

## Review

Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. The Haymarket Series (eds. Mike Davis and Michael Sprinlter), London and New York: Verso, 1997. 576 pp. ISBN: 1 859 8417 08; cloth and paper; \$16 (paper).

The university, science, technology, and learning were in general manifestations of bourgeois development, under bourgeois control, waging the bourgeois cultural struggle against the feudal order. But now all these forces, in their dominant institutional forms, are opposed to the proletariat; its revolutionary culture while it includes many concrete achievements, is necessarily and mainly potential, a culture of revolutionary criticism and ideological struggle, interpreting, clarifying, projecting, capable of becoming dominant only after the revolution. (Lewis Corey/Fraina, quoted in Denning, 100-1)

In the United States of the 1990s, I think it is fair to say that the influence of the American labor movement generally is somewhat marginal. Every now and then the unions figure in the news, like the successful UPS strike in the summer of 1997, or the AFL-CIO's opposition to the NAFTA treaty some years ago. Generally speaking, however, the relative power and impact of the labor movement in the US today, be it economically or politically, not to mention culturally, is weak. Bill Gates of Microsoft, Mike Eisner of Disney productions and their like are more admired as central figures in American public life than John Sweeney (he is the current leader of the AFL-CIO, in case you didn't know). Numbers tell part of the story: under ten per cent of the private sector labor force is unionized, and perhaps more importantly, since the 1980s, unions have been winning less than half of the elections held by the National Labor Relations Board in order to gain recognition as bargaining units for workers at specific plants. Over twenty states have 'right-to-work' laws, the Orwellian doublespeak term that outlaws union shops. American wage levels are low compared to those of Western Europe, as are the various forms of welfare provision of the kind we know here.

It was not always so. From the beginning of the 1930s until the end of the 1940s, the American labor movement was a force to be reckoned with, economically, politically, and culturally. In the course of the Great Depression, during the Second World War, and in its aftermath, labor activists as well as many others on the American left were active players on the US scene, contributing to the shaping of Roosevelt's New Deal. The labor movement was not only important in the economic and political landscape, but was also an organizational center that attracted to its cultural orbit a remarkable range of writers, intellectuals, and artists. This book is about these people and the way they related to their time, how they shaped and were shaped by it. It is a book that has several uses. Denning's objective is to point out to the readers that many of the cultural manifestations we take to be quintessentially American today originated with the American left during the twenties,

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the thirties and the forties. He also argues that many elements of the culture created by the American left during these years are with us today, but that we don't realize their origins. It came as an interesting revelation to me that two cartoon characters dear to my heart, Mr. Magoo and Gerald McBoingBoing, were the creations of artists like John Hubley of UPA, who had been leading figures in the union fights and strikes at Walt Disney in the early forties, and who created a new modernist drawing style that went counter to the more traditionalist one favored by Disney at the time. He replaced mice, pigs and bunnies with humans, focusing on social content rather than on the more formalist style perfected by Disney.

### *Who's Who?*

For the reader who is interested in knowing who was active in what field, there are the names of writers and artists, musicians and theater people, literally hundreds of them. For the reader who wants to know about who these people worked with, and how they saw their own work, Denning provides a good starting point. In that way, the book works as a kind of 'Who's Who?' of American culture from the 1930s to the 1950s. In this way *The Cultural Front* serves to rescue the people, institutions, and activities of the Popular Front as a social movement from the oblivion it has been sliding into since the mortal wounds it suffered during the heyday of anti-communism and the Cold War, and to point out that the Popular Front was just that: a broad coalition of disparate people and organizations dedicated to a vision of life in the US quite different from the market-dominated society and culture we know today. Furthermore, the book tries to point out that this vision might well be worthwhile as an organizing orientation today. (It is interesting to note that Denning, who is a professor of American Studies at Yale University, has been quite active in organizing graduate teaching assistants and other low-class workers in their quest for better working conditions. See the following sites on the Internet for more information: <http://www.yale.edu/geso/denning.htm>.)

### *What were the Cultural Sectors?*

There are major sections on literature and literary criticism, music from jazz and the blues to opera, and two interesting chapters on film, where the author zeroes in on Orson Welles and Walt Disney. These two sections alone make the book worthwhile, and lead to an important point that the author is making all along the way: reactions to changing work situations cause people in them to change. The artist who works as a drawer of cartoons in a Disney studio has a different view of the world than the one who is the benefactor of the largesse of an aesthetically inclined wealthy person. One is a wage earner, the other is the client of a patron, and their perception of reality and their life trajectories are different. Denning argues that the industrial age, with its changed relations between producer and consumer, between owner and worker, profoundly changed the nature of artistic work from that of the craftsman to that of the industrial worker. There is nothing new in this assertion, but the documentation of how this transformation took place in the US is a valuable contribution to American Studies.

