of Jamesian irony, one both created by, and creative of, Fleda. James's refusal of the marriage plot is here moral, formatively interesting, and richly suggestive of future possibilities. In the formal experiments of this period critically examined by Burrows, the style of the novel is frequently created by the promises by proxy – characters speak and think for each other; they mutually represent themselves. In James's three late novels, *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904), he argues, promises have a constitutive power, for both the novel and the characters' lives, the evolution and realized promise of the latter becoming, in effect, the text. He suggests that James blurs the distinction between speech acts and description – actions constitute the world, describing it in effect, and "description is an action, a means of shaping the world rather than merely reporting on it" (23). Merton Densher believes that in not speaking to Milly, he makes no promises, but in seeing him act through Milly's absent eyes, Burrows argues that we should regard this "bad faith as breathtaking" (122–23). The novel is one of denial and not-knowing in which Densher creates his own version of his past, making it impossible for him to fulfil his promise of eternal love to Kate.

The promise of a life well lived is an existential imperative for James; keeping one's word is a critical component in its evaluation. Failure to keep that self-promise dominates in James's late work. John Marcher in "The Beast in the Jungle" (1903) fails to live in the present because he believes he has been promised a momentous future. This promise fails to arrive – until it is "too late" (160–61). Burrows suggests that the empty promise is a "prophecy …without content"; at the same time, it is too early, and it deprives Marcher of a future by neglecting the present (158–60). Narrative, once again, is constructed by a temporally compromised promise that separates the protagonists, preventing what might have been. "Marcher looking forward to what is to come; May looking back at what has been" (165).

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Chris Molanphy, *Old Town Road: A Song by Lil Nas X with Billy Ray Cyrus* (London: Duke University Press, 2023, £15.99). Pp. 140. ISBN 978 1 4780 2551 1.

1 queer millennial + camp catchy cowboy country hip-hop song by Lil Nas X named "Old Town Road" = a fierce battle for no. 1 artist spot on my 2018 Spotify Wrapped (Janelle Monáe did edge Nas out following their flawless album *Dirty Computer*). "Old Town Road" (hereafter OTR) did and does resonate with me as a "pop artifact" (5), "chart phenomenon" (123), and "cultural watershed" (17). This commercial and cultural success is the focus of Chris Molanphy's book *Old Town Road*, in which he offers a unique interpretation of OTR's success and ingenuity, placing emphasis on "dissecting the chart as much as dissecting the song" (3). He examines its chart success through analysis of the chart's evolution from the 1940s, the relationship between country and hip-hop, and the creative and online savvy of Lil Nas X (hereafter Nas). Molanphy is a pop critic specializing in chart analysis who is a columnist for *Slate*, hosts the *Hit Parade* podcast, and writes for magazines such as *Rolling Stone* and *Pitchfork*. Scholarship related to Nas includes *Pop Masculinities* (2021), in which Kai Arne Hansen devotes a chapter to Nas and OTR, investigating how his queer tactics, both musically and visually, challenged accepted boundaries across country and hip-

hop. Hansen's work is musicologically authoritative, but Molanphy's focus on charts draws needed attention to the commercial artistry also at play. Further scholarship on Nas largely discusses his music videos and fashion choices from *MONTERO* onwards,[1] or situates him and his work within queer studies via queer futurity, queer utopia, Afrofuturism, and transness.[2]

