

Richard Pells. *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated and Transformed American Culture Since World War II*. New York: Basic Books, 1997. xviii + 444 pp.; ISBN 0-465-00164-5; hardcover; \$30.00.

Not Like Us is a cogent analysis of cultural exchange between the United States and Europe since 1945. In twelve broad chapters Richard Pells, professor of history at the University of Texas at Austin, tells the story of how Europeans have 'loved, hated and transformed' America, as the subtitle promises. His analysis ranges widely, from cultural diplomacy to mass culture, and throughout the book Pells demonstrates a remarkable breadth of knowledge and a keen eye for unexpected connections between very different kinds of material. The narrative begins with the de-Nazification program in Germany after World War II. It moves through a discussion of the Marshall Plan and the Fulbright Program to a careful examination of attempts by the United States to mobilize intellectuals, artists and academics in a Cold War of ideas with the Soviet Union. In two key chapters Pells discusses the repertoire of metaphors that Europeans and Americans have used to describe each other and then writes about the 'Americanization' of European advertising, industry and consumerism. The book reaches its crescendo in the final five chapters where the emphasis shifts to mass culture. It examines the American transmission as well as the European reception, from French New Wave filmmakers' incorporation of American film noir in the 1950s to the debate surrounding the opening of Euro Disney in 1992. Pells – a film buff and an encyclopedia of popular American film – writes most knowledgeably and convincingly about narrative film.

Readers who think that Coca-Cola, Michael Jackson and Jim Carey diminish traditional European culture will disagree strongly with the book. Pells argues that Europeans have successfully maintained local, regional and national traditions, and have adapted American culture to fit their own individual or collective needs. There is a certain inconsistency to the book here. Pells argues, on the one hand, that 'sometimes a movie is just a movie and a cheeseburger is just a cheeseburger' (282) to suggest that the impact of American culture has been temporary and negligible. But most of the time he actually argues that American culture has served as a reservoir of cultural knowledge, or as a vital interpretive tool for Europeans to understand their own cultural circumstances. This has been going on at different levels, from American Studies scholars who domesticated the discipline by studying American culture 'in terms that were relevant to European problems' (95) to Dutch women's personal reading of *Dallas* in the 1980s. Pells believes that Europeans have been active participants in trans-Atlantic cultural exchange, not passive recipients, and he argues that the story of American culture in Europe is a story of adaptation, not domination.

Not Like Us is meant as a flattering commentary on the capacity of Europeans to domesticate American culture. Yet it has been among European critics and intellectuals that the book (among others like it) has found its harshest critics. Many of them find that Pells's take obscures the way the massive presence of American culture in Europe has promoted cultural homogeneity and undisciplined certain indigenous creative communities. There is, however, little new about Pells's argument. He is mostly rehashing familiar arguments from cultural studies – about individual agency in reception of mass culture – that are today considered truisms by most people. Yet there is something new and refreshing about the book. By arguing that commercial American culture has something to offer Europeans and even suggesting that Europeans watch American movies, eat American food and listen to American music because they like the stuff, Pells confronts head-on the conventional snide European criticism of the deficiency of American mass culture. He especially writes against a current among smug French intellectuals to read American culture as a cultural menace and warn against the levelling of taste by American film and music. Pells treats this view as provincial – the worst accusation anyone can throw at self-described cosmopolitans – and believes that intellectuals' defensive posture reveals an anxiety about loss of intellectual status and privilege.

Pells's first two books, *Radical Visions and American Dreams* (1973) and *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age* (1985), established him as one of the leading intellectual historians in the United States. *Not Like Us* will strengthen his reputation and perhaps reach a new and larger audience. It is the first comprehensive study of the role of American culture in Europe since World War II and a project such as this is long overdue. Yet it is not a perfect book, as no book is. It is especially flawed by a couple of significant omissions. First, Pells ignores the considerable European import of African, Asian and Latin American mass culture and leaves the false impression that Europe's only outside cultural input comes from the United States. Second, and this is more serious, Pells writes primarily of reactions to America in Germany, France and Great Britain and does not deal sufficiently with circumstances elsewhere in Europe. Scandinavian readers will look in vain for any substantial treatment of the Scandinavian context, except for a predictable examination of Sigmund Skard's role in the early American Studies movement. The main problem is that Pells only deals with texts in English and has not read the vast corpus of Continental texts about America that have not been translated into English. This is frustrating for readers from smaller European countries, especially since Pells on the basis of German, French and British material – as well as select material from certain other countries – draws very general conclusions about the entire European experience. But it is perhaps unfair to criticize a book as broadly conceived as this for the things it does not do. *Not Like Us*, after all, accomplishes many things and will become a standard reference point for anyone with an interest in American cultural diplomacy, cross-cultural studies and European-American relations. Furthermore, it is a great read. Pells writes eloquently and has a keen eye for detail. He is out to tell a story, yet he never lets the book slide into anecdote. It will be appreciated by general readers and historians who simply enjoy good prose.