

137) – is a search for a new humanism, which highlights transnationality, transraciality, and cosmopolitanism, as well as embracing inclusive gender politics.

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Paul Lauter, *From Walden Pond to Jurassic Park: Activism, Culture & American Studies*. Durham: Duke University Press: 2001 (*New Americanists Series*, ed. Donald E Pease). 288 pages; ISBN 0-8223-2671-X; \$18.95 pbk.

Paul Lauter, Professor of Literature at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, is one of the grand old “young” men of American Studies. For over 40 years he has been tilting at the windmills of established academic opinion, theory and methodology – and not without effect, as this wide-ranging collection of his essays makes clear. His chosen vehicle has been the field of American Studies, which he has been instrumental in developing and defining. As practicing teacher, theorist and former President of the American Studies Association (1992), he has expanded both the scope and the depth of the field, helping to define it as separate discipline from its early mentors, American literature and history. Further, as a self-proclaimed political activist and cultural radical with an agenda, Paul Lauter provides a refreshing change from the popular political neutrality of modernist and post-modernist perspectives. As a historian, I was particularly pleased with the way he has carefully placed his subjects and his own analysis of them into an historical context, following his adopted injunction to “Always historicize” (22).

That being said, it is difficult to find any center or specific aim to this compilation. Rather, it seems more like a set of essays in search of a mission. This is reflected in the structure of the book which is divided into three general categories; Part One, *Practicing American Studies* (five essays); Part Two, *American Studies in a Racialized World* (three essays) and; Part Three, *Revisiting the Canon: The Question of Modernism* (four essays). While all can be connected to American Studies – or at least American Studies as practiced by Lauter – there is no intrinsic connection either between the three parts or among the essays each contain, though Lauter spins a loose thematic thread around them in a series of introductions. Rather, they constitute snapshots of various aspects of American Studies as perceived by Lauter during the 1990s – though their subject matter ranges across the centuries.

The merit of the work lies in the individual essays (referred to as chapters) and the weight and insight that Lauter brings to their various topics. This is not inconsiderable, given his erudition. They can, however, be somewhat daunting. Reading them is to receive a flash course in the developments in the study of American literature and American Studies over the past fifty years, both explicitly in their stated content and implicitly in the manner Lauter refers them to us. Regarding style, Professor Lauter is a very well read gentleman, with a quick wit and an easy way with words. One gets the distinct impression of a virtuoso lecturer and instructor from his deft manner of

weaving one set of information and associations into another through the use of the pungent metaphor or ironic turn of phrase. On the printed page, however, this does not serve him as well. Despite a step-by-step structuring of his arguments, they can be difficult to follow through a thicket of associations, verbiage and prepositional phrases. Like Samuel Johnson, Lauter is probably more charming in person than in print.

Turning to the essays themselves, chapter one of Part One begins with its most important contribution “Reconfiguring Academic Disciplines: The Emergence of American Studies” in which Lauter asks rhetorically, “Where ... do we ask how and why certain texts or objects come into existence in the particular historical landscapes of the United States? The brief answer, I think, is American Studies” (12). He goes on to identify principles and characteristics which make American Studies a separate discipline, not least its interdisciplinary nature and its use of historical and political context in analysis. In the following essays he exemplifies and employs some of these principles with regard to a series of debates regarding the study of the United States. Chapter two, “American Studies, American Politics, and the Reinvention of Class,” squarely confronts the issue of class-consciousness and class interest in relation to higher education. He outlines both the struggles of unionization within colleges and universities, the corporativization of higher education, and the manner in which class as an object of study had been set to the side in the post-World War Two academic world into which he grew.

In chapter three, “Three Versions of Nashville, Visions of American Studies” he outlines the roots of the Agrarians, the development of the Nashville non-violent protest movement during the civil rights era, and Robert Altman’s film “Nashville.” He uses these three aspects of Nashville to trace the development of “a kind of Mandarin culture” (79) in the academic study of English literature from its Agrarian roots, contrasting this to the humane Nashville movement and finally noting how both have been superceded by the rise of the media and the ideology of the marketplace, represented by Altman’s film. The fourth chapter, entitled “Culture and Conformity in Wartime America: My Junior High School Songbook” is an exemplification of how the analytical tools available to American Studies – in this case a gendered perspective – can utilize artifacts of all kinds to gain insight into American society and history. In the final chapter five, “Dinosaur Culture: From *Mansfield Park* to *Jurassic Park*” Lauter wishes to show how he and “many American Studies practitioners, have ... deviated from the well-trimmed paths of Austin and James and found ourselves hacking through the underbrush of ‘Jurassic Park’”(102). Contrasting the boundaries between “high culture” and “low culture” established after World War Two, he makes an analysis of the Spielberg film using both classic tools of literary analysis and newer ones developed within the field of American Studies.