*A Revisionist Orientation*

Much has been written about the Popular Front, and for many years, the prevailing argument has been that it was just that: a 'front' behind which the Communist Party of the USA could carry out its work of trying to support the USSR's political goals. Denning contends that the generally accepted view of the Popular Front as a tool of the CPUSA is incorrect. His view is that the CPUSA was an important part of the Popular Front, but the front as a whole constituted what Gramsci has called a 'historical bloc,' a broad coalition of 'fractions and subaltern classes.' In other words, he takes the idea of a 'front' the way the coiners of the expression intended it, rather than accepting the word's Cold War meaning: a tool of the Global Communist Conspiracy. He writes: 'It is mistaken to see the Popular Front as a marriage of communists with liberals. The heart of the Popular Front as a social movement lay among those who were noncommunist socialists and independent leftists, working with communists and liberals, but marking out a culture that was neither a party nor a liberal New Deal culture' (5). Further on, after having discussed the fractious nature of the political scene of the day, with its fights between Stalinists, Trotskyists and the other groups that constituted the political surfaces of the front, Denning notes the tone of the book: '... mine is less a story of political division than of cultural continuities; the culture of the Popular Front represented a larger laboring of American culture, which political adversaries often shared in shaping' (26). This bloc had the potential to become hegemonic in a period of social upheaval. He argues that there was a possibility that this could have happened in the US of the thirties and forties, that a laborist, social democratic bloc could have emerged as a hegemon. 'Gramsci's concept of hegemony begins not with the question of individual 'commitment' but with the question of how social movements are organized among both the dominant and subordinate groups, how social groups are led. The building of hegemony is not only a matter of 'ideas,' of winning hearts and minds, but also of participation, as people are mobilized in cultural institutions' (63).

*State, Market and Civil Society*

At an abstract level, it might be said that Denning's story of the cultural battles of the New Deal Era demonstrates how the forces of the market maintained their role as the dominant shapers of American culture, and that market forces defeated attempts by the working classes' civil society to shape its culture and to expand its influence in a non-commodified or de-commodified form. In this approach, the Cultural Front is seen as more than a collective of people with individual political commitment. Denning's theoretical framework is based on the Gramscian idea of the historical bloc: 'In analyzing a historical bloc, Gramsci turns to the dialectic of base and superstructure, seeing social movements and alliances as microcosms of the social order as a whole.'

The third actor in this matrix, the state, also played an important part. Initially, during the early years of the New Deal, the state, through WPA programs like the Federal Writers' Project, supported some of the American left's versions of what life in America was and, to a certain extent, what it should become. Denning notes that the products of these projects were perhaps less important than the way in which they were organized. In addition, through its legislation, the state, with the National Labor Relations Act of 1935,

recognized the unions' right to represent workers in a bargaining situation. This recognition was the foundation for the labor movement's power base in the next twenty years.

At the time of the Great Depression and its aftermath, partial accommodation to worker demands was a reasonable strategy for the historical bloc that is linked to the market. The market bloc had been weakened by the economic crisis, and could not afford an open confrontation with a contending bloc across the board in a country where, to quote Denning quoting a poll from *Fortune* from the early forties, twenty five per cent of the population thought socialism was a good idea, and another thirty five per cent were not against it. But with the end of World War II, which solved the country's economic crisis, and with the onset of the Cold War and the confrontation with the Soviet Union, the market bloc was able to abandon this strategy. The American national interest as defined by the state in the Cold War context became far more market oriented than it had been, and the communalist, non-commodified approach to satisfying human needs and problems was attacked as communist, and then marginalized, fragmented and to a large extent, expunged from the national consciousness and institutional structure. Cultural workers as a group did not disappear, but they were reorganized in other, market-oriented institutions. The potential that lay in the ideas and visions of the Cultural Front remained only potential (a post-modernist jokester might say they are impotential today). Cultural institutions in the US of today are part of the market.

#### *Who Were They?*

The Cultural Front, Denning argues, grew out of, and worked in, three major areas which characterized the Popular Front: the development of the CIO as an organization of industrial unionism, internationalist anti-fascism, and the struggle for civil liberties and against labor repression. Denning sees the CIO as the central organizing force around which the historical bloc coalesced. He characterizes it as basically driven by a Social Democratic vision that was somehow to be adapted to and grow out of the American environment.

According to Denning, three distinct groups came together in the Cultural Front: the Moderns, the Plebeians and the Émigrés. Denning notes their origins and discusses at length the way in which they worked relative to the issues of their time, as well as the way in which they saw themselves changed by their reaction to the Depression, the growing menace of fascism abroad, the question of civil rights, and the issue of labor repression at home. The Moderns were the established writers and artists, primarily of an Anglo background: people who had been inspired by the European modernist movements in art and literature. Edmund Wilson, Malcolm Cowley, Hemingway, and Fitzgerald are some of the more prominent names. The Émigrés, primarily refugees from fascism, names like Brecht and Eisler, Seghers and Adorno, but including C.L.R. James of Trinidad, also contributed to the Cultural Front. The Plebeians came out of the immigrant communities as well as the Black South; they were the 'new Americans,' primarily second-generation immigrants, products of the American system of public education. Theirs is the longest list, and Denning sees them as the most important, since they came from the same background as the vast majority of people who were part of the industrial working class. Their

different cultural heritages, reworked and in the process of adapting to the industrial environment, became a recognized part of the American cultural landscape of the time. Here, people like Philip Rahv, a self-taught man who came to the US at the age of fourteen, had little formal schooling, and ended as a professor at Brandeis, is noted, as is Sidney Hook, who tried to develop an American Marxism in which he attempted to replace the Hegelian elements of Marxism with John Dewey's pragmatism. For Denning, however, the most important figure is an Italian immigrant, Lewis Corey/Louis Fraina, a contemporary of Gramsci, and the author of two books, *The Decline of American Capitalism* and *The Crisis of the Middle Class*. In these, Corey/Fraina develops ideas about the position of the 'cultural worker' in the age of mass communications.

