> whole as their inescapable subject. For them, the marginal characters who mattered to their fiction were social misfits [...] The writers who followed in the forties and fifties, however, were influenced more by *Heart of Darkness, The Interpretation of Dreams,* and *Civilization and Its Discontents* than by the *Communist Manifesto* and *Das Capital*. They were concerned more with Oedipal struggle than class struggle, concerned about the limits of civilization rather than the conflicts within civilization. Their premises were more Freudian than Marxist (84).

Morris Dickstein has written an acute and intelligible social and literary history of postwar America. Once again the author shows, as he did in *Gates of Eden*, how appealingly history can illuminate fiction, and vice versa. *Leopards in the Temple* is especially recommendable to university students of both 20th Century American fiction and social history in that it most definitely will challenge their previous conception of the American Fifties.

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David Ingram, *Green Screen: Environmentalism and American Cinema*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000; x + 230 pages; ISBN: 0-85989-608-0 ; £35.00, cloth.

In response to poststructuralism's attempts to attenuate or even sever the connection between the world of things and the world of words, the last decade has seen the emergence of a new mode of critical thinking that proposes to read culture under the sign of nature. For practitioners of 'ecocriticism,' the point of literary criticism is not to debunk but rigorously to defend literature's capacity to evoke a natural reality, and thus use the text to call attention to the complex but necessary reciprocal interplay of mind and world, the human and the non-human. Defined by Lawrence Buell as 'the study of the relation between literature and environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmental praxis,' ecocriticism moves from '*différance*' to '*référance*' without forgetting the linguistic, psychological and ideological complexities identified by postmodern schools of criticism, and without simply recuperating traditional tropes stipulating a romantic, prelapsarian relationship between man and nature.

The scope and ambitiousness of first-wave American ecocriticism in the 1990s, however, were perhaps limited by the relatively narrow canon of 'nature writers' – typically Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Robert Frost, Mary Austin, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Robinson Jeffers, Edward Abbey, Annie Dillard and Gary Snyder – whom ecocritics deemed worthy of close scrutiny. It cannot escape notice that all these writers are white, that most are men, and that many have long held secure places in college anthologies like the *Norton Anthology of American Literature*. While pledged to questioning humanity's ownership of the earth, early ecocritics also appeared institutionally conservative, committed to defending the privileged status of literary high culture within the academic curriculum. This implicit contradiction vexes even American ecocriticism's one undisputed masterpiece, Buell's *The Environmental Imagina-*

tion: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture (1995), which despite including little-known women writers like Susan Cooper in its impressive survey nevertheless takes as its starting-point a relatively uncontentious (re-)assertion of Thoreau's absolute centrality to nineteenth- and twentieth-century American letters.

Arguing the enduring ideological subversiveness of *Walden*'s experiments in anti-agriculture, however, can seem beside the point in what Guy Debord long ago called 'the society of the spectacle' – a post-literary entertainment culture saturated by simulation and almost entirely dominated by visual media. While avant-garde literary writers may still provide the more philosophically sophisticated mediations on humanity's place in nature, the relative marginality of highbrow book-culture in postmodernity makes it unclear what literature and literary studies can ultimately do to raise consciousness about thorny questions like deforestation or global warming. On the other hand there can be no doubt that the impact of popular Hollywood blockbusters like *The Lion King* or *On Deadly Ground* far outstrips classical literature's ideological power, and that American mass culture's global reach endows such texts with a real potential for shaping, and potentially altering, public opinion about a variety of political issues, including environmental issues.

Partially in acknowledgement of this, ecocriticism has recently entered a new phase, with a younger generation of self-professed 'green cultural critics' embracing a broader and more heterogeneous range of cultural products, including music, television broadcasts and popular film. David Ingram's *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema* takes as its subject the emergence of the 'environmentalist' Hollywood cinema in recent decades. There is a problem in delimiting this field, for to a certain extent all films (indeed all forms of imaginative representation) can be said to reflect upon human treatment of non-human nature, insofar as they necessarily make reference to something 'out there.' What defines the movies of interest to Ingram, however, is that they thematise the environment as an object of interest in itself, which means that in such films 'nature' features as more than a backdrop for a predominantly or exclusively human action.

