established architecture and culture of the spa had a profound influence on the shape of early resorts. Nonetheless, there is a case that can and needs to be made for the major contribution of the seaside to architectural history. With the publication of this splendid book it is a case that can no longer be ignored.


John Lowney. *Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006. Pp. xii + 287. $39.95 (cloth).*

**Reviewed by James Smethurst, University of Massachusetts Amherst**

As John Lowney notes in the introduction to his excellent *History, Memory, and the Literary Left*, poetry has received short shrift in the comparative boom of scholarship on the artistic Left of the 1930s and 1940s over the last fifteen or twenty years. This is somewhat ironic since Cary Nelson’s *1989 Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and The Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910–1945* was one of the seminal studies ushering in this boom. However, with some notable exceptions, subsequent studies of the literary Left have focused on almost everything except poetry. Lowney addresses this gap in scholarship, joining a small band of distinguished scholars such as Nelson, Alan Filreis, William Maxwell, Stacy Morgan, and Michael Thurston, who have taken up the subject.

As is increasingly the case with scholars of artistic radicalism in the United States, Lowney seeks to place the cultural radicalism associated with “Third Period” and Popular Front Communism within a continuum of artistic and political practices while acknowledging the way that such epochal events as the onset of the Great Depression and the rise of the Cold War strained and disrupted continuity. Using six case studies (Muriel Rukeyser, Elizabeth Bishop, Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, Thomas McGrath, and George Oppen), Lowney examines the various ways in which poets whose work was significantly shaped by the radical currents of the 1930s and 1940s engaged with what Lowney, after Richard Terdiman, sees as the modernist crisis of cultural memory occasioned by the disruptions of modern industrial society.

However, instead of imagining a premodern moment of organic community, say late medieval Europe, Lowney argues that the sort of memory promoted by the literary Left tended toward the recollection or memorializing of people (workers, farmers, oppressed nationalities, and so on) who had rarely, if ever, been the focus of such memory. Such engagement with cultural memory sometimes took the form of documenting or memorializing events that might have otherwise gone unnoticed, or at least unsung. The epidemic of silicosis cases at Union Carbide’s Gauley Bridge silica mine in West Virginia which was the subject of Rukeyser’s “Book of the Dead” sequence in *U.S. 1* (1938) or the daily lives of the residents of the Mecca Building on Chicago’s South Side in Gwendolyn Brooks’s *In the Mecca* (1968) are cases in point. This “lest we forget” aspect of poetic memorializing is not only seen as a result of a perceived need for the subaltern writing her- or himself into the record, but also of an elegizing impulse that derives from the peculiar intensity of social disruption that takes place in working class communities, particularly, as Hughes and Brooks show, in African-American neighborhoods. In other words, one reason that Brooks wrote about the Mecca Building, where she worked for a time, is because it was knocked down as a part of an early “urban renewal” plan. One important contribution that Lowney’s study makes is the way in which it successfully locates Elizabeth Bishop’s Key West poetry in these sorts of recollecting and memorializing, linking Bishop with her more overtly Left contemporaries, such as her former college classmate Rukeyser.
Lowney also takes up some of the ways in which the literary Left that emerged in the 1930s and 1940s took up notions of cultural memory as tradition, whether one of revolutionary struggle (as was generally the case in the early 1930s) or of popular democratic struggle (as was more typical of the Popular Front era). He extends much of the newer scholarship on the connections between radical artists of the 1930s and 1940s and later cultural and political movements. In fact, most of the chapters on Hughes, Brooks, McGrath, and Oppen deal with their writing after the 1940s. His discussion of Brooks’s *In the Mecca*, for example, shows how Brooks’s first collection after her “conversion” to the Black Power and Black Arts movements, draws on work that she first began in the early 1950s, joining it to other pieces rooted in the events and landmarks of 1960s Chicago, such as the famous and most influential mural of that era, *The Wall of Respect*. In short, if Brooks was “converted” to militant nationalism, she (like her contemporaries Margaret Walker, Langston Hughes, Dudley Randall, and Margaret Burroughs) also brought many of the concerns, values, and artistic stances of the Popular Front era to Black Arts. In many respects, Lowney points out, *In the Mecca*, like Hughes’s *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951), McGrath’s *Letters to an Imaginary Friend* (1962), and, to a lesser extent, Oppen’s later poetry, is concerned with recollecting the buried world of the 1930s and 1940s Left in ways that make that world available to later generations—or at least that show how such useful recollection might be possible.

There are times when *History, Memory, and the Literary Left* strays away from the topic of memory into readings that, while often interesting, seem a bit distant from the main thrust of the project. Also, a little more could have been done to connect the chapter on George Oppen to the other chapters. As it is, it feels a little out of place, perhaps because Oppen’s political and artistic trajectory was so different from those of the other poets discussed in the book. While Lowney makes some reference to Oppen’s political work on the Left, he does not say much about Oppen’s relation to the literary Left before his hiatus from writing poetry (or at least publishing poetry) in the 1940s and 1950s. Perhaps some more consideration of the Objectivists as a Left cultural movement of the 1930s in dialogue and debate with other tendencies within the artistic world of the Communist Left might have helped situate the discussion of Oppen’s later work better. However, despite these quibbles, *History, Memory, and the Literary Left* greatly advances our sense of the range of Left poetry in the 1930s and 1940s, the manner in which it engaged, adapted, and critiqued modernism, and the way that Left poets of that era remained in touch with their earlier radicalism aesthetically and ideologically, if not organizationally.

**Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom.** Linda M. G. Zerilli. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Pp. xiv + 249. $55.00 (cloth); $22.00 (paper).

**Reviewed by Jane Elliott, University of York**

To set the stage for her groundbreaking intervention in recent feminist theory debates, Linda Zerilli recounts the following anecdote: in the early 1990s, a talk is given by a famous postmodern feminist associated with the deconstruction of gender. In the question-and-answer period, an irate audience member asks how, in the light of such deconstruction, the theorist knows that there are women in the room. The theorist responds, “Probably the same way you do” (33). Among the many significant contributions of *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* is the new purchase it offers on this odd phase in feminist history, often referred to as “foundationality debates.” How was it, Zerilli asks, that for nearly ten years academic feminists became obsessed