

## Book Reviews

***Godly Letters: The Literature of the American Puritans.* By Michael J. Colacurcio. Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press. 2006. xix, 650 pp. \$50.00.**

***Early American Women Critics: Performance, Religion, Race.* By Gay Gibson Cima. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press. 2006. xi, 241 pp. \$85.00.**

***Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature.* By Tracy Fessenden. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press. 2007. x, 337 pp. \$35.00.**

Over a decade ago, in the pages of this journal, Jenny Franchot issued a powerful challenge to scholars of American culture: bringing up religion in a secular context may always be risky, but continuing to ignore the often invisible yet still pervasive influence of religion is even riskier. With the recent “return of religion” to literary studies, we have at last begun to respond to Franchot’s prescient mandate. Although very different in subject matter and method, the three books under review demonstrate an array of options for taking religion seriously.

Michael Colacurcio redresses what he sees as a major flaw in most scholarly works about the Puritans: a tendency to pluck passages out of their original context in order to support some master explanatory thesis. What he offers instead is a “book on the (acquired) taste for the (rarefied) pleasures of the (not quite canonical) books of New England’s first Puritan generation” (227). He makes little pretense toward situating the Puritans at the start of some grand narrative, insisting instead that the “Puritans wrote extended compositions—books, in our usage—and we should learn to read them” (303). And once we learn to read these books as coherent works, we are able to evaluate them in literary terms, not just for their historical significance. To this end, Colacurcio unapologetically asserts a Puritan canon—not only are these *books*, but they are *good* books, and some are even better than others.

Colacurcio approaches his canon—which includes William Bradford,

Edward Johnson, Reverend Thomas Shepard, Reverend Thomas Hooker, Reverend John Cotton, and Governor John Winthrop—as a master teacher, offering what he calls “patient analytic summary” (385) in a valiant effort to help us acquire a taste for the rarefied pleasures of these texts. He takes us on a leisurely tour, pointing out accomplishments of language, style, and structure, wearing his learning lightly, invoking only as much history, scholarship, theology, or biography as is needed to illuminate a passage or challenge an assumption. And indeed the felt presence of generations of Colacurcio’s students serves as a kind of stand-in for the reader, as he anticipates their (and our) questions, and works through our resistances with sparkling wit, stunning insight, and above all, patience and generosity.

One comes away from *Godly Letters* with an intense desire to read these Puritan books for the first time, even if you thought you had read them many times before. By recontextualizing even the most famous passages, Colacurcio helps us see these old works in a new way. One also comes away chastened for ever having presumed that books of such rich literary complexity could be reduced to fit this or that scholarly paradigm. These books have never been read better *as* books.

If Colacurcio represents the paragon of one tradition for thinking about religion, Gay Gibson Cima typifies more recent trends in the field, which treat religion largely as a subdivision of cultural studies. Cima describes the ways in which women from the colonial era to the early republic gained access to male-dominated political debates about the emerging nation. By assuming “host bodies” that borrowed gestures and rhetoric from mainstream culture, women from various parts of society were able safely to perform criticism to help shape that culture. Some of these critical performances took religious forms such as spiritual autobiographies, spirit possessions, and revelations. While these strategies gave women access to public debate, they also provided protective cover from which they could mount critiques of dominant cultural values surrounding race, religion, nationalism, and gender.

A great strength of this impressively researched book is its range of material. Cima offers insightful readings of women critics (including Elizabeth Timotheé, Lucy Terry Prince, Phillis Wheatley, Mercy Otis Warren, Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, Susanna Rowson, Judith Sargent Murray) and unearths social networks that helped women redefine public debate (including marketplaces, parlors, literary salons, churches, newspapers, theaters, and camp meetings). At times the distinctiveness of religion is subsumed under this wider range of cultural performances, but Cima does an especially good job of not limiting her consideration of religion to Protestant Christianity and instead includes an array of alternative spiritual practices.

Why most scholars do limit their understanding of religion in the United States to Protestant Christianity is a central question raised by Tracy Fessenden’s groundbreaking book. Fessenden argues that what typically counts

as religion in the United States is actually limited to a range of beliefs and values associated with a particular version of Protestant Christianity: rational, unemotional, tolerant, literate, democratic. Because the values of “good religion” merge into the values of national identity, Protestant Christianity itself becomes almost invisible *as* religion, an “unmarked category” (6) that “was able to render itself unspoken” (88). In this context, secularization marks not so much an overall decline of religion but, rather, a containment or exclusion of any beliefs or practices that are perceived as a threat to this dominant definition. A particular kind of Protestant Christianity has been so successful at controlling these definitions, at aligning itself with democratic political values, that its continual presence as religious influence often passes unnoticed, even by those who would most have a stake in reacting against it.

Fessenden powerfully demonstrates how many scholars in both literary and religious studies have replicated this disappearing act. If religion as the dominant narrative means only Protestant Christianity, and because that particular religion has become “secularized,” then there is no reason for us to pay attention to religion any more. Until we read Fessenden, that is. The first part of the book describes various cultural mechanisms (*The New England Primer*, sentimental fiction, Bible wars of the nineteenth century) by which a once fragmented Protestantism consolidates, expands, and dominates. Eliding its own religious differences into symbols of national unity, Protestantism—often through acts of aggression and violence—manages to depict other spiritual practices (Indian, Catholic) as nonreligions and not American. Through a series of inspired readings of works by Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mark Twain, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, the second part of the book demonstrates the critical value of making religion visible again. Fessenden’s readings of religion challenge much critical complacency about race, gender, class, and ethnicity but at the same time never reduce religion to an epiphenomenon of these other categories. It is impossible to do justice to these analyses in such limited space, but suffice it to say that this is a book that absolutely must be read and contended with by all serious scholars of American culture.

Taken together, these books are a promising indication that religion has returned as a central concern in American literary studies—or, as Colacurcio magisterially demonstrates—that it never quite left after all. Where his book accepts religion as the centrally important category for understanding the Puritans, Cima adds that category to the broader list of cultural studies. Most provocatively, Fessenden offers a radical rethinking of the category of religion itself and in the process opens up entirely new directions for the study of American culture.

