

The struggles of Melville to survive economically between international book pirating and his failure to cater to popular cultural demands with *Moby Dick*, should be well-known, but as an expression of a dominant cultural-industrial complex rather than a personal author tragedy requires a change of focus, though not a revolutionary one, given directions already taken by new historicists whose efforts to place writers in their proper social and cultural historical reality has helped uncover their awareness of changes in the literary trade and their willingness to adapt to survive.

Benesch, however, claims that studies of the economic conditions and demands of the marketplace, resulting from technologically advanced means of production, lost sight of the symbolism of the machine as well as the individual achievement of authors. Retreating from ideological directions of past readings Benesch offers to revalue and establish authorship as a modern ideology imbedded within an increasingly technology-driven framework.

Romantic Cyborgs may not present itself with flashy new theorizing but is justly described, by Benesch himself, by using the term discourse realignment, and is a solid piece of work with more emphasis on engaging theories than on deep readings of the texts. Benesch relies on well-trodden pastures where texts and theories are concerned (Leo Marx is unavoidable when rereading technology and literature in this period), but the focus on cyborg and authorship ideologies makes it a suitably refreshing of familiar texts.

Inger H. Dalsgaard

University of Cambridge/Aarhus University

Hans Bak, ed. *Uneasy Alliance: Twentieth-Century American Literature, Culture and Biography*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004. Costerus New Series 150. 360 pp; ISBN 90-420-1611-6; \$91.00.

The essays in this volume have been written as a tribute to G.A.M. Janssens at the University of Nijmegen, who for more than thirty years has been a pioneer of American literature in the Netherlands. Of the twenty-one contributors to the volume, almost two thirds teach at universities in the Netherlands, and many of them are former students and colleagues of Professor Janssens', who has reason to be pleased and proud of the range and quality of the legacy collected in this volume. The editor, the prolific Hans Bak, has also provided an umbrella under which the many disparate essays can be seen, in his invocation of Professor Janssens' inspirational practice as both scholar and literary *aficionado*: "Together [these essays] testify to the ongoing pertinence of an approach to literature that is open, undogmatic, sensitive and sophisticated and that seeks to do justice to the complex interaction and uneasy alliance of literature, culture and biography in twentieth-century American writing." While many books of the *Festschrift* variety will tend to be uneven and problematically *ad hoc*, the essays in this collection, which range far and wide across the landscape of American literature and other cultural manifestations, are generally extremely well-

written, with an impressive linguistic sophistication and coherent clarity, free of esoteric academic jargon, that make them accessible to the general reader as well as to experts in the field. Thus the book's heterogeneity does not constitute as much of a handicap as one might have feared, since the great majority of the essays are able to create and sustain the reader's interest on their own particular premises.

Inevitably, wholeness and integration must necessarily be a problem in a collection of essays that contains no formal sub-divisions or other attempts to create an overarching structure. The title of the book does provide a clue, however, to an approach to reading the various efforts in the light of our current literary situation. The editor invites the reader to subsume the disparate essays under the ongoing debate about the relationship between esthetic formalism and cultural studies in the field of literature. Speaking about the immediate past, he reminds us that "this recanonization of American literature—perhaps the most striking development of American writing of the 1980s and 1990s—was predicated on a redefinition of the role and function of literary criticism, a revaluation of ideology and cultural politics, and (a hallmark of what was sometimes referred to as 'the postmodernist breakthrough') a blurring of boundaries: between high and low forms of art, between center and margin, between literature and other disciplines." Situated at a vantage point beyond the polarization of these turbulent decades, Bak sees new opportunities for *détente* and symbiosis at the beginning of the 21st century: "Recently, we have been witnessing a search for a new interface between textual and contextual readings, between a literary and a cultural approach, in the awareness that a literary (as opposed to a non-literary) text 'has the power to even subvert its own ideological complicity' and that 'the aesthetic does not deny the political, ethical, or historical dimensions of literary texts but engages them and mediates between them.'" This search for a compromise and a synthesis between the extremes of the various traditions of literary formalism on the one hand and the desire to see literature as wholly subservient to political, ideological, and cultural concerns on the other represents the "uneasy alliance" of the book's title, which is seen as promising the opening up of "opportunities for enriching interactions and new insights."

This is clearly a philosophy and a game plan that is as ambitious and difficult to fulfill as it is welcome and desirable for any number of readers and scholars tired of the canon wars and other aspects of life in the academic trenches, and as one would expect, the different essays live up to such challenges with varying degrees of success. Among the essays that best fulfill the volume's ambition to create a bridge between formalism and "culturalism," my own preference is for Gert Buelens' "Metaphor, Metonymy, and Ethics in *The Portrait of a Lady*," C.C. Barfoot's "Edna St. Vincent Millay's Sonnets: Putting 'Chaos into Fourteen Lines,'" Jan Bakker's "Saul Bellow and the Actual," Kathleen M. Ashley's "Toni Morrison's Tricksters," and Hans Bak's "Site of Passage: The City as a Place of Exile in Contemporary North-American Multicultural Literature." In their very different ways, all of these essays provide the reader with new and illuminating insights into the relationship between text and context, literary form and social history, resulting in a greater appre-

ciation both of the texts as distinctive works of art and of the range and meaningfulness of their thematic content as a reflection of their surrounding world.