*The Main Phases of the Age of the CIO and the Popular Front*

Denning lays out the time he writes about in segments conveniently marked by certain milestones or surges in activity on the left: the initial upsurge of 1933-34 which culminated in the textile strikes and the subsequent passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act. Then 1936-37, with the great strikes in Akron and Flint, the 'sit-downs' taking place at the same time as the antifascist mobilizations occasioned by the Spanish Civil War. He also mentions the conservative counteroffensive symbolized by the Memorial Day massacre in Chicago and the Dies committee's initial hearings. The third wave was the upsurge in union organization in 1940-41 and the beginnings of the Progressive movement with Henry Wallace as its figurehead, culminating in 1946-48, when the dream of some kind of Social Democratic future for the United States foundered on the reefs of Taft-Hartley, the failure of Operation Dixie – the attempt to unionize the South – and the onset of the Cold War.

These milestones indicate that Denning sees the industrial union movement, concentrated in and around the CIO, as the central axis of an effort to concretize a 'vision of social reconstruction.' The Cultural Front's contribution to the time was to give the participants, who were linked by their class to the historical bloc, a voice of their own. The way forward was through the creation of institutions, cultural apparatus, and audiences that grew out of the milieu itself. But it was not to be. The ruins of the Cultural Front that still exist today have been coopted and integrated into a market-based cultural complex, with those parts that attempted to create a communitarian framework almost completely buried, or surviving in little noticed pockets around the country. It remains to be seen how long this state of affairs will continue.

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Sigmund Ro, *Literary America. An Introduction to the Literature of the United States* Oslo: Universitets forlaget, 1997. x + 310 pp. ISBN: 82-00-21954-2; paper.

In his foreword, Sigmund Ro clearly states the audience his book is intended for: 'beginning and intermediate-level EFL-students in colleges and universities in their first

and second years of study.' He goes on to say that the book's *raison d'être* is that 'students often lack the necessary historical knowledge for an adequate understanding of American literary texts.' To fill the void Ro has taken an approach which places the literature in its social, historical, and cultural contexts.

He is certainly right about the lack of knowledge our students have. Academics in the old Anglo-Saxon world groan about the quality of their students, the decline in the knowledge they are expected to have. In non-native-speaker institutions this is compounded. The amount of literature high school students are expected to read in Finland is minimal in Finnish, to say nothing of what is offered in their English classes. Pre-university-level English is still primarily oriented towards the language rather than the culture. The extent that literature is read today is totally dependent on the individual; as a result our first-year students are a very uneven lot.

About ten years ago, a colleague in the Comparative Literature department asked me to suggest a literary history that his students (non-English specialists) could use. All I could come up with was the massive *Literary History of the United States* and Marcus Cunliffe's shorter work. This was before Emory Elliott's *Columbia Literary History of the United States* and Ruland and Bradbury's *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*. All this makes the need for an introductory text clear. A major consideration involves the level and depth of the text, the language and terminology, and the length. Long works, like the Spiller *LHUS* and the Elliott, are far too extensive for the beginning student of American literature. The information is there, but do these particular students need it? Will it in the long run be counterproductive? What about Ruland and Bradbury? It is only about 70 pages longer than *Literary America*, but far more detailed. Since many of our students only do American Studies and Literature courses because they are required, I agree with Ro against prescribing such longer works.

*Literary America* is traditional in the way it looks at its subject. It is divided into seven chapters, which grow in length as the literature of the United States becomes more established and significant. As expected, the accepted divisions into Colonial, New Republic, Transcendental, Realist/Naturalist, and Modernist periods are followed. An entire chapter, I am pleased to say, is devoted to the problematic decade of the 1930s. The long final section is given over to writing in the Post-War period. Ro chooses to highlight certain writers in each period in the form of short 'Author Portraits' (which unfortunately are uneven in content and scope; some are to the point, others are more anecdotal: does the student need to know that Katherine Anne Porter collected 'silver and china as well as jewelry, furs, and furniture?'), writers he feels to be representative, in essence creating his own canon. He is, however, conscious of this fact. Ro notes the 'debatability' of his choices but, considering the anticipated readership, these choices have to be made. They are for the most part the usual 'dead white males,' but women, immigrants and writers of color are more in evidence starting with the late nineteenth century, when society begins to allow them a greater voice.

Particularly in the early chapters (through the end of World War I), Ro provides excellent analyses of the social and cultural contexts. The importance of money and the power of capitalism as themes run through the text, as does the mythology of America: the Jeffersonian/Crèvecoeurian notion of the American as yeoman farmer; Emersonian self-reliance and the self-made man who replaced the yeoman; both are staples of Manifest Destiny. Ro's portraits of regional writers like Bret Harte and Owen Wister examine the Western myth so familiar to students from the Hollywood product. The author questions the traditional American history that students have been fed in high school classes. Ro takes pains in noting the social problems associated with race, class and definitely gender, and the importance this has had on the literature; this is to be expected from a late twentieth century Americanist. The chapter 'Winds of Change: The Rise of Realism and Naturalism, 1860-1912' is particularly strong in this respect, explaining the literary importance of the rise of the city along with the attitudes of the Protestant Church, the 'Gospel of Wealth' and its underpinnings in Franklin, Emerson and Darwin. Ro points out the gender division of skyscraper and colonial home and the segregation of urban neighborhoods. The significance of the Genteel Tradition and its passing in the works of the realists and naturalists is made clear to the reader.

The range of writers that Ro includes is not exhaustive, but sufficient to give the reader a sense of the diversity of the literature. Again, this is strongest in the Post-Civil War era. The largest number of 'author portraits' is included here, under four classifications: Regionalism, Social and Psychological Realism, Naturalism and the Revolt of the 1890s, Women Writers and the 'New Woman.' A coda to the chapter 'Immigrants and Minorities at the Literary Gate' briefly describes the emergence of Native American, African American and Jewish American writing. Ro, however, errs in omitting any reference to Mary Antin's 1912 autobiography *The Promised Land*, which is emblematic of the quest for total assimilation/Americanization championed in many immigrant circles at the time and in contrast to the problems of assimilation described by Abraham Cahan and later Jewish writers.