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***Women and Authorship in Revolutionary America.* By Angela Vietto. Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate. 2005. ix, 147 pp. \$89.95.**

***Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic.* By Mary Kelley. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press. 2006. x, 294 pp. \$39.95.**

Two books published in the 1980s had a deep influence on the study of American women novelists of the early republic and the antebellum era. Mary Kelley's *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (1984) presented twelve popular women novelists as deeply conflicted about their role as public producers of culture. The chapters in Cathy Davidson's *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (1986) that treat women novelists and their readers as worthy of serious analysis significantly altered the course of scholarship on the early American novel. Angela Vietto clearly frames *Women and Authorship in Revolutionary America* as a response to the work of Davidson and subsequent scholars, asking: How would early American women's authorship look different if scholars did not focus so centrally on the novel and on print publication? What if manuscript circulation and print publication were placed on a continuum and forms other than the novel were included? Kelley does not frame *Learning to Stand and Speak* as a revision of her own *Private Woman*; indeed, the scope and the focus of her new project are different and much broader, extending back to the early republic and treating scores of educated women who left traces of their intellectual engagements in writing (both manuscript and print); nevertheless, *Learning to Stand and Speak* is likely to most interest literary historians for its revision of *Private Woman*.

For Vietto, authorship is primarily a discursive formation. Relying on Judith Butler's theories of gender as performance, she proceeds through a series of chapters tracing women authors' engagements with (and occasional parodic subversions of) gender ideology in literary texts: women authors affiliated themselves with other women's writing by representing "literary sorority"; they used the narrative authority of the republican mother to advise men on proper conduct; they referenced historical instances of women warriors in complex ways that simultaneously disavowed and claimed the agency enacted by these violent women; and they claimed the role of citizens, rather than only mothers of citizens, by writing explicit political analysis. In a final chapter, Vietto analyzes shifts in gendered authorial strategies over time in works by Judith Sargent Murray, Mercy Otis Warren, and Sarah Wentworth Morton. Vietto usefully insists that scholars should read women authors as having careers. Arguing that "the relationship between authorship and gender is far from static," she claims that "each time a writer . . . set pen to paper, her work entered a cultural context that, in regard to both her gender identity and her vocation as an author, was constantly changing" (115). Her broad focus on a

variety of authors and genres, manuscript and print, is welcome. Additional authors who make significant appearances include Hannah Adams, Hannah Mather Crocker, Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson, Annis Boudinot Stockton, and Sarah Pogson. Vietto recognizes and accounts for the fact that these are all elite white women, briefly suggesting how Phillis Wheatley's career might be understood within her paradigm. One might wish, however, that a study with the word "authorship" in the title would have been more archival rather than consist largely of close readings of literary texts.

Kelley's study *is* archival, drawing on a wealth of manuscript and print sources documenting the intellectual lives and civic engagements of women over a span of nearly fifty years. Organizing her chapters around "social roles and institutions" open to women, Kelley draws on two decades of scholarship rethinking notions of public and private spheres and how they are gendered. Having "adopted the term 'civil society' to include any and all publics except those dedicated to the organized politics constituted in political parties and elections" (5), she finds educated women deeply and broadly engaged in civil society through critical reading, lucid writing, and persuasive speaking. The central achievement of Kelley's book is her recovery of academies and seminaries as true institutions of higher learning for young women, equivalent in curriculum and intellectual rigor to colleges for men. And although women could not enter professions such as law, medicine, and the ministry after finishing their educations, academies and seminaries did contribute to the increasing number of women who became teachers, editors, and writers. For the many women who did not become paid intellectual workers, participation in reading groups and literary societies maintained their active intellectual engagements in civil society. African American women attempted to knock at the doors of civil society through these institutions, and Kelley documents the ways civil society—including their white female peers—denied them admission.

Authorship is not a central category in Kelley's study but one point on a possible trajectory for educated women. Whereas Kelley's *Private Women* regarded women authors as domestic beings crossing a yawning gulf between private and public when their works appeared in print, print authorship in her new study is only a small step away from the norm for educated women. When Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Fanny Fern make brief appearances in *Learning to Stand and Speak*, their lives and careers look entirely different than they do in *Private Woman*. And Margaret Fuller's "conversations" look like business as usual, rather than the extraordinary enterprise suggested in much Fuller scholarship. A number of the figures that Vietto covers (Stockton, Murray, Fergusson, Warren, Adams) as well as other print authors from the early republic (for example, Susanna Rowson) also make appearances in *Learning to Stand and Speak*. This broad chronological focus is also the book's greatest weakness—chapters move back and

forth across chronology in dizzying ways, with the important distinctions that Kelley attempts to draw between the two periods getting lost or confused. Nevertheless, literary historians who hope to understand fully the intellectual and social contexts out of which women's writing emerged in both the early republic and the antebellum era will find Kelley's book essential.

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***Race, Slavery, and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature.* By Arthur Riss. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press. 2006. viii, 238 pp. \$80.00.**

***Slavery, Philosophy, and American Literature, 1830–1860.* By Maurice S. Lee. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press. 2005. viii, 223 pp. \$80.00.**

***To Set This World Right: The Antislavery Movement in Thoreau's Concord.* By Sandra Harbert Petruionis. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press. 2006. xi, 233 pp. \$29.95.**

Following the voluminous scholarship on slavery and abolitionism is akin to repeatedly traveling the same route, at various times of day and in different seasons, with a shifting set of companions and in a range of moods. However familiar, even tedious, the surrounding views and prominent landmarks may become, one is inevitably refreshed by a new observation, a hitherto unnoticed feature, or an unexpected detour. Three new studies of abolitionism and its literary contexts may not take us into new territory, but they do heighten our perceptions of the intellectual, political, and cultural landscape in which the slavery debate occurred.

*Race, Slavery, and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* good-naturedly jostles its fellow travelers, threatening at times to toss them out altogether. Returning to the conundrum of “American slavery, American freedom” in historian Edmund Morgan’s formulation, Arthur Riss contends that “an unexamined and anachronistic certainty about the ‘person’ organizes the most influential modern readings of antebellum literary and political representation” (164). Approaching American slavery as neither puzzling contradiction, nor rank hypocrisy, nor even liberalism’s inevitable by-product, Riss emphasizes the radical instability of the conceptual category *person*. Rather than accepting personhood as a transcendent, ahistorical given, Riss maintains, we must appreciate the extent to which disagreement about its various meanings—and their varied applicability—drove the slavery debate. Recent critics, for Riss, err in assessing American literature’s engagement with liberalism by implicitly positing an a priori personhood divested of contingent markers such as race and gender. To do so, Riss insists, is to confuse

the slavery controversy's results with its driving question: What or who is a person?

Riss's provocative intervention would have been more persuasive had it devoted less space to charting its predecessors' critical pitfalls and more to parsing early national and antebellum uses of its key terms (*Man, human, person*). Such a thorough elaboration of the study's central concepts would have further strengthened Riss's insightful reconsideration of well-canvassed topics ranging from Harriet Beecher Stowe's romantic racialism and sentimentalism to Nathaniel Hawthorne's seemingly quietist aestheticism to Frederick Douglass's literary self-making.

