Bert Bender, Evolution and the Sex Problem (Review)

David J Depew, University of Iowa
mortal danger of experiencing objects beyond the "familiar scene" in which they first "attained [their] epistemological force" (p. 80).

In the book's best chapter, the ostensibly plotless sketches of Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896) are compared to "life groups" anthropology exhibitions in which "the recreation of a scene of usage" (p. 92) replaced the simple display of archaeological artifacts. While putting antiquated tools into a cultural context (thus paralleling Jewett's local color descriptions of rural Maine customs), these tableaux also served to arrest human energy, making the people "as inanimate as the things around them" (p. 99).

Finally, Henry James explores "the psychology of collecting" in *The Golden Bowl* (1904), critiquing the era's connoisseur pretensions. Yet Brown argues that James's fabled late style—marked by his tireless delineation of cognition—represents an "internalizing" of that same impulse:

By rendering thinking itself as a mode of accumulation, [James] thus mak[es] Adam Verver's work of amassing European rarities seem like the merely physical version of a mental process, which is in large measure the process of making thoughts physical. (p. 164)

The intricacy of such interpretations makes *A Sense of Things* a complex and yet stimulating read. Never content with presenting a single hypothesis, Brown continually challenges his own conclusions, suggesting that for every cultural trend there is always an opposing (though perhaps not equal) counterforce to contend with.

Kirk Curnutt
*Troy University*
*Montgomery, Alabama*


Bert Bender studies fourteen American novelists from Frank Norris to John Steinbeck with a view to showing that the "eclipse of Darwinism," which accepted evolution but challenged natural selection as its mechanism, did not take Darwinism out of the novel. It led American novelists, whom Bender takes to be surprisingly well informed about evolutionary controversies, to emphasize Charles Darwin's different theory of sexual selection, which *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871) says is the motor of specifically human evolution. This transformed the traditional courtship novel by treating the Darwinian themes of female choice and compulsive male competition as explanatory. Bender's proof involves culling from the texts recurring terms and images that hark back to Darwin's works, such as *tangle* (as in Darwin's *tangled bank*), and powerful male hands, a Darwinian secondary sexual characteristic.

Bender is keen on showing how closely his novelists' themes reflect the changing history of evolutionary theory, in part because some had biology-based educations. Norris, for example, follows his University of California–Berkeley teacher Joseph Le Conte in tying sexual selection to Lamarckian progress from savage to civilized. Jack London was less Lamarckian but no less attuned to the theory of sexual selection, nature's way of more-making, rough-hew it how we may. Stephen Crane and Theodore Dreiser display a nature that produces men who love to fight over women in order, whether they know it or not, to get the species perpetuated. Bender's most persuasive reading has F. Scott Fitzgerald telling us precisely why Daisy chooses the big-handed Tom Buchanan over Gatsby.

Worries about the decline of the white race affect most of Bender's novelists, leading them to flirt with racist eugenics. Fitzgerald is full of the stuff. By the 1920s, another worry is at hand. Through Havelock Ellis, pop Freudianism has been added to pop Darwinism to generate novels in which unhappiness must necessarily result from failing to live in accord with one's evolution-bestowed sexual nature. This idea elicited a variety of responses. Sherwood Anderson thinks that, even if we take a Freudian cure, we are still mere tools of nature's indifferent more-making. Willa Cather engineers her women to escape from biological heredity by exercising female choice in the direction of sublimation, which she hopes is not
repressive. Gertrude Stein, who was schooled in evolutionary psychology by its founder, William James, stresses that sexual selection is not necessarily heteronormative; women are just as good as men in courtship battles for the possession of women. The novelists of the Harlem Renaissance struggle with the racist view that blacks are in no danger of unhappiness from sexual repression. Some embrace this view to show why whites are inferior. Others, notably W. E. B. Du Bois—another student of James—attack the image of black sexual primitiveness as a figment of white fantasy and neurosis.

Bender attempts to correlate the recession of these themes in Ernest Hemingway and Steinbeck with the rise of a new kind of Darwinism in the modern evolutionary synthesis, which refigured sexual selection as a form of a less deterministic natural selection. This suggestion requires further argument.

David Depew
University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa


Theodore Roosevelt's last decade has posed a problem for his biographers. Those ten years, from the time he left the White House in 1909 until his unexpected death at the beginning of 1919, saw him at his best and at his worst. In domestic affairs, his pursuit of another presidential nomination and candidacy as a third-party nominee afforded his greatest opportunity for developing and pursuing his reform ideas. In foreign affairs, his travels abroad and his reactions to World War I offered his widest scope for expounding his ideas about international order and the proper role of the United States in the world. At the same time, his courtship of southern whites opened him to charges of racial insensitivity or worse, while his furious attacks on Woodrow Wilson exposed him to allegations of envy and malice. Withal, Roosevelt made his greatest impact on American politics during this decade, even more than he had done as president. Yet this time remains a period neglected or slighted by most of his biographers, a recent exception being Kathleen Dalton in her excellent work, Theodore Roosevelt: A Strenuous Life (2002).

In this book Patricia O'Toole tackles TR's last decade head on. She has written a nicely balanced, compellingly readable account of that time. Unlike some of his other biographers (again, Dalton is an exception), O'Toole is not in awe of her subject. Her stance toward him is sympathetic, sometimes affectionate, and appreciative, but she is often skeptical about his motives. Repeatedly, she notes that TR was prone to hear trumpets calling him to honor and service when the promptings of personal ambition may have been echoing louder in his ears. Also, as she states in her preface, O'Toole strives to get beyond what he said for and about himself and to see him as he appeared to others, particularly those close to him. That effort has led her to search out some less familiar sources. One of the richest of those is the collection of manuscript letters of Archibald Willingham Butt, the military aide to Roosevelt and William Howard Taft, which were culled and sanitized for publication. Likewise, she does a good bit of local research to add color and information about TR's two great nonpolitical ventures of this decade, his hunting safari in East Africa in 1909 and 1910 and his exploration of the Amazon Basin in 1914. Her skepticism and research also produce some interesting insights about some of Roosevelt's less admired adversaries and associates, particularly Taft and George W. Perkins.

This is a fine account of TR's last decade. The political story is told well, as are the adventure tales in Africa and Brazil. As in Dalton's biography, Roosevelt's family emerges as a collection of interesting individuals and major actors in his life. The story of the service of Roosevelt's sons, son-in-law, and daughter-in-law overseas during World War I is particularly arresting. In my view, there is only one thing missing from this book. What makes Theodore Roosevelt most interesting was not his colorful life or vivid personality; it was his intellect. As one of only two genuine intellectuals to rise to the top in American politics since the Civil War (the other was Wilson), TR brought un-