*Literary America* has its problems, both in analysis and practical features. Deciding what to include in respect to the last eighty years naturally poses a dilemma to all literary historians, but the problem is magnified by the limitations of space and depth. A certain 'glossing over' is particularly evident in the section on the thirties. Ro introduces the WPA Art Projects, but does not go into greater detail, especially why it was so important to writers. When he does, he should check his facts: Philip Roth, born in 1933, could not possibly have been employed by the Federal Writers Project! Ro's section on 'Hard-boiled Crime Fiction,' while indicating that the settings are often San Francisco or Los Angeles, does not bring up the failure of the California Dream, especially in works by Horace McCoy, James M. Cain (who are unmentioned) and Nathanael West (who is), and the significance of Hollywood in the American mentality (cf. David Fine's *Los Angeles in Fiction* (1984)). Jewish American writing after Cahan is seemingly reduced to two themes, the immigrant story of Henry Roth's 'undisputed masterpiece' *Call It Sleep* and Daniel Fuchs's *Williamsburg Trilogy* and the problems of full assimilation. What makes Roth a

masterpiece, indisputably above the bulk of the sentimental ethnic writing Ro notes? Fuchs's trilogy may be set among Jews in the Williamsburg ghetto, but could just as easily represent just about any immigrant group in the United States at the time.

A significant problem concerning the Post-war period which the student faces involves unclear references requiring clarification. For instance, César Chavez's strike in California in 1965: what was he striking against? Or 'drop-outs from Berkeley' in the Ginsberg portrait: what was Berkeley? Similar references appear in earlier sections: Sarah Orne Jewett's 'crippling accident,' the last name of a critic – Brooks, a writer – Freeman. How is the reader to recognize these names? A similar problem arises in regard to Ro's citations of critical sources. He introduces a long quote by Susan Stanford Friedman on the modernist intellectual crisis, but does not cite the work. If we are seeking to awaken an interest in our students, hoping that they will go further on their own, why impede them by providing a 'Select Bibliography for Reference and Supplementary Reading' which is organized by 'author profile,' including primary and secondary works? Since *Literary America* is concerned with social, historical and cultural contexts, why not include a general bibliography by period? An index is necessary, for pedagogical reasons alone. One way of providing valuable space for analysis and interpretation would be the elimination of the 'Overviews' following each chapter. Serious students surely would not need these short summaries, especially of the short early chapters.

Despite these faults, *Literary America* succeeds on the level it is meant for, as a background reference for beginning and intermediate students. The basic understanding of the subject matter the book provides should allow the instructor to delve more deeply into the literature itself as well as supplement much of the material omitted due to considerations of space.

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Marko Modiano, *A Mid-Atlantic Handbook: American and British English*. Studentlitteratur: Lund, 1996. 150 pp. ISBN: 91-44-61451-9; paper; SKK 186.

Being divided by a common language is something that might well be relished on both sides of the Atlantic as good-hearted chauvinism. Yet, for those on the chalk-face teaching English to non-native speakers, the joy of lexical, phonetic and grammatical difference amounts to a practical inhibition. It is this problem that *A Mid-Atlantic Handbook* addresses. The aim is to point up the differences between American English (AmE) and British English (BrE), and the argument is that the resulting confusions can be avoided, at least to some extent, by identifying a Mid-Atlantic standard. The beneficiary, the book cover informs, will be the 'freshman college student,' one wishing to be comprehensible to the greatest number of people. While the aims are largely achieved in the terms Modiano sets for himself ('No effort has been made to include *all* of the significant differences between AmE and BrE,' (6)), the argument may not entirely go off with a bang in all

quarters. Or should it be go over with a bang (see 137)? Whatever the case, in respect to his underlying argument, Modiano has entered into an ancient and venerable controversy.

Firstly, it should be remarked that the Handbook is a clear and accessible study, easy on the eye and with a useful index. Five chapters titled respectively, Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Spelling, *Grammar*, Punctuation and Style, and Expressions and Proverbs, plus a brief section on traditional weights and measures differences, give the freshman a very clear idea of the difficulties the English learner will encounter in the effort to attain maximum understanding. In the, by any standard, baffling area of English spellings, the freshman will note that BrE eschews *z* in favour of *s*, eschews *favor* in favour of *favour*, and prefers the theatre to the theater. It may have helped him to know that much of this is a result of Latinate, chiefly French, influences on BrE in the Middle Ages and, perhaps ironically, a more Germanicised base to the linguistic gallimaufry that became AmE. Philology, however, is not in the Handbook's brief. The freshman will also have noted the BrE obsession with hyphens and commas, though I suspect that the comma-free address on letter headings is already an established international restraint. How the freshman is going to decide on the merits of BrE *knelt* – AmE *kneeled* –, or AmE *gotten* – BrE *got* – (125), is a tough one: in this case, the freshman might suspect that both dialects continue to court archaisms for reasons that are entirely idiosyncratic. Left to himself, of course, the freshman may run into several problems if he accepts fully Modiano's observations, particularly if he were then to seek linguistic amelioration in British society. For example, if he starts worrying that his failure to fit in at a British educational institution will incline that institution to rusticate him, which the Handbook cross-references with *expel*, then he'll probably be at either Oxford or Cambridge, seeing as only viewers of the BBC's Oxford sleuth series *Inspector Morse* would otherwise understand the basis of his anxiety. Similarly, if goes about on a moving staircase, (instead of an escalator), enters into a drawing room (instead of a living room), and offers to remunerate (instead of pay), folk will wonder less what country he's from and more what century. There is, unfortunately, a fair bit of this marring the usefulness of Modiano's vocabulary lists (23-106). Some, like BrE *mother* company for AmE *subsidiary*, are plain wrong (though some might find the corollary fitting); others misleading (do BrE speakers still refer to World War I as *The Great War*?); several are tendentious or, as noted above, very much out of date. What's more, if the aspiring freshman goes around in ordinary English society using the childish colloquialism *ta* ('...Mid-Atlantic English at its best...' (12)) as opposed to what he believes to be an AmE standard *thank you*, he'll not only be wrong but foolish to boot. However, if he reads the Handbook aright, this simply isn't going to happen. Indeed, from his knowledge of the weird, outmoded, and eccentric nature of BrE, as gleaned from the Handbook, it's highly unlikely that he'll give BrE a second thought. This, seemingly, is Modiano's underlying message. Thus:

When it comes to the standard variety in the US, however, when spoken at a moderate speed and with careful diction, most of the features of AmE fall within the parameters of what can be called Mid-Atlantic English. This is because AmE is so widespread internationally. Most second language speakers of English are familiar with AmE, find

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it easy to understand, and do not commonly associate it with the US when they hear it spoken by second language speakers. For this reason, I have concentrated on the attributes of BrE when discussing features of the language which should be avoided with (sic) speaking Mid-Atlantic English. In comparison to BrE, there are few features of AmE which cause misunderstanding in an international context, partly because of the large number of native speakers of AmE, and also because of the massive spread of the variety throughout the world via the media. (13-14)

On the subject of media exposure, and considering the global popularity of the BBC World Service, statistical evidence for the relative penetration of the two dialects would be difficult to quantify, although the penetration of the American news channel CNN is almost certainly ascendent. Yet what is really clear here is that AmE is tantamount to Mid-Atlantic English and all the apparent virtues of this standard, whereas BrE isn't. It is this edge of argument that places Modiano's claims for Mid-Atlantic-speak in a venerable tradition of linguistic squabbles that no doubt raise hackles from Tunbridge Wells to Tallahassee. The squabble, at turns bitter and barmy, notably among the English, concerns class, power and privilege. Ironic it is then, for example, that Modiano recommends AmE *napkin* over BrE *sewiette*, when forty years ago Nancy Mitford was telling us that *napkin* is U and *sewiette* non-U. Ironic, too, that BrE in the *Handbook* is characterised by the Received Pronunciation dialect long *a*: and considered less internationally intelligible than the AmE *a* (compare *a:nt* with *ant*, for example), when the reality is that RP is largely eclipsed in British media phonology by estuary varieties and other accent forms in which the short *a* is characteristic. In actuality, pronunciation-wise at least, BrE really hasn't got a standard. It's a form of special pleading to suggest it has. However, the circumstance that Modiano's argument points to is that the accent/dialect debate is now hovering Mid-Atlantic. What's more, it is not just the equivocal English middle-classes who await the outcome but freshmen world-wide.

In short, then, *A Mzd-Atlantic Handbook* is in the tradition of prescriptive grammars, a *lingua franca* ideal for English language learners. And there can be no doubt that educators would welcome a global standard just as much as they fear the the long awaited fragmentation of international English into mutually unintelligible dialects. Trouble is, language will have its say no matter what braces attempt to regulate it. The *Handbook* will need regular servicing if it intends to keep up and give a fair picture of linguistic developments both sides of the divide. Yet one suspects that this is not the thinking, that somewhere at the back of things is the old nagging engine of the old squabble: privilege, status, resentment. In this regard, one could slightly misquote George Bernard Shaw and recall that 'It is impossible for an English speaker to open his mouth, without making some other English speaker despise him.'

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Gerhard Hoffmann and Alfred Hornung (eds), *Emotion in Postmodernism*. American Studies – A Monograph Series Vol. 74. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1997. iii + 439 pp; ISBN: 3-8253-0543-0; cloth.

'Four thousand pounds of ugly Detroit steel on his toes and *not even a twinge of pain*' (272), says Pedro, the killer in Carl Hiaasen's *Native Tongue*; in 'Emotions Flattened and Scattered,' Hanjo Berressem links such apparent 'lack of psychic and physical coherence' to the 'increase of the borderline syndrome in postmodern culture' (280). Pathological or not, this quote in many ways points toward what has been conceived as a certain numbing, waning or transformation of affect in contemporary culture, and it is this alleged development that is at the heart of most of the twenty-two pointed and well-written articles in this volume, edited on behalf of the German Association for American Studies after a conference held at Mainz in 1996.