Complementing Riss's investigation of what antebellum Americans thought of personhood in the context of slavery is Maurice Lee's excavation of *how* they thought of such matters—especially as they sought to put the era's philosophical theories into political practice. Despite its tendency to insist on the self-evidence of its claims for black personhood and thus the inhumanity of slavery, the antislavery movement, like the larger slavery debate, posed with new urgency such enduring philosophical dilemmas as “skepticism, representation, subject-object dualism, the foundations of moral and political law” (130). Most compelling when, in Lee's own words, the “musty disciple of source study” is by necessity driven “into the fresh air of discourse” (95), the study follows a somewhat diffuse account of Edgar Allan Poe's self-consciously transcendental embrace of slavery and racism with indispensable analyses of Stowe and Douglass. Along with carefully considered readings of Herman Melville and Ralph Waldo Emerson, the latter chapters powerfully reinforce Lee's call to excavate the particularities of literary-philosophical engagements with slavery beyond the well-known parameters of the Scottish enlightenment and transcendentalism. Resisting the temptation to assert his central figures' philosophical greatness, Lee carefully demonstrates how these authors' committed wrestling with the political issue of slavery inspired philosophical investigations that in turn shaped literary production. In the process, with mid-century abolitionism as a case study, Lee provides one answer to the perennial political-philosophical concern regarding the interanimation of theory and practice.

It is the everyday practice of antislavery that Sandra Harbert Petrulionis helpfully documents in her account of abolitionism in antebellum America's most philosophical community. Her subtitle notwithstanding, Petrulionis is far less interested in reconstructing “Thoreau's Concord” than a town defined as much by its local female antislavery activists as its famous male intellectuals—the Concord of “Louisa Whiting, Lidian, Ellen, and Waldo Emerson; Abby and Louisa Alcott; Cynthia, Sophia, and Henry Thoreau” (6). Cultural cachet and proximity to Boston ensured that Concord would be the site of key scenes in the history of abolitionism, from regular lectures by William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, Douglass, and William and Ellen Craft to more dramatic episodes involving the rescue of the famous fugitive slave Shadrach

Minkins and the aftermath of Harpers Ferry. In this case, the delight—not the devil—is in the details: the discovery that in a single week, Concord (the Emerson household in particular) hosted both John Brown and the influential polygenist and Harvard zoologist Louis Agassiz as “inspiring speakers, privileged guests, and friends” (125). Or that Thoreau “became a criminal conspirator . . . by aiding and abetting the most improbable of Brown’s raiders, twenty-two-year-old Francis Jackson Meriam,” escorting him to a Canada-bound train (142). Any bedevilment comes from the need to contextualize such momentous local actors and events in their larger political and cultural contexts; in this sense, *To Set This World Right* may be of greater interest to scholars of transcendentalism than of abolitionism, as the latter will find themselves stolidly trudging over much well-trodden ground.

As important as local female participation was in Concord’s influential anti-slavery activism, Petrulionis’s meticulous research seems to warrant more far-reaching conclusions than those limited to the community history or the recovery project. The *Liberator*’s local correspondent, reviewing a recent lecture by Wendell Phillips in the midst of a tense local debate over whether to include such antislavery orations in local lyceum programs, was “greatly encouraged that the old spirit of liberty is not yet quite extinct in our ancient town,” while the Democratic *Freeman* conceded that such debates “have at least the one good effect of breaking the dull monotony of a country life, if not of rousing a spirit of inquiry among the people” (37). The female-led abolitionist impulse resident in Concord clearly arose, as Petrulionis suggests, from a strong sense of Christian duty mingled with moral outrage at the injustice of slavery. But surely other factors were at play. Could other incentives have included a commitment to sustaining the town’s proud historic revolutionary legacy? More self-interested desires like social advancement through networking with prominent Bostonians? Or was the impulse merely a welcome break from “the dull monotony of country life”? The book leaves us wondering not only about communal and individual motives but also about how the growing tensions of the 1840s and 1850s affected the quotidian life of the town. In contrast to Boston and Philadelphia, how did social divisions around the intensely political and moral question of human bondage impact face-to-face relations in a community of two thousand? That the reader is left wanting to learn more about Concord and its dedicated, diverse, and contentious inhabitants, of course, only affirms the ultimate accomplishment of *To Set This World Right*.

The antebellum slavery debate’s continuing fascination for literary critics is due, in no small part, to its thick, wide paper trail. Providing excellent company, these studies make it pleasurable and instructive to follow that trail yet again.

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***Trinity of Passion: The Literary Left and the Antifascist Crusade.* By Alan M. Wald. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press. 2007. xviii, 319 pp. \$34.95.**

***Romancing the Vote: Feminist Activism in American Fiction, 1870–1920.* By Leslie Petty. Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press. 2006. viii, 231 pp. \$39.95.**

American literary history is replete with attempts to outline “the great tradition.” In 1933, *New Masses* critic Granville Hicks offered his version, beginning with abolitionism and culminating in proletarianism. It is tricky to forge or follow a tradition: outlines blur, connections break. These two books etch variations on different traditions yet see American fiction vitally linked to political causes. Leslie Petty uncovers sentimental and sensational middle-brow fictions about middle-class (mostly white) women rallying for female enfranchisement. Alan Wald continues his saga of communist-affiliated authors, begun in *Exiles from a Future Time*, with a chronicle of those orbiting from the Spanish Civil War to join, in a complicated way (thanks to the 1939 Molotov-von Ribbentrop [also known as Hitler-Stalin] Pact), the antifascist “crusade.”

Wald’s *Trinity of Passion* unveils prodigious original research into the personal lives and political cultures of predominantly working-class black or Jewish writers (some well-known: Ann Petry, Arthur Miller; others barely remembered: Lauren Gilfillan, Leonard Zinberg) whose work recast their often fraught identities through fierce resistance to racism and Nazism. This narrative was itself fraught with complications as black writers during World War II pushed for the Double V—victory over Hitler abroad and Jim Crow at home—while the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) abandoned its antiracist programs (not to mention its labor militancy) to push for all-out support for FDR’s war effort. Dissecting the inner worlds of left-wing writers by collecting a vast archive of interviews and unpublished materials, Wald illuminates new facets of many writers’ careers. He has uncovered a “missing chapter” in Arthur Miller’s biography, for instance, when Miller wrote theater reviews for the communist-aligned *New Masses*. Likewise, Wald managed to unearth what became of literary sensation Lauren Gilfillan, whose fictional memoir, *I Went to Pit College*, was a 1938 *cause célèbre*. She dropped out of sight, suffering severe mental illness that led to her confinement in hospitals in Michigan, where she died in obscurity in 1973. Wald ferrets out obscure authors whose biographies offer an indication of the wacky diversity of the CPUSA. Contrary to the drab image of comrades marching in lockstep, Wald shows the intimate links between bohemia, plain old American quirkiness, and left-wing politics. Writers, he is at pains to remind us, are difficult to pin down; they cannot be counted on to parrot the party line—even when they are members. Thus there are delightful portraits of Len Zinberg, who under the name Ed Lacy made a career of writing antiracist and antiwar pulps with titles such as *Lead from Your Left*; and Jo Sinclair (born Ruth Seid in Brook-

lyn), who, with Chester Himes and Dan Levin, edited a left-wing literary journal in Cleveland and went on to write a landmark antiracist lesbian novel, *The Changelings*.

