact sutured through a paradoxical recognition of colonial displacement and settler expropriation. Highlighting this contradiction constitutes a small step in refusing the legal and political structures that enable diasporic Jewish access to Palestinian land. Ultimately, enunciating these anxieties underscores how larger processes of colonial occupation and settlement are transmitted and naturalized, precariously, in the present.

Jenny Kehl (UW-Milwaukee)

“The Disruptive Power of *No* in Water Privatization: A Study of Resistance, Refusal, and Post-Capitalist Remunicipalization”

In this time of reverence for privatization, are we going to sell our water to the highest bidder? My work suggests we say “no” to privatizing our vital water resources. Water privatization is a strong trend based on the reverential capitalist belief that private water companies will increase efficiency, but the reality in most cases is that water privatization has increased price, decreased access, and decreased the quality of water provided to the public. From a normative perspective, it is important that the public govern the Commons such as water resources through the Public Trust, and that we not release our governments from the fundamental responsibility of providing clean safe water to all. It is also important that public water not be for private profit. My work is grounded in the seminal works of John Stuart Mill, who argued for the importance of public water supply, and Elinor Ostrom, Nobel Laureate who documented the benefits of polycentric governance of common natural resources to provide the greatest common good and to prevent ecosystem collapse.

My work provides empirical evidence and discusses ethical reasons for why we should say “no” to water privatization. It examines the 235 cities in 37 countries, including eight cities in the U.S., that have said “no” to privatizing their vital water resources.

Calina Ciobanu (United States Naval Academy)

“Julian Barnes and the Function of Dystopian Literature in Dystopian Times”

This paper considers Julian Barnes’s 1998 novel *England, England* alongside the rise of Donald Trump in America in order to argue that the latter’s rejection of (his “Big No” to) the established post-WWII order—an order marked by liberalism, free trade, globalization, and a sense of shared responsibility among nations—demands to be understood as an uncanny materialization of Barnes’s satirical, dystopian alternate-history novel.

Barnes’s text centers on a megalomaniacal businessman, Sir Jack Pitman, a man so narcissistic that he has a newspaper profile of himself chiseled into stone inside the grand building he’s named after himself (Pitman House—shades of Trump Tower). Sir Jack, who says things like, “I employ more women than most in my position. I am a great admirer of women,” reads like a doppelganger of Donald Trump, who has insisted, “I hire tremendous numbers of women” and “Nobody has more respect for women than I do.” In the novel, Pitman’s project is to distill down the “quintessence of Englishness” (a list that comprises the royal family, Big Ben, Robin Hood, the class system, and “emotional frigidity,” among others) into a tourist attraction. Echoes of Sir Jack’s attempt to reproduce the quintessence of Englishness abound in Trump’s exhortation that we “make America great again”—presumably by saying “No” to all those things that are not, according to Trumpian dogma, “quintessentially American” (e.g., immigrants, women’s reproductive autonomy, and environmental protections). Ultimately, Sir Jack ends up producing a microcosm of England that caters to tourists who want to feel like they’ve “seen” England but can’t be bothered to go there and experience it for themselves. This replica of England, aptly named *England, England*, ends by usurping the place of England itself, which undergoes a not-so gradual decline when “New political leaders [that] proclaimed a new self-sufficiency...extracted the country from the European Union...declared a trade barrier against the rest of the world...[and permitted] immigration only in rare circumstances.”

This paper asks what it means to read an alternate history novel like Barnes’s—one that “predicted” Brexit nearly two decades ago, and one that appears to have foretold the course that America is on today—in a moment when the world of “fiction” seems to have merged with our “reality.” What is the potential of dystopian literature, in particular, if we find that we’re already inhabiting the dystopian “future” that our works of fiction have imagined for us? This paper argues that in the moment in which dystopian literature loses its capacity to serve as a warning of what might come (because it represents what already is), what remains for it is the task of deploying “fiction” to immunize us against (i.e., to impel us to deliver a “Big No” to) the ever-encroaching normalization of our own dystopian “reality.”

1 ***The argument expressed in this piece is my own personal reading and does not express the views of the US Naval Academy or the United States government.