Occupying centre-stage is a 45-page essay by one of the editors, Gerhard Hoffmann, who in 'Emotion and Desire in the Postmodern American Novel' probes in an impressive, learned and concise way into the complexities regarding emotions and their representation. Even if 'one does not follow the extreme positions of Wittgenstein and Lacan in respect to the fundamental problems of representation' (181), says Hoffmann, emotions, in their fluidity, complexity and transparency, present a range of difficulties for the author. In a broad sweep, Hoffmann reviews the construction and evaluation of emotion in Victorian and modern literature as a backdrop to a discussion and analysis of its place in postmodern fiction, whose 'confinement to the present' often transfers 'integrating feelings like joy, anxiety, or pain' (which 'appear to have a causal or teleological dimension of time') into 'what one might call *'mood,'* which itself does not necessarily have a definable cause' (188). Emotions are here, as it were, 'under erasure.' Various constellations of behaviour, action, reflection, imagination, emotion, and desire are discussed and exemplified by a range of fine readings of American novels from the last three decades (Barthelme, Barth and Pynchon among others); and the conclusion reached in relation to John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* is extended to postmodern literature in more general terms: 'The conclusion is that emotions and desire, represented or not, are not only strong motivating forces in the postmodern novel, but that the central emotions, even when they are ironized [and absent], are also the central *values* not only of Barth's novel but more or less of all postmodern fiction' (218).

Hoffmann is not alone in reaching such a conclusion; indeed, many of the articles are somehow conceived in opposition to Fredric Jameson's (widespread) notion of the 'waning of affect' in postmodernism. While some merely react to the call for papers in which a similar notion was aired, others engage more openly in a polemic against Jameson. Richard Martin confronts Jameson – although not very successfully – from within contemporary popular music in "'Why should I not admit it?': Displays of Emotion in Postmodern Popular Music,' whereas Theo D'haen, in 'Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*, or, The Emotional Depths of Postmodernism,' argues more pointedly from a post-colonial perspective. While some 'postcolonial critics,' says D'haen, 'will cheerfully

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allow that there is a good deal of formal and tropological overlap between 'primary' texts variously categorised as 'post-modern' or 'post-colonial' (228), there is, he says, a great deal of difference in how 'subjects' are presented: in the former category subjects are often left in mired confusion, while in the latter they are mapping their 'relationship to the new global system' (228). In opposition to what he calls 'central postmodernism,' which basically is Jameson's, D'haen posits a 'counter-postmodernism.' While Jameson's arguments, 'albeit indirectly, because shaped by his negative appraisal of 1980s poststructuralism's positive evaluation of the same phenomenon, [are] predicated upon a body of literary work that is limited to white male America whites of the 1960s and 70s,' D'haen points to a postmodernism that seeks to recover the 'subjectivity and historicity' of those not included in Jameson's frame of reference, those left out by a wholly negative evaluation of the political and cultural potentialities of late capitalism. What 'passes for depthlessness in central postmodernism,' D'haen ends his essay, 'is depth in counter-postmodernism.' And although it is true, as Herbert Grabes points out in 'Aesthetic Emotion,' that the emotional commitment and complexity expressed in for instance Toni Morrison and Alice Walker's novels stand in a marked contrast to the 'overloading of aesthetic distance,' its 'being immediately ironized' (336) and intellectualised, in for instance Bartheleme or Barth, one should be careful in setting up a dichotomy between confused main-streamers trying to think their way across a commodified media-landscape and clear-headed and grounded minorities with a firm sense of direction. In any case, this does not do away with the overall and common mechanisms that Jameson is trying to come to terms with; and when many of the contributors pay attention to the market, Jameson (and with him Baudrillard and Debord) still lurks underneath.

David Nye's intriguing 'De-Realizing the Grand Canyon' only points in that direction; here, Nye traces the changing perceptions and experiences of one of America's famous landmarks from John Wesley Powell's expedition in 1869 to the contemporary tourist's 'compressed' experiences of the canyon in an off-site IMAX theatre. This is, however, only one aspect in the slow and complex process through which Nye argues that the canyon has been 'de-realized,' that is, regulated, controlled and mediated, partly because of increasing ecological strains and partly because of temporal and pecuniary limitations of many contemporary visitors. But although visitors still may be touched by a measure of the sublime, and although Nye rightly cautions against devaluing contemporary experiences as simply commercially produced, one cannot help but feel a slight nostalgia for the 'nineteenth-century grand tour [which] proffered a leisurely banquet of the senses' as opposed to the 'visual fast-food and shot of adrenaline' consumed by the postmodern tourist' (89).

In Riidiger Kunow's article it is not the nineteenth century which forms a backdrop to contemporary America, but rather the overarching event which carves our (intellectual) century into two, namely the Holocaust. What Kunow addresses in 'Representing the Holocaust in Fiction' is the 'obvious paradox' of recollecting 'genocide in tranquillity' (247). What is delved into here is the fascinating and unsettling question of a (or *the*) gap between the 'force of outrage' and the 'form of outrage,' the awareness of the 'risk [and

inadequacy] of representation involved in aestheticizations of the Holocaust' which underlies Adorno's statement 'After Auschwitz to write poetry is barbaric' (249), or Elie Wiesel's less dramatic but equally telling '[a] novel about Birkenau is either a novel or not about Birkenau, but not both at once' (250). The Wordsworthian formula – 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' – which according to Kunow 'since the Romantics [has] served as something like a descriptive shorthand for two of our culture's most privileged means of memory' (248), namely art and history, has in a post-Holocaust world become problematic, and this partly because of this event's amorphous unspeakability and refusal of hermeneutic distance, and partly because of an overall 'change in cognitive orientation' (two things which ultimately at some level are causally related). Kunow's analysis of 'second-generation' fictional representations of the Holocaust – a 'name' which according to Lyotard 'marks the confines wherein historical knowledge sees its competence impugned' (253) – nonetheless identifies a revealing and important 'reference' to the horror, albeit in the nature of a 'void' brought out by a conscious balance 'on the margin between the speakable and the unspeakable.' 'One does not look directly at the sun,' as he ends by quoting Aharon Appelfeld (269).