Focusing on the biographies of writers who fall far outside the bounds of the American literary canon—much less the bounds of the literary left (Richard Wright, Lillian Hellman, for example) Wald’s “aim of deepening and complicating rather than creating a counterparadigm” limits his scope. His interest is literary, but he relentlessly reads novels psychologically, as lenses into “careers in literary radicalism” (11). Thus it is really literary history, or literary biography, that molds the tradition Wald fills out. People make the tradition, and literature opens a window onto them. Wald discerns how a generation of writers who came of age during the horrors of fascism, seeing communism as the most vigorous movement challenging its terror, negotiated their desires to write with urgent yearnings toward political commitment. In the United States, it is never easy to do either, especially if one is poor, female, or working-class; an ethnic immigrant or their children; or, especially, African American.

Whereas Wald posits writers as the makers of a tradition, Petty discerns a tradition of prosuffrage fiction through her extended close readings of a few mostly forgotten novels. Petty provides new sources of feminist activism in the form of various fictional heroines who defy convention and pursue careers as suffragists, public speakers, and ultimately companionate mates to enlightened men dwelling in communities of like-minded male and female citizens—including novel readers. Petty reveals another hidden political history within American fiction: suffrage reform. With the exception of Frances Harper, Hamlin Garland, and Henry James, the authors Petty analyzes have disappeared from literary, and even feminist, memory. Petty’s detailed analyses of these often predictable novels, however, reveal the limitations of close reading when the object of study is a didactic work of genre fiction. What more can one say about a subject when the author has already delivered the punch line—at least three times over? Petty’s reading of James’s *The Bostonians*, by contrast, is astute; she rightly understands James as both a satirist and a utopian when she argues that he subtly plays with romance conventions, turning them on their heads, to undo the limitations of both fiction and women.

Despite writing at the beginning of this “submerged” tradition, James already questions the need for establishing one (1). But Petty argues that linking these selected novels to each other, as well as to the shifting political allegiances of feminists—reading for these dual plots—enriches our sense of the “oppositional community” forged through, *pace* the unacknowledged Che, “revolutionary love” (10–11). Collectively, these texts meld author, character, and reader through the processes of novel consumption. The literary historian further enhances America’s moral development by bringing the past into present conversation. A tradition instructs through its construction. Obliquely, Petty implies that the American reform tradition is essentially lit-

erary, relying on its audience to amass an army of resisting readers. Thus, through novels, radical movements and their ideas become acceptable political reforms. In the United States, politics needs fiction to make it personal.

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***Faithful Vision: Treatments of the Sacred, Spiritual, and Supernatural in Twentieth-Century African American Fiction.* By James W. Coleman. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press. 2006. 252 pp. \$42.95.**

***Cross-Cultural Visions in African American Modernism: From Spatial Narrative to Jazz Haiku.* By Yoshinobu Hakutani. Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press. 2006. ix, 251 pp. Cloth, \$41.95; compact disc, \$9.95.**

***Black Writers, White Publishers: Marketplace Politics in Twentieth-Century African American Literature.* By John K. Young. Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi. 2006. ix, 230 pp. \$40.00.**

***Claude McKay, Code Name Sasha: Queer Black Marxism and the Harlem Renaissance.* By Gary Edward Holcomb. Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida. 2007. xiv, 273 pp. \$59.95.**

These four books illustrate the diversity of perspective in recent criticism on African American literature. James Coleman shows how the various manifestations of the “sacred, spiritual, and supernatural” in African American life inform and shape black novels; Yoshinobu Hakutani eschews the sacred for the secular to examine the influence of other cultures on African American modernism and postmodernism; John Young is fascinated by both the interchange between author and publisher and the transformation a manuscript undergoes when it arrives in the marketplace; and Gary Holcomb digs up a lost Claude McKay manuscript to make a striking connection between McKay’s sexual politics and his Marxist vision of a society in evolution.

Coleman writes with great insight in *Faithful Vision* when he discusses texts he admires, but occasionally he rides his thesis too hard. He insists that black texts having a religious center, preferably Christian, are superior to modernist texts that lack one, such as Richard Wright’s *Native Son*. Coleman is at his best when he analyzes religion’s presence in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*. What begins in that novel as a criticism of Christianity—its oppression of women, its patriarchal white God—concludes as a reshaping or reimagining of the spiritual. Coleman is also perceptive when he notes Christianity in conflict—with voodoo in Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day*, with despair in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, and with loss of faith in John Edgar Wideman’s *The Cattle*

*Killing*. He convincingly argues that “syncretism” is the folk’s way of expressing and containing multiple forms of the sacred. However, Coleman goes wrong when he insists that a black text should address Christianity as a theme because African Americans are overwhelmingly Christian. I suggest Coleman watch Charles Burnett’s extraordinary film *Killer of Sheep* and ask himself if Christianity remains “essential” to the people of Watts who are depicted in that film. And since when must a text concern itself with what the majority thinks, especially when the majority is Mencken’s “Boobus Americanus”? *Native Son*’s “bleak view” may not be the whole truth about black life but it is a truth.

Hakutani, in contrast to Coleman, obviously admires Wright. He is especially insightful when he discusses Wright’s fascination with the haiku or his underappreciated book *Pagan Spain*. Hakutani’s focus on an unknown Wright is part of his larger claim for the cross-cultural complexity of African American literature, such as “Buddhist Enlightenment” in *The Color Purple*, existentialism in Wright’s *The Outsider*, and the urban imagination in Morrison’s *Jazz* and James Baldwin’s *No Name in the Street*. What is troublesome about Hakutani’s approach, however, is that he writes about the city in black literature as though no one else has written about it. Books that warrant acknowledgment include Lawrence Rodgers’s *Canaan Bound* (1997), Farah Jasmine Griffin’s “‘Who Set You Flowin’?’” (1995), or my own *Sweet Home* (1993). Furthermore, existentialism is hardly a “half-baked philosophy,” and it is not, as the author argues, the defining philosophy in Wright’s *The Outsider*. In fact, the epigraph from Hart Crane for book 2 of Wright’s novel—“As silent as a mirror is believed / Realities plunge in silence by”—links Wright as much to a home-grown modernism as it does to French existentialism.

