Casanova eventually ran afoul of the state inquisitor Antonio Condulmer, a corrupt womanizer and investor in a theater whose productions Casanova had lambasted in the press. In 1755, on charges of sorcery and subversion, Casanova was imprisoned in the Leads, Venice's infamous prison, from which he made a sensational escape the following year. Predictably, he turned the exploit into a slim book, which earned him some international notoriety.

Thereafter, Casanova became a perpetual and desperate wanderer across the Continent under the sobriquet of Chevalier de Seingalt, always hoping for a reprieve from Venice but never quite obtaining one. He consorted with Voltaire, Rousseau, and Frederick the Great (or so he says), but his forced nomadism seems finally to have worn him down, and he was obliged in his old age to accept the patronage of Waldstein and his gloomily provincial castle—happily for us the impetus for his most impressive feat.

Today, Casanova lives on as a louche noun—one that has about it all the allure of cheap aftershave. But is it possible that he is about to be reborn, not as the immortal lover but as the boulevardier of all boulevardiers and the wiliest bluffer of them all?

LAWRENCE OSBORNE

vear-old Casanova improvised a joke for her in Latin: Discite grammatici cur mascula nomina cunnus et cur femineum mentula nomen habet? Disce quod a domino nomina servus habet. (Tell us, O grammarians, why the male genitals are a female noun and the female parts are masculine? Because, they say, the slave always takes the master's name!) On hearing this, La Zanetta, we are told, proudly bestowed a gold watch upon the young prodigy's teacher.

History of My Life gives us a catty and supple panorama of a European society that eerily prefigures our own. It was a world in the process of disintegration, in which women exhibited sexual boldness—hence innumerable convents filled with middle-class girls recovering from illicit abortions. To his female contemporaries,

HISTORY

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Casanova seems to have been the ideal companion. Classless and rootless, willing to take seriously both women's sentiments and intellects, he inspired enduring affections.

His correspondence with many of his lovers spanned thirty years and thousands of pages—unfortunately, it's not included in any edition of the memoirs. In the memoirs themselves, these women remain mysteriously elusive: the cross-dressing Henriette; the subversively voluptuous and intellectual nun M** M**; the wounded C** C**; the coldly treacherous Charpillon; the charming Mimi; the courtesan Ancilla, who was made love to by the libertine John Murray as she lay dying of the pox—while Casanova

watched. This nightmarish demise the writer chronicles with typical detachment: "It was one of the most striking spectacles I had seen in all my life. The cancer which ate away her nose and half of her beautiful face came up again from her esophagus two months after she believed she was cured of the pox by mercury ointment."

STRANGE FRUIT

IN AN EYE-CATCHING EXPERIMENT THAT has created an uproar among American historians, *The Journal of American History (JAH)* recently published an anguished essay on lynching by the distinguished historian Joel Williamson, along

with the unexpurgated responses of his peer reviewers. Instead of keeping the editorial process cloaked in its usual secrecy, David Thelen, the journal's editor, coaxed all the parties into having their contributions published in their raw, unrevised state. Without having read one another's remarks, they agreed to go public. Shortly after, however, the experiment blew up in their faces. "I've heard more comment about this than about almost anything that's appeared in the journal in my recollection—most of it negative," reports Eric Foner, a professor of American history at Columbia University.

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Lingua Franca

Original Article

It's not hard to fathom why. At the center of the controversy is an apparent racial split: Williamson's four white readers recommended the manuscript for publication; his two black readers tore it apart. With Op-Ed-style photographs of the respondents placed beside their remarks, the roundtable in the March issue has the look of a willful editorial provocation. Complains historian Robin Kelley, one of the dissenting panelists and a member of the JAH editorial board, "The presentation deliberately played up a false dichotomy between blacks and whites."

Disavowing any plot to stage a racial melodrama, Thelen claims the exchange on Williamson struck him as "an opportunity not only to publish good conversation about why history matters but also to answer another common request from our readers: to demystify our own practice...for scrutiny by readers. There's no reason to doubt his intentions. After all, the peer-review process tends to generate fascination. Surely a peek behind the curtain was long overdue.

Still, if the editors' purpose was to air the buzz behind the scenes, their choice of occasion was extraordinarily odd. For Joel Williamson's "Wounds Not Scars: Lynching, the National Conscience, and the American Historian" is not, by any measure, a scholarly monograph but a supremely quirky bricolage of personal memoir

and historiography. Williamson, a sixty-eight-year-old professor of history at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, is an eminent scholar of race relations in the post-Civil War South. In his lamentful and occasionally moving rumination, the professor describes himself as "the prisoner of my birth and rearing." He claims that, as a white Southerner, he grew up largely ignorant of vigilante violence, nourished by a "culture that was amazingly effective in erasing some parts of its history." His intellectual heroes-C. Vann Woodward above all—helped maintain the taboo by diligently tracing the origins of segregation, while neglecting to write about lynching. Only in the mid-Sixties, when he stumbled upon newspaper accounts from the 1890s of black men burned at the stake, did Williamson perceive that lynching was America's hidden "holocaust." The nexus of race and lynching became his obsession; in works like The Crucible of Race, he depicted anti-black violence as an extension of the white elite's efforts to transfer its base of power from black slaves to poor whites. And yet, he writes, he still remained trapped by his identity—only this time it was a "gender cage." Feminist historians, notably Jacqueline Dowd-Hall, were transforming the study of Southern history and the

meaning of lynching along with it. Once again, he telt eclipsed

It's rare for a historian to admit to his blind spots, much less to a history of blind spots: Williamson's sincerity can't be denied. Yet it is hard to believe him fully when he says that "nothing in my living experience as a southerner and as an American prepared me for this [the horror of lynching]." Not the church bombings or Bull Connor's dogs? Nor is it easy to accept Williamson's call for historians of lynching to give priority to gender over race: He looks forward to the day when scholars represent lynching as having "more to do with relations between white men and white women than with relations between blacks and whites." As for previous scholarship,

he hopes "those vestigial and fading paragraphs on slavery and race relations will disappear totally as no longer very relevant to our cultural needs."

