Review of LYNCHING PHOTOGRAPHS and WITNESSING LYNCHING

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In these stimulating new studies, Paul Gilmore and Rochelle Johnson approach nineteenth-century literary aesthetics from the conceptual poles articulated in Leo Marx’s The Machine in the Garden (1964). Gilmore’s Aesthetic Materialism shows how a range of Romantic writers embraced the “machine”—centrally the telegraph, and the electricity that enabled it—as an evocative vehicle for figuring new sorts of transcendent experiences. In Gilmore’s account, innovative technologies of communication and interconnection, no less than the electric oratory of Frederick Douglass or the sensuous poetry of Walt Whitman, serve as powerful conductors of human thought and experience across time, space, and race. Johnson’s Passions for Nature, by contrast, sides firmly with the “garden,” critiquing the tendency of a set of antebellum writers to describe the nonhuman environment in metaphorical terms, thereby translating the natural world into ideas in our minds rather than material things that surround us. Johnson, who teaches American literature and environmental studies at The College of Idaho, wishes to affirm a “counterpassion for nature;” which she describes as “the aesthetic pursuit of nature’s physicality” (10). Whereas Gilmore’s book emphasizes the cautious optimism of writers who mined new technologies for their aesthetic and world-transforming possibilities, Johnson’s study sounds an elegiac note, stressing instead the difficulties of bringing human consciousness into meaningful contact with an elusive natural environment.

Both scholars focus on philosophical questions of perception, mediation, and intersubjectivity, carefully situating this potentially abstract set of con-

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cerns within the specific historical conditions of an increasingly materialistic and technological United States. Gilmore’s *Aesthetic Materialism* addresses these questions through the prism of Romantic thought, positioning U.S. authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, and Harriet Beecher Stowe in relation to British romanticism and to a philosophical tradition stretching from Immanuel Kant to Ralph Waldo Emerson. This transatlantic, diachronic, and cross-disciplinary approach makes for startling connections. In fact, making links turns out to be both the central topic and the dominant methodology of the book. This approach is established in chapter 1, which describes how Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s ideas about electric language productively combined with inventor Samuel Morse’s technical innovations to figure “both the telegraph and art as enabling a kind of disembodied and disinterested communication” (47). Gilmore is shrewdly skeptical, however, about “the peaceful prospect of technological domination,” noting that this idealist aspiration not only celebrates a common humanity but also “hints at a potential political and moral uniformity” (57, 63).

Each chapter is similarly attentive to the constitutive tension of the writers’ Romantic project: simultaneously to acknowledge the material differences that separate human beings (into discrete bodies, into social classes, into political factions, into nations) and to surpass these divisions by appeal to the immaterial currents of electrifying aesthetic experience. Gilmore’s terrifically ambitious, wide-ranging second chapter takes up this question with respect to Lord Byron, Hawthorne, Thoreau, and Herman Melville. Originally published in a special issue of *American Literature* on “Aesthetics and the End(s) of Cultural Studies” (76 [September 2004]), “Aesthetic Electricity” includes a helpful reading of Melville’s notoriously twisted novel *Pierre* as both “a democratic erasure of boundaries and an aristocratic defense of them” (103). Chapter 3 persuasively shows how Douglass’s invocation of electrical connections across racial divides avoids the sentimental suppression of differences between selves (aligned with Stowe) and the transcendentalist elimination of the individual bounded self (associated with Emerson). Douglass “force[s] the reader to confront the limitations of a universalized humanism . . . while insisting on some sort of commonality as the ground for political reform” (132). In what is perhaps the least surprising of Gilmore’s readings, the final chapter explores the shocking pleasures and the indeterminate politics catalyzed by Whitman’s “more dynamic, electric connections of free verse” (173).

Whereas Gilmore shuttles between England and the United States, Johnson examines the specifically American traditions of nature writing, landscape painting, and garden design. She proposes that during the first half of the nineteenth century, writers’ “passions for nature” catalyzed a paradoxical sense of disconnection, prompting writers and artists to grope for metaphors to bring the nonhuman world into the realm of human comprehension. Organized into five chapters, Johnson’s study looks at three central metaphors: nature as progress (a trope she associates with artist Thomas Cole), nature
as refinement (a concept connected to Andrew Jackson Downing), and nature as reason (linked to the work of Emerson). Johnson bookends her study with a first chapter on Susan Fenimore Cooper’s nature journal *Rural Hours* (1850) and a last chapter on Thoreau; these two writers serve as conceptual touchstones throughout. Cooper in particular appears in each of the book’s five chapters, modeling humility, attentiveness to the concrete, and a recognition that “the significance of the natural world is beyond the powers of human expression” (182).