Of the four books, Young’s *Black Writers/White Publishers* and Holcomb’s *Claude McKay, Code Name Sasha* are the best. They combine archival research and critical theory, and they give fresh readings of texts we thought we knew. Young focuses on the “material conditions” of publication, publicity, and packaging, and his views are original. For instance, how shall we read Nella Larsen’s *Passing*, when the last paragraph is deleted in the novel’s third printing? We must wonder if this deletion was the author’s or the publisher’s intention. What impact does it have, he asks, if Ishmael Reed’s original copyright page in *Mumbo Jumbo* has a black background and white type that was changed to traditional typeface (white page, black type) in the paperback editions? What influence does Oprah Winfrey’s promotion of Toni Morrison have on the readership of Morrison’s most difficult novel, *Paradise*? Even more startling, how do we perceive Morrison’s novel *Jazz* when we hear the author reading it on audiotape? Young notes that sometimes a reciprocal relationship exists between the white culture industry and black texts (such as Morrison’s), and sometimes not. Gwendolyn Brooks, for instance, deliberately changed from Harper and Row, a mainstream press, to less prestigious, independent African American presses. Nevertheless, anthologies continue to focus on Brooks’s

earlier poetry for its “universal” themes, thereby erasing the remarkable shift in her poetic career. Finally, Young tackles John Callahan’s editorial strategy in assembling the unpublished material that became *Juneteenth*, Ralph Ellison’s posthumously published “novel.” In looking for a “beginning, middle, and end” in Ellison’s voluminous fragments, Callahan imposed an order on material that lacks a center, an irony that no doubt would have amused the creator of Rinehart in *Invisible Man*.

Holcomb’s book on Claude McKay combines the virtue of Young’s rigorous scholarship with original and often brilliant readings of McKay’s seminal texts. Like Alan Wald, Barbara Foley, and William Maxwell, Holcomb wants to recover a lost leftist tradition in American letters. He begins by showing how McKay’s autobiography, *A Long Way from Home* (1937) is more porous than it appears. In this document, McKay supposedly rejects his former commitment to Communism, but Holcomb notes that the intellectual rebel continues to surface: the internationalist who is a “bad nationalist,” the Trotskyite who loathed Stalin, the sexual being who associated institutional sexuality with a suppression of the proletariat. At first glance, McKay claims to recant, to present himself as a reformed citizen of the world. Holcomb wryly observes, however, that the clumsy FBI file on McKay got it right: McKay remained a subversive all his life.

Holcomb focuses on three texts: the best-selling and controversial *Home to Harlem* (1928), its sequel *Banjo* (1929), and the unpublished *Romance in Marseilles* (1929–1932). His point is that these three texts make up a trilogy, that the unpublished *Romance* (a significant novel in itself) allows us to read *Home to Harlem* from a radically new perspective. *Home to Harlem* is not an attempt to cash in on the vogue of Carl Van Vechten’s *Nigger Heaven* (1926), nor is it an attempt to rewrite Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), although McKay’s novel holds a dialogue with both texts. Rather the “dark desire” that permeates its pages is truly revolutionary. It is a text that dreams of a renewed society based upon a radical transformation at all levels: sexual, political, and economic. Holcomb’s reading of *Home to Harlem* challenges David Levering Lewis’s assertion that the Harlem Renaissance substituted art for politics. As the first novel in a trilogy, *Home to Harlem* combines “queer,” “Marxism,” and “black” to redefine the entire notion of politics. Like Marx, McKay saw politics in terms of the recovery of human desire, as “a restoration of the human world and human relationships to man himself.”

Holcomb argues that McKay had no illusions about the nature of the world as it is, even the world of the proletariat. Like Wright, he could cast a cold eye on how the proles could be their own worst enemy. In *Home to Harlem*, a jealous Zeddy is willing to rat out Jake to the government; in *Banjo*, Banjo betrays his free spirit by playing the fool for rich white tourists; and in *Romance*, the hapless and legless Lafala yields to the seduction of capitalism, betraying black and white friends alike. Although Holcomb does not discuss McKay’s last novel, *Banana Bottom* (1932), a passage therein illustrates Holcomb’s

thesis. To show how Bitá, the novel's female protagonist, might be susceptible to the blandishments of the island's dandy, Hopping Dick, the local male storyteller says that when God created woman, He "put an O in woman. But dere's no O in man." The joke is that Bitá is vulnerable because of her vagina, but the joke suddenly moves in another direction. The storyteller continues: "Now dere's an O in the reading and the figuring a life and woman is in both a them an' both ways." That is, human beings want the eternity and perfection that the circle symbolizes, but given desire's manifestations, we are just teetering on the ball of the world, desperately trying to keep balance. Holcomb's book is not only well researched and full of wonderful insights, but it is also marvelously provocative.

Charles Scruggs, University of Arizona

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***American Literary Regionalism in a Global Age.* By Philip Joseph. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press. 2007. xii, 232 pp. \$45.00.**

***Critical Regionalism: Connecting Politics and Culture in the American Landscape.* By Douglas Reichert Powell. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press. 2007. xiii, 260 pp. Cloth, \$59.95; paper, \$24.95.**

***From the Garden Club: Rural Women Writing Community.* By Charlotte Hogg. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press. 2006. xiv, 182 pp. Paper, \$15.95.**

For all the vaunted multidisciplinary of our field (each of these books advertises itself, as most books in cultural studies do these days, as busting out of its home discipline), there is remarkably little overlap among these three books on American regionalism. Philip Joseph's bibliography has the most conventional (and admirably thorough) coverage of regionalist literary studies, with additional works on civil society, mass media, and social theory. Douglas Reichert Powell takes a much more glancing look at literary regionalism and then runs through classic American studies, regional planning, film studies, and a smattering of other fields. Charlotte Hogg responds primarily to work in rhetorical studies, literacy studies, and women's history. It is hard to see how any of them relate to each other, and one wonders: How is it that these books addressed to such a large number of closely related topics and disciplines fail to speak even to each other?

Joseph's *American Literary Regionalism in a Global Age* is an impressive first book and a significant contribution to literary scholarship, with excellent chapters full of original insights on Mary Austin, Abraham Cahan, and Zora Neale Hurston along with very astute (if less fresh) readings of standard regionalist authors such as Sarah Orne Jewett, Hamlin Garland, and Willa

Cather. In the introduction, Joseph argues persuasively that literary scholars today, finding it increasingly necessary to justify literary study in the evolving university system, need to “concern themselves with defining literary value” (12), to articulate not just the ways literature is entrenched in its various discursive and material worlds but also the ways literary texts are effective. They teach readers, he argues, to “question the prevalent assumptions of a culture,” to “remain skeptical toward [their] own points of view,” and to be “open to unfamiliar objects and ideas that require revision of previous judgments” (18). He is guided, he writes, “by the belief that literature’s orientation toward discourse—its tendency to emphasize open-ended critique and the unencumbered subject—equips it to make its own specific contribution” to the cultural conversation (169).