Viewed in retrospect, the late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed a remarkable albeit short-lived heightening of environmental awareness in mainstream American culture, provoked by the environmental 'Decade of Disaster' which saw the release of poison methyl isocyanate (MIC) at the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, India (3 December 1984), the meltdown at the Chernobyl nuclear reactor (26 April 1986), and the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska (14 March 1989), culminating with the El Niño phenomenon that triggered world-wide concerns over global warning. Then Vice President Al Gore published his best-selling *Earth in the Balance* in 1992, and about the same time Disney's Michael Eisner and other major Hollywood moguls formed the Environmental Media Association in a bid 'to mobilize the entertainment industry in a global effort to educate people about environmental problems and inspire them to act on those problems now' (21). Since then the political climate may have changed, with

another oil crisis looming on the horizon and with overt and extreme anti-environmentalism back in style in the White House, but even so the phenomenon of the 'green Hollywood' raises a series of intriguing questions. Is the major movie studios' embrace of environmentalist rhetoric a public relations ploy, or does it in fact represent a real commitment to change? How plausible is it that transnational media corporations will commit themselves to an environmentalist politics, given global capitalism's absolute dependency on ever-increasing levels of consumption? Ingram's method is to answer these questions through a series of more of local inquiries. To what extent and in what ways, then, do the movies produced under the auspices of the green Hollywood actually serve the enlightening and action-inspiring agenda announced by the EMA?

Comprised of relatively brief, thematically organised discussions of specific films, *Green Screen* ranges over diverse topics including the gendered representation of Alaskan wilderness, the revisionist construction of the 'ecological Indian,' the film media's complicity in the killer-whale Kinko's lamentable fate, the populist faith in the virtue of the small American farmer, and the management of anxieties raised by the possibility of nuclear apocalypse. A thoroughly sceptical ideology critic, Ingram generally finds little reason to applaud Hollywood filmmakers for their embrace of environmental correctness. Although prepared to admit minor contradictions in some studio productions, Ingram's account nevertheless describes an ideologically consistent if not monolithic body of work, consciously or unconsciously devoted to protecting the status quo and to diverting public attention from the real conflictual issues.

On the one hand, Ingram finds, Hollywood nature-movies typically use nature as an ideological screen for the working-out of imaginative 'solutions' to political, racial and sexual problems occupying American policy-makers. Invoking loaded phrases like 'a fact of nature' or 'the order of nature' to oppose or promote certain desirable or undesirable social trends must be the oldest rhetorical sleight of hand, and not surprisingly Ingram finds that Disney's anthropomorphic animal features, from *Bambi* to *The Bear and I* and *The Lion King*, have been especially consistent in 'representing a model of virtuous nature from which conservative moral lessons concerning human gender relations can be learned' (38). On the other hand, to the extent that Hollywood films are really 'about' nature they typically – indeed almost inevitably – present distorted views of humanity's environmental predicament.

Ingram starts out by quoting a Greenpeace employee saying that environmental problems are 'extremely complicated' and never 'black or white' (1). That environmental problems are irreducibly complex, and that Hollywood has been stunningly unwilling or unable to grasp or acknowledge this complexity, are the fundamental propositions that *Green Screen* illustrates with a plethora of examples. Unlike wars or terrorist attacks, environmental calamities like BSE (or 'mad cow disease') take time to develop, and spring from elusive causes that make it difficult to tell heroes from villains. Furthermore, this ambivalence makes it almost always impossible to separate ecological concerns about loss of habitat and biodiversity from potentially more