In the first three chapters Molanphy outlines the three building blocks of OTR, discusses the ongoing relationship between country and race where Black people are erased and Black culture is co-opted by white people, and illuminates how country and hip-hop have a more established history of mutual influence than the charts suggest. Molanphy constructs a convincing narrative that Nas was destined for creative success from the outset of the book: he was raised in the Bankhead Courts project, which spawned Atlanta hip-hop innovators T.I., D4L, and Young Dro, and by the Internet, which he understood and gained traction on in different guises during his teenage years. The links between Black history and culture and how country music evolved from it are made explicit by Molanphy: white musicians travelled through Black communities to pick up (read, appropriate) black musical characteristics in the early 1900s, which were subsequently gatekept by the Nashville country scene; some forms of rap started to be accepted in country music, but by white artists and with minimal rap production as Black artists were deemed too novelty. While Molanphy gives a clear sense of how race informed Nas's trajectory within country music, there is a lack of attention given to Nas's queerness within the book. There are few queer Black artists in both hip-hop and country. It is significant that OTR was as successful as it was considering the racism and homophobia inherent in certain circles of each genre. That the song's success continued and increased after Nas came out publicly warrants more attention from the outset. Considering Nas's current cultural position as a queer icon, those searching for commentary on how his queerness influenced OTR's commercial success will not find it here. However, Molanphy provides useful chart data by which researchers might be able to explore this relationship further.

Chapters 5 and 5 explain the evolution of the charts and the Hot 100, how their criteria have changed over time, how *Billboard* introduced genre charts, how disparities between parameters based on genre had racial implications, and how reworkings of these parameters led to misrepresentation of actual popularity and inequitable identity markers. Molanphy provides a clear evolution of the charts to reflect popularity more closely through *Billboard*'s switch from analog to digital: SoundScan technology tracking physical sales, Broadcast Data Systems tracking radio plays, the tracking of the newly available digital sales, and, most crucially, counting streaming numbers from

[1] Juri Giannini, "Quare(-in) the Mainstream: YouTube, Social Media and Augmented Realities in Lil Nas X's MONTERO," in Holly Rogers, Joana Freitas, and João Francisco Porfírio, eds., *YouTube and Music: Online Culture and Everyday Life* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 65–89.

[2] Brent C. Talbot and Donald M. Taylor, "Queer Futurity and Afrofuturism: Enacting Emancipatory Utopias in Music Education," *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, 31, 1 (2023), 43–58; Antonio Raúl Fernández Rincón and Clara González Mula, "La presencia del género no binario en la promoción musical, de David Bowie a Lil Nas X," *Signos do Consumo*, 15, 2 (2023), 1–16.

Spotify audio and YouTube video. With this context, Molanphy is able to illustrate how the popularity of OTR was therefore captured more thoroughly than it could have been at any time previously.

Chapter 6 demonstrates how Nas mobilized social media and gaming culture to heighten the reach and success of OTR, as well as how the notorious racist rescinding of its place on the Country Hot 100 boosted its popularity. The book culminates with a chapter that elucidates the frenzy of OTR and tracks its chart performance through 2019, contextualizing it within the broader pop culture: Black cowboy culture is a focus through the TikTok #Yeehaw challenge, the song becomes a *cause célèbre* when it is booted from the Country Hot 100, Justin Bieber endorses the song, exposé pieces on the Country Hot 100 are published, Nas performs in Atlanta and appears in *TIME* magazine, Billy Ray Cyrus features on a remix and the two perform together at venues including Coachella, the official music video is released and instantly goes viral, Nas releases his EP, he comes out in Pride Month, and he fights off other no. 1 spot contenders with remixes featuring viral stars Young Thug, Mason Ramsey, and RM of BTS. Throughout the book Molanphy skilfully crafts a sense of building up to cultural revolution: we are provided with a context of country which is rigid in its reinforcement of normative whiteness. As such, we root for Nas and his success. Nas manipulated the racist, homophobic, and appropriative structures in place not just to expand the box, but to break the box. When we arrive there in the final chapter, it is suitably satisfying.

