

## Reviews

*The Cultural Shuttle: The United States off/in Europe.* Edited by Véronique Béghain and Marc Chénétier with the collaboration of Jean-Paul Gabilliet. European Contributions to American Studies 57, VU University Press, Amsterdam, 2004. ISBN 90 5383 949.

This book is a product of the European Association for American Studies (EAAS) Biennial Conference held 2002 in Bordeaux, France. It could be said to present, at least according to some criteria, what at that time was the best European scholars could offer in the field. And it is a good book. Many of its articles are certainly worth reading and may provoke new ideas and help in teaching American Studies.

However, as most collections of articles and conference publications this one is not without problems either. On the representative level, one may question how well it represents the whole of Europe, for instance. Out of the 24 articles or essays, five writers come from France, four from Germany, and another four from the United Kingdom, so the three big dominate.

This is, of course, due to several things that I can only guess. Certainly it has to do with the selection made for the conference already at the EAAS Board meeting previous fall. Plenty of discussion about including the Eastern European scholars was in the air, but not much of that is unfortunately shown in this collection. Only two writers have made it from the Czech Republic, and even one of them, I suspect, may be a transplanted American. Three of the writers teach at American universities. Can they then be called European contributors? But maybe they are Europeans?

That is another problem with the book. We are given only the name of the writers and their institutions, but nothing more. I, at least, would have wanted to know a bit more about the writers. Certainly for reasons of curiosity, but also to be able to better put their writings into perspective. Even in monographs by well-known authors there is usually a short personal history.

Nevertheless, *The Cultural Shuttle* gives an interesting look at the variety of things in American Studies that Europeans are engaged with. Literature related articles dominate, but not as much as one would perhaps expect. Those of us who heard Rolf Lundén's excellent presentation on defining American Studies at the Nordic Association for American Studies (NAAS) meeting in Växjö last May, have no difficulty in agreeing that all articles in *The Cultural Shuttle* are "American Studies." Yet, I must confess that I would be more interested in reading about "the surrogate legacy of European Jewishness in America" than about "the surrogate legacy of European Jewishness in the Fiction of Philip Roth." However, this could be due to my coming to

American Studies through political history, geography, and anthropology. (And I did enjoy reading Margaret Smith's article on "The Surrogate Legacy of European Jewishness in the Fiction of Philip Roth.")

To single out one or a few articles of a collection of 24 may not be totally fair, but as this is my subjective review, I will follow this common pattern. I found Denis Donoghue's "Moby-Dick: Before and After September 11, 2001" quite interesting even though I think that too much space was spent at the beginning in analyzing "Moby-Dick" with no connection to 9/11. But then why and whether US citizens are by definition "good" as foreigners are "evil" or is George W. Bush an Ahab using Moby-Dick a.k.a. 9/11 as an excuse for setting aside international agreements, are most intriguing questions to ponder. And would this change our reading of Melville's book forever?

The best article in my opinion is Arne Neset's "Seeing Europeanly: The Americanization of Arcadia." Truly American Studies even within Rolf Lundén's narrow definition. Very refreshing, and not just because I, as I suppose many do, have always connected Arcadia rather with Canada than with the United States, although the area Verrazano named Archadia was most likely located somewhere in Northern Carolina and not in Acadia. Some linguists have recently suggested that the name could possibly be a derivation of a Native word and have nothing to do with the Verrazano brothers.

Neset's article gives a short history of American landscape painting, talks about transatlantic iconology, and compares and analyzes several paintings and their relations particularly with the archetypal image of the good, happy place, Arcadia. For anyone who is teaching American art as a course, or wants to include something of it into her/his survey of American Studies, this article is recommended, if not must reading. Arne Neset can help you go through your 90 minutes lecture in the class much easier and better.

Very interesting are also the first two articles of *The Cultural Shuttle*. In his "E Pluribus Unum: A Motto for Europe," Denis Lacorne traces the European origins of the American "From many one" to Virgil's poem of *Moretum*. He also discusses other mottos and sentences related to American nationality and political system, and explains whether and how they fit or don't to describe the "radically new beginning without any historical precedent" – if that, indeed, was actually the case.

Although the editors write in the preface that the conference presentations printed in the book "have retained their pertinence" and "weathered the test of time," well, a European reader cannot be but amused when reading Lacorne enthusiastically talking about the coming European Union Constitution and even using it as a base for some of his analysis. We know now, of course, that the constitution was rejected by the French and the Dutch and it has been put on ice. For a Non-European reader, who is perhaps not quite aware of all this development, this can be quite confusing, perhaps even misleading.

This applies also for the second article on whether the European Union is “on the way to its Philadelphia” by Jean-Marie Ruiz. Nevertheless, Ruiz’s work is a very important comparison of the circumstances and the ideologies between the creation of the United States and what many hoped – and still do – would become the creation of a federal European Union. When Ruiz closes with the observation that “Federation now appears to Europeans as it once appeared to Americans as a solution to international dilemmas of the time,” he may have taken upon himself a greater mandate than what he actually had. When at least half of the people already inside the EU (not to mention the Europeans outside the Union) are critical if not even hostile to the idea of stronger federation, a more cautious comment would have perhaps been more appropriate.

And what about the “Americans” in Philadelphia? We may argue against Herbert Baxter Adams’ Germ theory and support Frederick Jackson Turner’s Frontier thesis, but the Founding fathers in Philadelphia were Europeans, or at least children of European immigrants. We can also argue endlessly about the impact the League of the Iroquois had on Benjamin Franklin’s ideas of a federation, but the fact remains that the political ideology behind the creation of the United States in 1787 was European.

Throughout *The Cultural Shuttle* the articles talk about the United States and Europe as if they were two totally different cultural and political concepts with interesting connections, and fail to see that, of course, the United States and its Americans are only another branch of the European tree. To me the United States has always been an interesting European adventure in a non-European environment. After reading *The Cultural Shuttle* it still is. The book actually confirms it.

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Herman Schwartz, *Right Wing Justice: The Conservative Campaign to Take over the Courts*. N.Y.: Nation Books, 2004. 328 pp. (index included); \$14.95.

Surveys show that Americans of mainstream political views mainly think about the judiciary when it issues a highly controversial decision such as outlawing school segregation, legalizing abortion, or overturning state sodomy laws – or when there is a vacant seat on the U.S. Supreme Court. Democrats have therefore generally viewed the judiciary as a non-sexxy nonstarter of an issue in American politics.

Not so Republicans, especially rightwing Republicans. They constantly think about remaking the courts, and the election of progressively more right-wing Republican presidents has served these conservatives well over the past forty years or so.

Presidents sit for 4, or if they are lucky, for 8 years. One of the best ways in which a president may make sure that his own political views will continue to hold power even after he is no longer in office, is to appoint federal judges who hold the same