year old. Casanova improvised a joke for her in Latin. *Disuas gradeus car uscula nominem cunnos et car feminea mentula nomen haberet.* Once quid a dominus nominum arrogans haberet. 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 curious andsupply 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, 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 courteous Ancilla, who was made love to by the libertine John Murray as she lay dying of the pox—while Casanova watched. This nightmare demises 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.”

Nevertheless, the amorous episodes are just that—episodes—some of them probably invented with a good deal of novelist’s bravura. It is the memoirs’ picturesque social sweep that strikes us now rather than its salacious particulars. There is no pornographic prose to speak of. Everything is draped in decorous eighteenth-century euphemism. “I do not want,” she said with a smile, ‘to be bothered with keeping your quintessence from falling on the carpet.” And then again, sometimes the verbal posties become insidiously matter-of-fact: “I have found,” he writes, “that the smell of every woman I love is agreeable to me.”

Casanova eventually ran afoul of the state inquisitor Antonio Condalmer, 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 consort ed 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 groomsly 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 after-shave. 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 wildest bluffer of them all?

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*LAWRENCE OSBORNE*

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**STRANGE FRUIT**

IN AN EYE-DRAGGING EXPERIMENT THAT has created an uproar among American historians, *The Journal of American History* (JAH) recently published an unsigned 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 row, 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.
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-eds, e-mail, and photographs of the respondents placed beside their remarks, the roundtable in the March issue has the look of a wilful editorial provocation. Complains historian Robin Kelley, one of the dissenting pan-
delus 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's Wounds Not Scars: Lynching, the National Conscience, and the American Historian is not, by any measure, a scholarly monograph but a superficially 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 reminiscation, 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 deliberately 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 retells his story.

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]." Nor do 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 vertiginous 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 Rites Against Civilians, Dowd-Hall indeed argues that lynching enabled white men to resist the political demands of white women, who were fomented 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 Williams- son seems to feel—separate and competing.

"It's a case of a very good historian writing a very mediocre piece," says Sean Wilentz, a professor of history at Princeton. "There are 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 gauzy one at that, may have disarmed some of...
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 overt writings helped to rally France's beleaguered anti-Stalinist left in the Fifties and to inspire the spectacular Paris revolts 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 Aristotelian. World in Fragments (Stanford) presents a selection of readings from Castoriadis's recent work, including papers on ancient Greek demics, the French Revolution, psychosis, racism, and the history of science.