There are a couple of things that Molanphy's book might have benefited from. For a book about a song, there is a distinct lack of musical analysis of it: Molanphy dissected the chart and the song's performance expertly but not the song itself. There is some analysis of aspects of country music, mostly historical, but no detailed analysis of OTR's musical characteristics. For example, while Molanphy makes the point that Cyrus's involvement on the song challenges the gatekeepers and those running the Country Hot 100 as Cyrus is such a mainstay of country, analysis of Cyrus's vocals and accompanying instrumentation would have made this point more convincing. Cyrus's vocal presence and musical stylings act to shield Nas from being othered, both as a Black man and as a gay man. Hansen expands on this "sonic styling" and how the different musical meaning derived from them is more racially complex and inherently queer: Cyrus's performance coded with white masculinity through his nasal voice, exaggerated southern drawl, lyrical markers of whiteness such as references to the "Marlboro man," and the sparse accompaniment, consisting of a banjo sample (sonically white but historically not), which emphasizes his voice in the mix. This is juxtaposed with Nas's performance, coded with black masculinity as he sings with an accompanying bass and a trap-style drum pattern, which drops out when Cyrus starts singing again. The texture is denser and the drum pattern is prominent in the mix, this typifying "blackness for the 'hostile ears' of the mainstream."[3] While Molanphy's arguments in the book are not necessarily dependent on musical analysis, acknowledgement of this complex musicality could have enhanced his overall discussion of chart performance.

Molanphy's book is a well-thought-out approach to understanding how conditions of the chart aligned in such a way that Nas's subversive OTR could manipulate the

[3] Justin Adams Burton, *Posthuman Rap* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

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chart itself, country gatekeepers, and audiences, and break chart records and remain relevant, a true cultural watershed. Well supplemented with examples, readers can overlay their own experience of the song onto the map Molanphy creates, and critically reconsider what the charts really show us, who is empowered by them, and who is excluded.

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Irena Księżopolska and Mikołaj Wiśniewski (eds.), *Vladimir Nabokov and the Fictions of Memory* (Warsaw: Fundacja Augusta hr. Cieszkowskiego, 2019, £22.99). Pp. 350. ISBN 978 8 3657 8712 5.

The centrality of memory within Nabokov's art has long since been acknowledged. From his early poetry and first novel *Mary*, perhaps his most nostalgic narrative, through to his final, the playful and parodic *Look at the Harlequins!*, Nabokov simultaneously interrogates and champions the power of memory. Memory is the artery which runs throughout the body of his work, imbuing his texts with that intricate watermark. Of course, much scholarship has already been dedicated to Nabokov's treatment of the subject (see, for example, Marina Grishakova's *The Models of Space, Time and Vision in V. Nabokov's Fiction* (2012), Hana Píchová's *The Art of Memory in Exile* (2001), or John Burt Foster Jr.'s *Nabokov's Art of Memory and European Modernism* (1993)), and yet this collection marks a valuable and necessary contribution to Nabokov studies.

The essays within this volume, which emerged from a 2015 conference of the same name – organized by the coeditors – address crucial features of Nabokov's artistic and autobiographical conceptions of memory, nostalgia and temporality. It is not only the power of memory in a conventional sense, as an accurate recollection of the past, which is dealt with in these chapters; they are more concerned with the ways in which the mnemonic merges with the creative. For Nabokov, the truth of the past cannot be understood merely by transcribing previous dates and events. Rather, it necessitates the artistic rewriting, reinvention and re-creation of the past. The desire to relive the past is apparent in almost all of Nabokov's texts: Ganin attempts a mnemonic re-creation of his lost home and lover in *Mary*, while *Lolita*'s Humbert seeks to resurrect Annabel Lee, and "the impossible past," in the figure of Dolores (282). So, too, is the need to reinvent: *Speak, Memory* describes Mademoiselle O's nostalgia for Russia, despite it being a country "which [she] had never really known" and in which she was never really content (83). The act of writing remembrance as the rewriting of the past is discussed in essays by Gerard de Vries, who considers the tension between memory and invention in Nabokov's work in relation to Proust and Wordsworth, and by Carlo Comanducci, who explores fiction and remembrance in *Transparent Things*.

The function of biography and autobiography, as both a quest for and an obfuscation of the truth, is another topic addressed through various perspectives in this collection, with Leona Toker's "Nabokov's Factography" providing an account of the distinction between *Speak, Memory* and the traditional pseudo-autobiography of the Russian gentry. In exploring the tension between Nabokov's denial of fictionalization, and the "performative," curated nature of factual autobiographical information, Toker draws attention to the impossibility of portraying the past without also invoking the