Joseph discusses regionalism because it provides a paradigmatic, large-scale case study of the way literary texts work: by imagining the possibilities and problems of subjectivity and community in the modern age. His introductory chapter provides a useful digest of the civil society debate, greatly aided by his detailed discursive footnotes. His most provocative argument is that we should be interested in regionalist novels and stories from the 1890s through the 1930s not as historical artifacts but as living texts, as “a body of writing capable of an active, transformative role in the lives of contemporary and future readers.” I remain unconvinced, finally, by these assertions of timeless value, and in fact his own readings rely quite heavily on the very specific historical contexts he claims are *not* intrinsic to the texts’ value. Assenting to this part of his argument is unnecessary, though, to appreciate the rest of his case, which is that literature works by training people to remain open to competing paradigms and values. Like Faulkner’s Ratliff, Joseph suggests, literature “gains its authority by purposely avoiding the terminating claim” (167).

Douglas Reichert Powell’s *Critical Regionalism: Connecting Politics and Culture in the American Landscape* opens by combating those who would think that *regional* means *hick* by dubbing his own method *critical regionalism*, a term he adopts with only the slightest of nods to Kenneth Frampton and with no discussion of the fate of the term since 1983. Parts of this often engagingly quirky book were published as much as twenty years ago, and one senses in its parade of topical moments (*Twin Peaks*, *Pulp Fiction*, the Duke lacrosse scandal) a long gestation. The resulting miscellany is somewhat crudely stitched together with vague claims to the importance of this ill-defined theory. This is too bad, because Powell tells good stories, stories that are both critical and regional in the multiple senses of those terms, and he writes with a good deal of energy and skill. His descriptions of growing up reading the news and watching movies and television in Johnson City, Tennessee; his histories of that city’s parks and public spaces; his readings of antiliterating campaigns and other moments in the construction of regional identity: these are all fresh and vital, and his odd collection of cultural moments has

its own compelling logic. These sections are in the grand tradition of American studies, a participant-observer reading symbols and signs across culture, media, and the mediated landscape.

Charlotte Hogg's *From the Garden Club: Rural Women Writing Community* is an entirely different kind of book again. Hogg is not interested in representations of regional culture consumed by a national audience. The question of literary reading hardly makes an appearance and none of the usual suspects from literary studies show up. Much of Hogg's archive was written by her own grandmother, and much of that not meant for publication. Instead of analyzing even these texts in any detail, she interviews her grandmother and her grandmother's friends about them, inquiring about the importance of writing to their lives. Since beginning her PhD program, Hogg writes, she has "had to justify projects that blurred the distinctions between 'scholarly' and 'creative'" (61), and that blurring helps make this book the real outlier here. This is not just because it uses ethnographic memoir. Powell's book, after all, is framed by first-person reminiscence as well. Hogg is trying something more radical: a memoir as scholarly treatise.

In practice, Hogg's double purpose and audience means that she writes the kind of nostalgic, evocative, emotive, first-person reminiscence we associate with the contemporary memoir, but it is frequently interrupted by phrases such as "funerals are ubiquitous social and literacy events in a small town" (164) and "my researcher's gaze comes from within a web of multiple sponsoring relationships" (131). The terms *literacy practices* and *product of sponsorship* are brought to us courtesy of composition theory, and perhaps if Hogg were sprinkling literary-theoretical terms I wouldn't have found them quite as jarring, although it occurred to me that perhaps a little of the jarring was intended. In any case, this bivocal text moves, sometimes from section to section, sometimes even from sentence to sentence, from one rhetorical and stylistic register to another, whenever the need strikes. Some scholarly readers will be allergic to the memoiristic moments here and the memoirists will hate the academic language, but I found it quite interesting and a perfectly appropriate scholarly tool for understanding and illuminating her archive. Problems can arise when Hogg's figurative language invades her argument, leaving one to wonder whether a point is being made or an arena metaphorically outlined. Nonetheless, the book is a noble and worthwhile experiment, an ambitious if sometimes awkward hybrid, and a real contribution to the ethnography of reading and writing.

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***Sucking Salt: Caribbean Women Writers, Migration, and Survival.* By Meredith M. Gadsby. Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press. 2006. vii, 225 pp. \$39.95.**

***Caribbean Women Writers and Globalization: Fictions of Independence.* By Helen C. Scott. Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate. 2006. 193 pp. \$89.95.**

Like most academic disciplines, black studies (African American studies, Caribbean studies, Africana studies) produces monographs that range from the interrogatory to the celebratory, with most works falling somewhere in between. Both Helen Scott's *Caribbean Women Writers and Globalization* and Meredith Gadsby's *Sucking Salt: Caribbean Women Writers, Migration, and Survival* fall into the latter category, Gadsby more so than Scott:

For my mother and my aunts, to “suck salt” is to survive on the bare minimum, when one has nothing but salt, sweat, and tears to feed oneself and one's children. . . . I deduced that the hardship [my Aunt] Tantie describes can be overcome with strength and resourcefulness. (2)

Heavily influenced by the works of Carole Boyce Davies, Dionne Brand, and Barbara Smith (all of whom are explicitly taken as models in the introduction), Gadsby also invokes Barbara Christian's essay “The Race for Theory” and stands beside her against the “academic gangsterism of postmodern theorists” (15). Gadsby explains that she too sees literary theory as always already white and therefore (shades of *Souls on Ice*) a generic mechanics devoid of the specificities of blackness necessary for a proper exegesis of traditional black literary and cultural forms.

Gadsby's *Sucking Salt* is at once an impressively researched exploration of the tradition of Caribbean women's survival in the face of material lack and a project one wishes would provide analytical depth to match its topical breadth. Moving from the recollections of her own aunt and mother, Gadsby proceeds to provide a brief background on Caribbean socioeconomic history and its intersections with salt and nutrition (chapters 2 and 3). Because Gadsby is not a historian, she relies heavily on secondary sources for economic histories of the Caribbean, such as Sydney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power*, but her research and engagement with Caribbean salt fictions is broad, ranging from WPA narratives to Édouard Glissant's *Black Salt* and Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* to Fred D'Aguiar's dub poetry. Gadsby convincingly shows that salt is a key theme in Caribbean literature and history, one linked, as her thesis asserts, to the practice of survival.