divisive social questions about global injustice and inequity. Any attempt to halt ecological degradation, Ingram reasonably assumes, will have only very limited effect unless it seeks to address the inter-relatedness of all factors within the ecosystem, from the social and the political to the phenomena of the natural world. Undoubtedly such considerations seem to call for new representative strategies to imagine, represent and begin to effect large-scale change, and yet this crisis of representation is a question that Hollywood has scarcely begun to address. Instead, Hollywood has relied on proven cinematic formulas, consistently choosing to represent environmental problems, and their possible solution, in terms of simplistic and abstract binary opposites such as good and bad, native and stranger, human and animal, male and female, authentic and inauthentic, self and other. This Manichean structure is to be expected in animated films for children, but Ingram shows that even well-intentioned adult eco-films like *The China Syndrome* end up compromising the seriousness of their environmentalism by resorting to conventional plot structures and character typologies. Ingram is reluctant to speculate about the causes for this reluctance to experiment, but he does propose that one tangible reason concerns the high status of the melodramatic genre within Hollywood's 'commercial aesthetic.' Ingram, in other words, believes that melodrama's inherent privileging of individual agency renders it fundamentally incapable of describing systemic conflict adequately, and yet melodrama has been and still remains the vehicle chosen by most Hollywood filmmakers to mediate virtually *all* socio-political conflict. Himself favouring an aesthetics and a politics based on 'critical realism,' Ingram thus chronicles Hollywood's failure to transcend the limitations of melodrama and live up to the complex challenge of the real.

Ingram's preference for hard-nosed ideology critique accounts for the strengths of *Green Screen*, but is also the source of some unresolved tensions. As Ingram points out, his accusation that Hollywood fictions 'oversimplify complex social and political issues' presupposes 'a realist interpretative context, in which a film is judged against a particular conception of reality, and is found wanting' (1-2). This argument is reminiscent of, and draws upon, a long-standing literary-critical debate about pastoral. According to Raymond Williams and his followers (of whom Ingram is one), the persistence of pastoral signifies a lamentable failure on the part of those (predominantly middle-class) writers who resist modernisation and salute the healthiness of natural living as an antidote to urban moral decadence. Essentially urbanised outsiders to the countryside whose values they purport to champion, such writers have generally despaired of representing they real exigencies of rural living, instead reverting to the comforting reduplication of hackneyed clichés of rustic happiness and natural bounty (e. g. 'Arcadia,' 'the Golden Ages,' 'Old England,' 'the Organic Society'). The problem with this account, however, is not only that it tends to render suspect *any* imaginary reconstruction of reality, but also that it underestimates the flexibility and open-endedness of the pastoral mode. In contrast to Williams' somewhat disillusioned view, recent revisionist critics have noted that establishment figures and enemies of the status quo alike professed to love all living creatures, and that both revolutionists and anti-revolutionists deployed organicist rhetoric to make

their arguments appealing. Urging a more natural life-praxis, the notion of Arcadia can be used not only to idealise the past but also to effect a release from the prison house of history, for to the extent that pastoral represents an idealisation, it must also imply a better future conceived in the language of the present. And as Jane Tompkins showed in her classic analysis of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the fact that sentimental fictions appeal to the imagination and the feelings need not weaken but can in fact strengthen their rhetorical power.

In all fairness, Ingram concedes the possibility of an alternative and more appreciative view of melodrama, when he admits that 'the notion that apocalyptic fictions can also articulate a desire for radical social change, or at least a protest against the status quo of big business and big science is [...] worth exploring' (9). Nonetheless, some readers will feel that *Green Screen's* sometimes schematic interpretations risk riding roughshod over the ambiguities that inhere in pastoral and melodrama, and that Ingram too dogmatically accepts the primacy of 'reason' and the secondariness of 'feeling.' In the last instance, Ingram's discourse seems rooted less in any form of environmentalism than in unreconstructed Marxist rationalism – an intellectual tradition that may itself have much to answer for in terms of global environmental destruction. According to Ingram, 'the explanatory powers of science' provide 'a much more effective basis for environmental politics than mythopoeia and spiritualism' (44). Against this one might assert, with Heidegger, Adorno and Lyotard, that the Enlightenment's blind faith in technical rationality is precisely what the environmental movement must struggle to overcome. At the very least it seems likely that a green turn in history, if such a turn is ever to occur, will necessarily presuppose new ways of thinking *and* new modes of feeling.