A great many of the other essays are also interesting in their own right, but vary greatly in terms of subject matter. Some deal with very well-known authors, while others focus on names that will be unknown even to people relatively familiar with the field of American literature. Thematically, some essays stand alone, while others can naturally be grouped with others. There are two essays on crime fiction, two on Chicana literature, two on Jewish-American literature, both new and "old," two on literature of the city, and three that focus on the relationship between authors and publishers. Needless to say, every reader will have a different set of preferences faced with such a disparate multitude of studies, but even in the case of topics that initially seemed obscure and idiosyncratic, this reader found himself interested and even intrigued on a number of occasions.

One salient example of such an experience is Mathilde Roza's "American Literary Modernism, Popular Culture and Metropolitan Mass Life: The Early Fiction of Robert M. Coates." In spite of my own interest in the writers of the Lost Generation, Robert Coates was completely unknown to me until my reading of this collection. After reading Roza's presentation of this man and his work in its proper context, I am again forcefully reminded of how much potentially valuable and important literature is lost to the vagaries of critical fashions and just plain luck. This writer, a close friend of Nathanael West, a distinctive voice at *The New Yorker*, and the author of five novels and three collections of stories, sounds fascinating enough to have deserved much more than a footnote in the ordinary literary history books. Both from the point of view of experimentation with literary form, as a chronicler of the twenties and thirties, as a satirist, and as a pioneer mediator of popular culture in fiction, Coates comes across as a potentially fascinating figure well worthy of serious attention. Maybe now that a recent smash hit American TV sitcom (*Desperate Housewives*) is located in Wisteria Lane, time has come to revive his *Wisteria Cottage: A Novel of Criminal Impulse* ...

Several other articles could be mentioned for the way they shed new light on the more or less obscure reputations of writers who are not on the A team. For instance, Inez Hollander-Lake does not only convince the reader that Martha Gellhorn was a much braver war correspondent than her famous husband, Ernest Hemingway, but also reminds us of the considerable virtues still residing in her best novel, *Point of No Return*. Equally valuable, however, are many of the other studies of more well-known authors that successfully manage to hold a mirror up not just to their literary achievements but also to the world that made them. It does not take a feminist to appreciate and feel enlightened by the border crossings of Sandra Cisneros and Julia Alvarez, nor does one have to feel at home in Flannery O'Connor's Southern Catholic universe to come away wiser from an immersion in Susan Castillo's study of *Wise Blood*.

In my experience, it is unusual to find a collection of this kind where so many of the articles are enjoyable and enlightening reads, readily accessible to many kinds of

readers without being condescending. The 360 pages of *Uneasy Alliance* may be a little slim for a cornucopia, but in the breadth and variety and quality of its contents, Hans Bak and his team have ample reason to be proud of their achievement.

Erik Kielland-Lund

University of Oslo

Van Gosse, *The Movements of the New Left 1950-1975 – A Brief History with Documents*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005. 203 pages; ISBN: 0312133979 Paperback; \$ 13.95.

The overall aim of this compact volume – the latest contribution to The Bedford Series in History and Culture – is pedagogical, namely to allow “readers ... to study the past as historians do” (v). Although the potential audience is wider, this book is thus primarily directed at students and is, as it says, “short (and inexpensive) enough to be a reasonable one-week assignment in a college course” (v). The book consists of a short introduction (38 pages) followed by 45 documents (most of which have been shortened) all preceded by a “headnote that situates it historically and provides key information about its author” (vii). At the back of the book there is chronology of key events in the history of the New Left followed by a select and thematically organized bibliography for further study. In focus in the following are thus both this concept and its specific execution with regard to the New Left.

As signaled by the “movements” and the periodization (1950-1975) Van Gosse aims at advocating an inclusive view of the New Left in opposition to the widespread practice of conflating the New Left with the (mainly) white student movement SDS, which is often seen as occupying the place in between the civil rights movement and the women's liberation movement, and whose “official” history, from the break with the League for Industrial Democracy to its fragmentation and radicalization, coincides neatly with the decade of the sixties. The introduction is thus entitled “A Movement of Movements” as is Gosse's discussion of the historiography of the New Left that appears in Jean Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig (eds.), *Blackwell's Companion to Post-1945 America* (Blackwell, 2002) in which the argument of inclusivity is unfolded at greater length. In the volume under review, a broad definition of the New Left is simply put forth as “both more accurate and more useful in introducing students to the complex political dynamics of ‘the Sixties’” (vii). “In particular”, says Gosse, “I hope this book challenges students to think about the commitment shared by all of these movements to a radical understanding of democracy and how that resonates in American history” (vii).

This common ground of a radical understanding of democracy (which I will return to) and its ascendance is by Gosse related to three broad historical developments: firstly, World War II brought African Americans out of the South and into the Army or the North, experiences putting into perspective social structures; also women found themselves in changed circumstances because of the war; secondly, the cold war in