*Sucking Salt* will be most useful to scholars seeking more information on black British author and educator Beryl Gilroy; Gadsby has truly done the groundwork on Gilroy, including extensive interviews that provide us with a greater insight into the life and views of a true pioneer in black British and black feminist fiction. Of note also is Gadsby's engagement in chapter 5 with black Caribbean authors in Canada—a welcome addition to our current library

on African Canadian literature and its diasporic influences. Gadsby's book will prove an excellent resource for advanced undergraduates and beginning graduate students interested in themes of survival and endurance in Caribbean literature.

Helen Scott approaches black literary studies differently than Gadsby. In *Caribbean Women Writers and Globalization*, Scott argues that "attempts to neatly categorize narrative techniques as 'male' or 'female' or as 'western' or 'nonwestern' often rest on idealist, essentialist, and unsustainable foundations" (6). Providing a brief but impressive overview of the possibilities and limits of poststructural theory on postcolonial literature through a postcolonial critique, Scott then moves to situate her analysis in a "materialist starting point" of the "second-half of the twentieth century," arguing that recent socio-economic developments (for instance, globalization and its manifold forms) speak directly to "the greater prominence of [Caribbean] women writers [and] the shift away from the self-consciously anti-imperialist themes of the national liberation writers" (15).

Given that the majority of scholarship on the Black Atlantic tends to take the Middle Passage as its ontological frame of reference, Scott's approach is relatively unique and exciting, providing a welcome link with a tradition of contemporary postcolonial authors writing on India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh who have been discussing and debating the effects of global capital for almost two decades. Focusing on the works of contemporary Caribbean women writers, Scott reads the literature of Edwidge Danticat, Jamaica Kincaid, Pauline Melville, Jan Shinebourne, Oonya Kempadoo, and Merle Collins for their discussions on the effect of global capitalism on the Caribbean, applying both the tropes and strategies of the Anglophone Caribbean tradition as well as the Marxist critique of Georg Lukács (specifically *History and Class Consciousness*).

Scott discovers a literary tradition long on critique but short on solutions, wrestling as it does with the semiconscious complicity of the bourgeoisie, not to mention a neoliberalist, capitalist world system in which the wealthiest and most powerful nations are free to exact payments and exploit the human and material resources of weaker nations. While this predictable ending is, to a certain degree, inevitable, I would also argue that Scott does not do full justice to her topic or to the literature, tending to read the latter as sociopolitical critique rather than dialogic literary texts that will at once do more and less than a position paper on the topic. While she does cover all necessary bases in providing the reader with a primer on Caribbean literature and global capitalism, one does wish that she had gone further and paid greater attention to the ways in which these fictive strategies deploy their imaginative prerogatives. While Scott demonstrates mastery of her material and quotes liberally, her analyses often ignore the creative strategies and deployments that made these authors famous, thus reducing heavily layered, ambiguous, and even ambivalent cre-

ative choices to the linear arguments necessary for policy critiques but foreign to the agendas of these novelists.

Michelle M. Wright, University of Minnesota

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***American Indian Literary Nationalism.* By Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack, and Robert Warrior. Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press. 2006. xxii, 272 pp. Paper, \$19.95.**

***Muting White Noise: Native American and European American Novel Traditions.* By James H. Cox. Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press. 2006. xi, 338 pp. \$29.95.**

Nationalism emerged in Native literary studies in the mid-1990s as an attempt to develop critical paradigms based on indigenous epistemologies and political activism, especially campaigns for sovereignty premised on the unique legal status of tribes as nations. Responding in part to the ethnographic tendencies of earlier criticism and the underrepresentation of Native scholars in academia, nationalist critics aimed to show how colonial social dynamics shape Native studies and to shift the focus of intellectual work to issues relevant to indigenous communities. Between 1995 and 1999, Robert Warrior, Jace Weaver, and Craig Womack published the first full-length studies that have come to define this position. Warrior's *Tribal Secrets* contended that critical approaches should derive from the ideas of Native intellectuals, Weaver's *That the People Might Live* drew together culture and politics to characterize Native literature as engaged in an activist commitment to community, and Womack's *Red on Red* insisted on the centrality of individual tribal traditions and political processes of nation-building to interpretations of literary texts. In an approach that Warrior labels "intellectual sovereignty," these scholars position indigenous perspectives as the foundation for the subjects and methodologies of Native studies. Yet regrettably, as all of the books cited here demonstrate, nationalist critics have yet to devote significant attention to writing by Native women. Coauthored by Weaver, Womack, and Warrior, *American Indian Literary Nationalism* endeavors to define nationalism as a cohesive literary critical position, while James Cox's *Muting White Noise* draws on nationalist criticism's insistence on self-representation and its attention to the political contexts of indigenous cultural production to analyze the relationship between Native and European American literary traditions.

*American Indian Literary Nationalism* consists of lengthy essays by each of its coauthors as well as a reprint of Simon Ortiz's influential 1981 essay "Toward a National Indian Literature." Nationalist criticism, as Lisa Brooks characterizes it in the afterword, "posits the existence of a field of Native American literature and supports . . . theoretical and epistemological models

that arise from indigenous languages and literatures, as well as the many, varied, complex, and changing modes in which Native nations have operated on the ground, in particular places, over a wide expanse of time" (244). At its best moments, *American Indian Literary Nationalism* clarifies and extends arguments in its authors' earlier books, connects their ideas to render nationalism a coherent critical position, and explores possibilities for future research. While focusing heavily on critiques of dominant representations of Native peoples, Weaver's essay draws connections between Native literature and its social and historical contexts that underlie his previous work. Womack elaborates on controversial aspects of *Red on Red*, including its advocacy of separatism intended to position "Indian concerns as a central rather than peripheral endeavor" (161), and he also delineates central tenets of nationalist criticism. Warrior reflects on intellectual influences on *Tribal Secrets*, including Edward Said, and describes the changing place of nationalism in contemporary Native scholarship. Nevertheless, the volume as a whole lacks a tight and coherent focus; its discussions cover a broad range of topics that include extended refutations of other critics' arguments (the major focus of Womack's essay), and these often do little to illuminate its stated topic. A clearer sense of these authors' critical positions and the development of Native literary nationalism can be found in their earlier works.