This is, however, often what it seems like when emotions are excessively flaunted, for instance in contemporary talk shows. 'Emotion has,' says Linda Nicholson in 'Emotion in Postmodern Public Spaces,' emerged as 'an explicit focus of attention' (2) through what she calls a 'reconfiguration of the association of reason with publicity and emotion with privacy' (1). What specifically interests Nicholson are the processes through which 'affective elements as a factor in the decision-making' have become increasingly important since identity, in the sixties, 'began to matter not only as a means to ferret out specific forms of exclusion but also as a means to evaluate the social manifestations and psychic consequences of race and gender' (17). Rather than lamenting this in relation to 'the group specificity of the [various] goals,' Nicholson sees a danger in the claim that 'only those physically marked in ways which make them subject to differentially negative experiences can understand or be motivated to challenge those social practices which perpetuate such differentiated experiences' (18). The 'therapeutic turn has,' ends Nicholson, 'left a powerful, and I would regard, importantly democratic, imprint on the shape of our politics' (21).

As I hope the above suggests, *Emotion in Postmodernism* contains a wealth of illuminating and probing insights far beyond what can be discussed here, and it is no doubt a volume worth consulting for anyone interested in contemporary America as well as in well-grounded and thoughtful engagements with the conglomerate of theory called postmodernism.

Mark R. Schneider, *Boston Confronts Jim Crow, 1890-1920*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997. 262 pp. ISBN: 1-55553-295-0; paper.

Antebellum Boston was the home of some of America's most ardent opponents of the institution of slavery. Although not all Bostonians by definition opposed the Southern way of life, the strong commitment to combat racism and racial inequalities continued after abolition when the South introduced its inflexible segregation practices.

Based in large part on newspapers, correspondence, and judicial and legislative debates, Mark Schneider convincingly portrays the intellectual and political lives of influential Bostonian reformers like Booker T. Washington, William Monroe Trotter and Henry Cabot Lodge and their views on American race relations. In the introductory chapter Schneider portrays the racial and political commitment characteristic of Boston's close-knit African American community during these years and points out that the city's black and white civil rights activists found much of their strength and inspiration in the deeds of their abolitionist ancestors. The rest of Schneider's book is divided into seven chapters. The first examines the Republican party's determination to end the Democrats' domination in the South. Backed by accusations of southern election fraud and harassment of its African-American voters, Henry Cabot Lodge initiated his crusade for the Federal Elections Bill of 1890. Despite its strong advocates in both black and white political circles, the bill was never passed. Schneider remarks that this rejection of a bill securing the African-American vote, led to a shift in the strategies of race improvements from political action to more individual economic and social self-help. The second chapter is devoted to the period's most prominent African American leader, Booker T. Washington, and the communication between him and Boston's African American upper class in particular. For a brief period, black Bostonians backed Washington's accommodating policies until the emergence of more radical views such as those of William Monroe Trotter and W.E.B. Du Bois. In contrast, influential white Bostonians remained receptive to the ideology of gradual racial concessions.

The third chapter is devoted to African-American women's influence on the racial and women's rights debate of the time. Prominent women like Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin and Maria L. Baldwin worked to improve women's and African Americans' position in a white, male-dominated society which Schneider depicts with careful attention to the agreements and disagreements between black and white women's groups. As in the previous chapters, Schneider in his fourth chapter provides useful background about the personalities portrayed, with Trotter as the protagonist in the increasing opposition to Washington's alleged autocratic rule. Schneider argues that Trotter was ahead of his time, for, like the militant civil rights movements during the 1950s and 1960s, he stressed keeping organizational leadership in African-American hands. Du Bois worked for similar goals in the NAACP, whose leadership went from largely integrated to largely African-American by the 1920s. The fifth chapter examines the leadership and work of the NAACP's Boston chapter that, in spite of its relatively small African-American community, constituted the largest branch in the nation. Schneider attributes this fact and

the organization's successful legal battles during the modern civil rights movement to the city's long history of race activism. Chapter six explores why, in spite of the NAACP's commitment, only a few significant racial advancements were achieved in Boston during these years. Here, Schneider turns his attention to the wider Bostonian community and the transformation of white power relations from the Protestant Yankee upper class to the ambitious Irish-Americans. The contributions of three prominent lawyers to the African-American quest for equality is the topic of the final chapter. The focus is on William Henry Lewis and Moorfield Storey's commitment to pursue their predecessors' active engagement in the civil rights struggle, an enthusiasm the third lawyer, Oliver Wendell Holmes, did not quite share.

In this solid but slow-moving book, Schneider addresses the specialist reader interested in the history of race relations as they pertain to the city of Boston. His elaborate list of primary and secondary sources is a valuable source for anyone wishing to know more about Boston and its inhabitants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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Mary O'Connell, *Updike and the Patriarchal Dilemma: Masculinity in the Rabbit Novels*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996. xiv + 268 pp. ISBN: 0-8093-1949-7; cloth; \$34.95.