Williamson's argument that historians of lynching should abandon their focus on race is pretty odd, considering that lynching took the lives of more than three thousand black men from the 1890s through the 1930s. What's more, no one besides Williamson is making it, least of all the feminist historians from whom he claims to take inspiration. In her pathbreaking 1979 study Revolt Against Chivalry, Dowd-Hall indeed argues that lynching enabled white men to resist the political demands of white women, who were fenced in by their fear of the mythical black rapist; she does not,

however, gloss over the terror visited upon black men, their families, and their property. The point of the feminist scholarship is that race and gender are intertwined, rather than—as Williamson seems to feel-separate and competing.

"It's a case of a very good historian writing a very mediocre piece," interesting bits in it, but

they don't add up to a compelling article." Why then did four of the readers recommend publishing it? The fact that it was a memoir, and a gutsy one at that, may have disarmed some of



EDWARD AYERS AN DAVID LEVERING LEW IN THE JOURNAL O AMERICAN HISTOR

If the editors' purpos was to air the buzz behind the scenes, their choice of occasion was fessor of history at extraordinarily odd.
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Williamson's readers. Then there was the fact that Williamson's first-person references to his own work left no doubt as to his identity. Robin Kelley says that "once the author's identity becomes clear, and it's a great guy like Joel Williamson, there's a real reluctance to reject." And, apparently, a reluctance to analyze too closely. After noticing several "assertions that go unexamined"—particularly Williamson's idea of a monolithic black culture—David Blight, a professor of black studies at Amherst, retreated, saying, "These are minor points for discussion." If Edward Ayers and George Fredrickson, both esteemed American historians, were at all bothered by Williamson's bizarre statement that the

Anita Hill case "would echo in gender terms the racial message broadcast by the Supreme Court in the *Dred Scott* decision," they did not say so. Could they have been favorably influenced by the fact that Williamson had lavishly praised them in his essay? In an interview with *Lingua Franca*, Ayers insisted this was not the case, although he admitted to being "enormously flattered."

For their part, Robin Kelley and David Levering Lewis were unswayed by the awareness that this was a memoir by a noted historian. Lewis disparaged the Anita Hill-Dred Scott comparison: "Surely the consequences of the Thomas confirmation vote were exactly

the reverse [of *Dred Scott's* disenfranchisement of free blacks]. Senators found themselves scrambling to placate and apologize.... The Judiciary Committee is now coeducational, and the

national life has been transformed." As for Kelley, he chastised Williamson for speaking on behalf of "the American historian" and "we Americans": "Williamson cannot and should not say 'we' unless he specifies who he's talking about." To Kelley, Williamson seemed alarmingly ignorant of the black and radical white scholars who knew and wrote about lynching long before Williamson's "discovery." In making these trenchant arguments, however, Kelley seemed to miss the point of Williamson's essay: While Williamson had indeed not done his homework, he was now attempting to apologize for it.

Was this, as some historians are saying, a woefully symptomatic episode of what Stanley Crouch calls the "all-American skin game"? If so, the reasons were other than what one might suppose. The racial split did not consist in any shattering epistemic differences. One can easily imagine a different division with, say, a white neo-Marxist echoing Kelley and an older black scholar appreciating Williamson's candor. Ultimately, the central drama of this peer review turned not on race but on how to evaluate an autobiographical manuscript that was clearly the work of a prominent (and well-liked) member of the club. If the JAH has done any harm, it may not have been so much to race relations among historians as to their public reputation. While it's unclear whether the scholars who approved the article were consciously relaxing their standards for Williamson, their standards seem to have been mighty low that day. As Wilentz quips, "If this is a window onto how historians operate, someone ought to consider dropping the blinds again."

ADAM SHATZ

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THE RADICAL IMAGINATION

PARIS IN THE FORTIES WAS A CITY AWASH IN forged identities and remade lives. But few transformed themselves as completely as Cornelius Castoriadis. When the young Greek émigré arrived, in 1945, he settled down to write a doctoral thesis on the inevitable culmination of all Western philosophies in "aporias and impasses." But by the end of the decade, he had quit academia to lead a curious double life. As Cornelius Castoriadis, he worked as a professional economist, crunching numbers at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Meanwhile, adopting a number of aliases, he developed one of the most influential bodies of political thought to emerge from

the non-Communist left over the last half century. Castoriadis's covert writings helped to rally France's beleaguered anti-Stalinist left in the Fifties and to inspire the spectacular Paris revolt of 1968.

Yet even as other intellectual heroes of Paris '68 marched on to academic renown in the United States, Castoriadis's work has remained little known in this country. That may change this year: As he turns seventy-five, academic presses are generating the biggest wave of Anglophone publications by and about Castoriadis yet. The Castoriadis Reader (Blackwell), with representative extracts from almost fifty years of political and philosophical writing, reflects his long march from Marx back to Aristotle. World in Fragments (Stanford) presents a selection of readings from Castoriadis's recent work, including papers on ancient Greek democracy, the French Revolution, psychosis, racism, and the history of science.