Despite these reservations about the book's demystifying mode, *Green Screen* is a timely and well-argued contribution not only to the burgeoning discipline of film studies, but also to the politicised and by now acrimonious debate over the definition of the contested term 'environmentalism.' Writing with wit and some degree of scorn, Ingram seeks to debunk all those pseudo-environmentalist discourses which at best produce evasive and contradictory pseudo-answers to real problems, and which at worst cause substantial damage to the very causes which they ostensibly advocate. In a provocative argumentative twist, Ingram uses his exposé of Hollywood's 'greenwashing' strategies to posit a surprising convergence between corporate would-be environmentalists and some rather more uncompromising friends of the earth. Ingram finds, for example, that Hollywood's sacralisation of the Native Americans' holistic wisdom is reminiscent of the undiscriminating admiration for shamanistic modes of consciousness that one finds among many proponents of radical environmentalism, notably ecofeminism and deep ecology. It is obvious that native American cultures never embarked on anything resembling Western industrial civilisation's self-destructive quest for universal dominance, but even so the idea that Indians were culturally programmed to refrain from ecological interference because they felt an instinctive awe and respect for all living things sounds too good to be true, and has in fact been disputed by recent anthropologists and environmental historians. As Ingram shows,

however, the 'ecological Indian' is by now an iconic figure, who raises his teepee not only in successful revisionist westerns like *Dances with Wolves*, *The Last of the Mohicans* and *Pocahontas*, but also in much post-1968 'alternative' discourse. By contrast, Ingram himself sympathises with a left-leaning 'social ecology' which has never been and probably never will be co-opted by Hollywood. The proposition that some varieties of radical ecology tacitly collude with the entertainment industry in perpetuating uncritical myths that retard rather than advance real environmental understanding is a provocative notion bound to cause some controversy, but it is surely one that deserves to be taken seriously.

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George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger*. Critical American Studies Series, George Lipsitz, series editor. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2001. 384 pages; £16.50, paper (ISBN: 0-8166-3949-3).

Is it relevant to talk about a nationally defined discipline like American studies in today's transnational – even post-national – world? George Lipsitz, Professor of Ethnic Studies at the University of California, San Diego, and Director of the Thurgood Marshall Institute, raises this question in his book *American Studies in a Moment of Danger*, the first in the 'Critical American Studies Series' from the University of Minnesota Press. More specifically, Lipsitz asks how 'nationally inflicted understandings of citizenship, race, class, gender, and sexuality change when they become international, transnational, and national all at the same time?' (8). Or to put it succinctly, today, how can we be sure that we are talking about the same thing when we talk to each other about the United States or American studies?

Lipsitz covers two aspects of American studies as it can be understood primarily in a US context. First, he presents an historical overview of how the academic field has been transformed by social movements from the 1930s until the present. Secondly, and more importantly, the book offers a rendition of how an academic discipline defined by its national scope has faced a rapidly changing world where transnational and cross-cultural understanding has come to transform the various forms of knowledge that make up critical inquiry. Lipsitz is thus not only concerned with the past of American studies and how that past has shaped the subject; he also engages the crucial question of how today's globally initiated social, ideological, and cultural agendas will shape the future of what we now know as the United States. Consequently, the book offers both a study of an academic subject – American studies – and a broader discussion of the limits and possibilities that this subject can, and to some degree must, exist within, namely the United States as a national construct.

Lipsitz identifies two co-existing types of American studies. First, there is the institutional, canonized form of American studies which relies on established methodological practices and intellectual paradigms, like myth-symbol-image, anthropology,