Part Two, *American Studies in a Racialized World*, begins with the sixth chapter entitled “American Studies & Ethnic Studies at the Borderlands Crossroads” in which Lauter aims to “examine ... border regions where American studies intersects with

other disciplines, like the various ethnic studies programs ...”(120). He first deals with the concept of borders as a metaphor within which varieties of American identity can be transcribed, outlining a conservative assimilationist version and contrasting it to one based on a culturally pluralistic perspective that, he notes, has led to the inclusion of earlier marginalized groups like blacks, Hispanics, women and gays. He goes on to identify causes for tensions that can exist between American Studies programs and ethnic studies programs. In chapter seven, entitled “Of *Chadors* and Capital,” Lauter examines the dilemma faced by Americans teaching American studies abroad, a dilemma neatly summed up in a question put to him by a young woman in Indonesia, “Do you think that American studies in Indonesia serves a role something like that previously played by the missionaries?”(139). He finds that, despite the best of intentions, this may be true in so far as Americanists may spread American values – some good, some bad. The concluding chapter of this section, entitled “Fiction as Exploration: The Novels of George Chesnut” is perhaps the entry most closely related to the stated theme of part two, “American studies in a racialized world”. In it Lauter examines the personal and artistic struggles of this black author during a time of increasing segregation – “Post-Bellum, Pre-Harlem” (170).

Part Three, *Revisiting the Canon: The Question of Modernism*, begins with the chapter that may be the most interesting in the book, entitled “Reflecting on the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*.” In it he traces the origins and development of the anthology for which he has been both the instigator and general editor. He outlines how it was consciously designed to be a progressive and multicultural alternative to “... that pedagogical Bible, the *Norton Anthology*” (176), and the conservative canon established by high modernism in the 1950s. He finds attacks on the *Heath Anthology* by the Right to be “appropriate (given that)... boundaries, whether one is talking of neighborhoods, nations, gender or culture, are not light abstractions but the stuff of battle” (198). In chapter ten, entitled “Melville Climbs the Canon,” he illustrates an earlier battle for such cultural territory, suggesting how the “rise of Melville’s reputation in the 1920s may be taken to represent the ascent of the ideology we call “modernism” and of the academy and its adjuncts in the hierarchy of cultural authority“ (201). In chapter eleven, entitled “And Now, Ladies and Gentlemen, May I present Miss Amy Lowell,” he employs a gendered perspective on Lowell’s “... poetry as a performative medium” (221) to show her role in the development of modernism and her effort to “... avoid being incorporated into Pound’s increasingly masculinist project” (226).

In the final chapter of the book, entitled “Cold War Culture & the Construction of Modernism,” Lauter focuses his attention on “... some of the critics and institutions responsible for constructing what became for half a century the hegemonic view...” of American literature, and particularly poetry (235). Interestingly, he does this through textbooks. Examining pre-1950 anthologies, he notes the gradually diminishing cultural room for progressive, political and minority authors as the cold war ratcheted up. He contrasts this with culturally conservative texts that became acceptable in the 1950s. In conclusion, he notes that the canon and teachings of modernism

established during the cold war continue to "... retain real power in the academy and therefore among those shaped by it, including, particularly, secondary school teachers of literature ..." (249).

What, then, is one to make of the finished product, the sum of the parts? There is much of worth here, but like gold, it must be dug out from the complicated prose and sheer density of knowledge being proffered. It is perhaps best taken in small portions, like rich chocolate cake. For those with the interest of a specialist, many of the essays will provide fascinating insights. From the perspective of an Americanist abroad, it can have an additional function. It can itself be viewed as an artifact of American culture – a window into the academic world of American Studies in the United States at the end of the 20th century.

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Øyvind T. Gulliksen, *Twofold Identities. Norwegian-American Contributions to Mid-western Literature*, New York: Peter Lang, 2004. 240 pages; ISBN 0-8204-6230-6; \$65.95.

Norwegian immigrants in the United States created a rich literary culture. A great number of publications were brought out for the rapidly growing market of Norwegian Americans in the second half of the 19th and the early part of the 20th centuries, and it seems safe to say that this literature was one of the richest among all American ethnic and immigrant groups. Over the years, a number of studies of Norwegian-American literature and culture have appeared by authors on both sides of the Atlantic, including, among others, Einar Haugen, Odd Lovoll, Dorothy Skårdahl, and Orm Øverland. The present book by Øyvind Gulliksen thus falls into a long and venerable tradition of scholarly interest in the cultural and intellectual life of the Norwegian-American community.

Immigrant literatures, such as Norwegian-American writings, can be studied in different ways. One is to focus on writings that deal with the topic of immigration or the circumstances of a particular ethnic group, which puts the immigration process at center stage. It would include materials published in both Norway and the U.S. and in both Norwegian and English. A second way is to study printed materials published in a particular language, such as Norwegian, in the United States. This definition does not insist that Norwegian-American literature should have an "immigrant theme" or ethnic component, but would encompass newspapers, periodicals, fiction, poetry, and non-fictional materials of a very varied kind, as long as it was published in the United States in the Norwegian language. A third way of looking at Norwegian-American literature would be to focus on the audience, and to study what Norwegian immigrants in America read, regardless of thematic content or language or place of publication.