The political implications of self-representation and the relationship between literature and colonization are at the center of James Cox's *Muting White Noise*. "European American storytelling traditions about Native people," Cox argues, "use caricature, stereotype, and romance to obscure colonial violence," and this distortion provides the critical context for Native novels that undertake to "revise the European American textual record of these conflicts" (x-xi). The study takes its title from a metaphor in Sherman Alexie's novel *Indian Killer*, in which the static on television at the end of the broadcasting day signifies "the oppressive noise of white mass-produced culture, the loud demand to conform to the invader's cultural belief system or be destroyed" (11). Throughout, Cox similarly links European-American representational traditions (popular culture, canonical literature, narratives of exploration and discovery, Judeo-Christian sacred texts) to colonial violence against indigenous peoples, and he considers how Native novelists revise these traditions to reveal their ideological investments and tell subversive stories about Native survival and the complexity of contemporary Indian life. *Muting White Noise* begins by examining how early-twentieth-century texts such as Mourning Dove's *Cogewea* and D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded* thematize the colonial violence of representation; subsequent chapters focus on the revisionist narratives of contemporary novelists Thomas King, Gerald Vizenor, and Sherman Alexie. The study concludes with "red readings" of canonical novels such as *Moby Dick*, a methodology that, as Cox describes it, draws inspiration from the work of Native writers and "foreground[s] the issues that . . . [are] important to Native people and communities" (203). *Mut-*

ing *White Noise* proceeds through careful, often insightful readings that usefully explore the connections between Native and European American literary traditions, showing how novels are embedded in the social contexts of colonialism. The study, however, would benefit from a more nuanced analysis of its core texts, one that does not see European American representations as always only oppressive and Native novels as always only subversive, and from a more complex understanding of the role of literature in colonialism, which cannot, as Cox's discussion often suggests, be reduced to its ideological and cultural dimensions.

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***The Origins of the American Detective Story.* By LeRoy Lad Panek. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland. 2006. viii, 227 pp. Paper, \$35.00.**

***Brown Gumshoes: Detective Fiction and the Search for Chicana(o) Identity.* By Ralph E. Rodriguez. Austin: Univ. of Texas Press. 2005. xviii, 183 pp. Cloth, \$40.00; paper, \$17.95.**

***True Crime: Observations on Violence and Modernity.* By Mark Seltzer. New York: Routledge. 2007. x, 185 pp. Cloth, \$100.00; paper, \$26.95.**

These three books explore, in very different ways, the relation between crime fact and crime fiction. LeRoy Lad Panek focuses on how developments in such fields as law enforcement, journalism, and forensic technology influenced the crime fiction of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century America, while Ralph Rodriguez examines the mutually informing dialectic between the work of Chicana/o crime fiction writers and the evolving definition of Chicana/o identity over the course of the twentieth century. Mark Seltzer, in his own inimitable fashion, rejects the idea of social constructionism *tout court* but still focuses on the productive and complex connections between true crime and the pathological public sphere.

Panek's *The Origins of the American Detective Story* is easily the most traditional of the three. Much of the book's energy is devoted to the project of literary recovery, specifically, the recovery of turn-of-the-century American crime fiction, much of which has lapsed into obscurity—overshadowed, according to Panek, by *Sherlock Holmes's* emblematic status. Panek's most valuable contribution, therefore, is the recovery of such writers as Julian Hawthorne, Arthur Train, and Emma Murdoch Van Deventer (who published under the pseudonym Lawrence L. Lynch), writers whose work deserves to be part of the standard history of American crime fiction.

Panek's other major contribution is his argument that American crime fic-

tion during the turn of the century shows the influence of the rise of professional law enforcement, “the parallel rise and fall of private detectives,” the “birth of the crusading newspaper reporter,” the “beginning of what we now call forensic science, and the changes in rules of evidence and judicial procedures made necessary by science” (2). This influence, Panek shows, means that there were a number of other potential heroes of detective fiction (other than the detective, that is) who were tried and tested during this period, including the cop, the scientist, the journalist, and the lawyer. Reminding ourselves of this fact, concludes Panek, also reminds us of the diversity of what may seem at first glance to be a narrow and formulaic genre.

Although Rodriguez focuses on a different body of texts, his and Panek’s aims are similar. Like Panek, Rodriguez wants to focus on the enabling connections between crime fictions and their social, political, and cultural contexts. Rodriguez’s subject is the emergence of the Chicana/o detective novel from the early 1980s to the present and the issues that these novels have grappled with during that time, including feminism, homosexuality, *familia*, masculinity, mysticism, the nationalist subject, and U.S.-Mexico border relations. His discussions of the work of writers such as Rolando Hinojosa, Michael Nava, Lucha Corpi, Manuel Ramos, and Rudolfo Anaya are both thorough and complex. He is especially adept at bringing a wide range of theoretical approaches to bear on this material, without being ventriloquized or overwhelmed by any one of them.

Of particular interest is Rodriguez’s argument that Chicana/os stayed away from detective fiction for so long because they were concerned that becoming associated with a popular form would (further) marginalize them and prevent them from being taken seriously. Fortunately, argues Rodriguez, the appearance of crime fiction by women and African American writers beginning in the 1970s alleviated these concerns. Rodriguez goes on to argue that this change of heart was especially welcome because crime fiction is particularly well adapted for addressing issues peculiar to the postnationalist Chicano subject. The genre can be used to reveal elements of a culture that are hidden, and its preoccupation with various forms of alienation enables it to dramatize the dilemmas of evolving Chicana/o identity effectively.

Although both Panek and Rodriguez set out to survey the literature that is their subject, the same cannot be said of Seltzer. Despite its apparently descriptive title, Seltzer says explicitly that his analysis proceeds “not by surveying the genre of true crime . . . and not exactly by isolating its elementary particles” (23). Rather, he intends “to trace the relays among murder, media, and modernity that make up the crime system” (23). Seltzer achieves this aim by focusing on what he describes as “three linked premises of modern life and modern crime” (7), namely, “the intensified turn of interiors, bodies, and acts into communication (the media a priori) . . . the sequestration and self-reflection of the contemporary social field (the locked-room model of the world . . .) [a]nd . . . the radical entanglement of violence and technical

media of information, transmission, and observation (the violence-media complex)” (7).

Seltzer’s examination of these three premises takes a variety of forms, some of which have a more obvious connection to the phenomenon of true crime than others. (He makes a valiant attempt to connect his chapter on the reconstruction of Berlin, for example, to the themes of trauma and the scene of the crime, but the connection seems more opportunistic than convincing.) With this said, Seltzer’s work is never anything less than fascinating and, just as in *Bodies and Machines* and *Serial Killers* (both of which Seltzer refers to repeatedly), he is capable of brilliant flashes of insight. His observation, for example, that the landscapes of popular true crime are “psychotopographies, incipient crime scenes” (50), together with his comment that the television show *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* maps the virtual nation as one big crime scene (14), confirm Seltzer’s perceptiveness as a critic of popular culture.

One of the most pleasant surprises in *True Crime* is just how many of the book’s examples are taken from fictional narratives. Seltzer argues that true crime takes the crime novel “as its prototype and tries it out in real life” (9). Accordingly, Poe is described as the inaugural writer of true crime, the (bad!) fictional elements of true crime (both popular and academic) are given their due, and Seltzer devotes a whole chapter to the still understudied work of Patricia Highsmith. This book, which covers a lot of ground in less than 200 pages, rewards careful and sustained engagement.

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