There are several reasons for not liking John Updike. At least three of the reasons can be expressed in zoological metaphors: stylistically, his words seem to multiply uncontrollably like rabbits; politically, during the Vietnam war, he was a conservative eagle; and ideologically, he is still supposed to be a chauvinist pig. Mary O'Connell's book seeks to challenge the stereotypical portrait of Updike by providing the first sustained reading of the Rabbit quadruplet (*Rabbit, Run*, (1960); *Rabbit Redux* (1971); *Rabbit Is Rich* (1981); *Rabbit at Rest* (1990)) from a gender theoretical viewpoint. O'Connell examines how Harry 'Rabbit' Angstrom, the protagonist of the quartet, experiences masculinity and how his gender identity affects his development and relationship with other characters. It is O'Connell's contention that, far from being a promoter of given gender roles, Updike problematizes socially constructed masculinity and reveals its limitations. However, O'Connell does not merely treat the Rabbit novels as case studies of actual gender positions but also links the problematic to its aesthetic articulation: to the form, structure, narrative point of view, and use of language. All this certainly sounds exciting and any reader of Updike is likely to expect radically new readings of the Rabbit novels. To a degree O'Connell succeeds in fulfilling the expectations she raises in the Introduction, but as a whole the book is somewhat disappointing.

First, O'Connell's version of gender theory turns out to be surprisingly shallow. The author is content with paraphrasing such grandmaster theorists as Freud, Lacan, and Cixous through their exegetes rather than going *ad fontes*. Furthermore, O'Connell seems to be

unaware of the recent discussion on the problem of gender in philosophy or critical theory; for instance, such a must as Judith Butler does not figure in the author's theoretical repertoire. It is symptomatic that O'Connell utilizes Bruce Woodcock's book *Male Mythologies: John Fowles and Masculinity*, which appeared more than a decade ago, as a model for her readings. Now I realize that O'Connell's main interest lies in the new analyses of Updike, not in keeping up with the most recent theoretical developments. Nevertheless, a more varied development of her theoretical stand would perhaps have yielded even more insightful readings. For instance, Ramchadrán Sethuraman's Lacanian articles on the Rabbit novels, which are not included in O'Connell's otherwise comprehensive list of secondary material, exemplify the interpretive force of theoretical knowledge. Second, in her attempt to contextualize Rabbit's progress, O'Connell tends to draw on (popular) socio-psychological studies whose formulations are so general that the similarities between fiction and reality are somewhat inevitable. O'Connell's project is a hybrid of critical approaches whose mutual compatibility is sometimes questionable. No doubt unwittingly, the book seems to mime the tradition of Updike scholarship: archetypal-mythical references to Laius, Oedipus, and cosmogonical cycles are combined with findings drawn from sociological and historical studies. By thus widening its focus, the book loses some of its potential critical force.

Despite the limited theoretical depth of her study, O'Connell does, however, reread the Rabbit novels in a refreshing manner. O'Connell examines the varieties of masculinity and gender by close reading of the characters and their relationships in *Rabbit, Run*. What is even more intriguing is O'Connell's acute analysis of the ways in which gender, linguistic capability, and narrative voice interrelate in the novel. Although the masculine dominates the novel's form and content, the suppressed and inarticulate feminine breaks the illusion of narrative transparency and problematizes the universality of male experience. Julia Kristeva's and H  l  ne Cixous's ideas about the semiotic and the preverbal could have enriched O'Connell's analysis more than the Jungian archetypes which she brings into play here.

If the young Harry Angstrom would actively fight or flee the constraints of society, the Rabbit of *Rabbit Redux* practices passive resistance. Both strategies fail to resolve the protagonist's problems with patriarchy but they do dramatize important aspects of masculinity vis-8-vis sexism, racism, nationalism, and technology. The new characters of *Rabbit Redux*, Jill and Skeeter, are papery representatives of flower children and black militants respectively instead of being truly believable human beings. This and the self-consciously foregrounded depictions of the printing process in a way make the novel postmodern. Like the majority of Updike scholars, O'Connell does not discuss this interpretive possibility, although it could relate to the novel's material and thematic heterogeneity. O'Connell's treatment of the novel's imagery is precise and she manages to link it with the problematic of masculinity. The author emphasizes the homosocial in Rabbit's relationships with other men, especially with Skeeter, although in some instances *homoerotic* would be a more appropriate term.

*Rabbit Is Rich* is largely based on what could be called ironic symmetry: Rabbit's son Nelson repeats the deeds and errors of his father. Rabbit for his part has grown from a young rebel *puer* into an affluent *senex*. This state of affairs seems to call for some intertextual ancestors, and O'Connell – somewhat forcedly – reads the novel through the story of Laius and Oedipus. O'Connell provides an excellent reading of the novel's economic metaphors and convincingly manages to combine it with the context of masculinity. The brief section on masculine modes of narration is intriguing but it could have profited from a more sophisticated narratological treatment.

Even more than *Rabbit Is Rich*, *Rabbit at Rest* picks up the events, motifs, and themes of the prior novels. The dying Rabbit loolts at the world around him with a sense of resignation. The strict self/other and man/woman dichotomies develop, in Harry's mind, toward a reconciliation. O'Connell makes a fascinating comparison between *Rabbit at Rest* and Wagner's operatic *Ring* cycle, which was performed and aired in the US during the time of the novel's composition. The question of actual influence aside, O'Connell's analysis is at least heuristic, especially when she cross-reads the two works on a general structural level. However, O'Connell's comparison of details is somewhat far-fetched, as in: 'Wotan is betrayed by his beautiful daughter Brunhild while Rabbit is betrayed by his daughter-in-law Pru, and Sigfried inadvertently tastes blood, which, like Rabbit's parrot food, enables him to understand the language of birds' (225).

One is surprised that O'Connell's book ends with a less than one-page Conclusion. A thorough summing-up would certainly have been more appropriate and reader-friendly. As a whole *Updike and the Patriarchal Dilemma* marks a gendered change in Updike monographs. It is to be hoped that this well-documented and at times illuminating book will be followed by more daring and theoretically astute works concentrating on the complex problem of masculinity in Updike.

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