There is a kinship between Johnson’s study and the ecocriticism of Lawrence Buell and Michael Branch. One discerns other conceptual sources as well. By focusing on the “intrusion of metaphor” and supporting an “aesthetics of the ‘real’” (208, 59), Johnson’s work echoes Susan Sontag’s (though *Illness as Metaphor* does not appear on the otherwise comprehensive list of works cited). Her emphasis on the “irrecoverable story” of nature and on Cooper’s “expression of grief” and “laments” also suggests links to contemporary trauma theory (40, 41).

Despite the two scholars’ quite different conclusions, their studies constitute thoughtful responses to a methodological quandary: How is a historicist critic to approach the topic of nineteenth-century aesthetics without 1) taking a sociological approach that reduces aesthetics to ideology, or 2) adopting a formalist approach that abstracts aesthetic concerns from material conditions and political struggles? Both Gilmore and Johnson negotiate this difficulty by attending to particular ways that this sort of tension—between the concrete and the abstract, and between the material of the world and the resources of human expression—characterized aesthetic experience as it was theorized by antebellum American writers. In short, these works will prove valuable for scholars working in a wide range of fields.

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*The War in Words: Reading the Dakota Conflict through the Captivity Literature.* By Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press. 2009. xxxiv, 363 pp. $60.00.


These two studies of North American captivities focus on the ubiquity of captivity as a part of late-nineteenth-century conflicts in two disparate areas of the U.S. West and, especially in the case of Kathryn Derounian-Stodola’s *The War in Words*, on the variety of ways the testimonies of captives have been shaped, disseminated, and received. Both Derounian-Stodola and Victoria
Smith demonstrate that captivity was endemic to the “Indian wars” of the period, particularly in border areas such as Arizona and Minnesota, but that our understanding of captives and their narratives has been limited and in many cases poorly informed. To read these two texts is to better understand how important the genre of the captivity narrative has been to American literary and cultural history and how narrowly it has thus far been defined.

In *The War in Words*, Derounian-Stodola concentrates on captives’ accounts of the Dakota War of 1862 in Minnesota, providing information on that particular conflict while commenting insightfully on the history and uses of the captivity narrative in general. Captivities, she notes, have always been a traditional form of American writing and are perhaps the most familiar form of American war narrative. Both she and Smith point out, however, that the captivities that have thus far caught the attention of both scholars and such popularizers as the authors of dime novels have been primarily the stories of whites (usually women) who were kidnapped by Indians. These two studies make it abundantly clear that Indians and whites—and, in the case of Arizona, Mexicans as well—were busy kidnapping each other and then enslaving, adopting, trading, and possibly even marrying their captives. The origins and experiences of the books’ subjects vary so widely that terms such as “Indian captivity” or even “captivity narrative” begin to seem at best inadequate and at worst freighted with misleading assumptions. Both works therefore contribute to a reading of the West that emphasizes multiplicity—of perspectives, experiences, and loyalties, even among groups we might assume to be united by ethnicity or nationality.

Derounian-Stodola has chosen to divide the narratives she examines into two groups, one by whites and one by Natives, in order to emphasize the differences in the ways the two groups represented their experiences of the Dakota conflict and consequently the differences in the ways they understood what the conflict was about and what it meant. Separating the narratives according to the ethnicity of the narrator and including an equal number from each group, she notes, not only removes the dominance of the white voices but also underscores the vast differences in the significance attributed to the conflict by whites and Natives. Simply placing the two kinds of narratives alongside each other is therefore remarkably instructive.

Although Smith also considers both white and Native (and Mexican) captives in *Captive Arizona, 1851–1900*, she characterizes her study as gender-based. Given that most captives—white, Native, or Mexican—were women or children and all of the captors were men, the study of captivities, Smith argues, can help reorient our understanding of this period, adjusting what has been its persistent bias toward the experiences of men and restoring the stories of women and children whose lives could be as difficult, as marked by violence, and as determinative of the course of events as the lives of men.

These books are deeply researched, and while there are times when a reader might wish for both authors to be more discursive about the signifi-
cance of their information, the stories and details they include are themselves a crucial way of fleshing out the histories of the U.S. West. Both scholars contextualize their accounts by providing photographs and, where possible, by following the lives of the captives after their escape or release. Considering these subjects’ entire lives leads the authors to the recognition, particularly interesting to Smith, of how much remains unknown about the thoughts and motivations of the prisoners, both during their ordeals and afterward. Smith’s primary example is Olive Oatman, who may well have borne children during her captivity among the Mohave. If she did have mixed-blood children—which she denied, although some evidence suggests otherwise—she left them behind when she returned to white society, and her motives for doing so can be only a matter of speculation. Some captives, that is, knew more than they wished to tell, and therefore more than we will probably ever know.

Both writers emphasize the centrality of captivity narratives to the history and culture of the United States. Derounian-Stodola, especially, remarks on the prominence of the theme of captivity in modern and contemporary Native literature, making the connection between captivity as a resonant trope and as historical reality. It can be revealing to recognize the extent to which the taking of hostages has been part of U.S. military history; it can be equally revealing to consider how narrowly the American captivity narrative has thus far been construed. *The War in Words* and *Captive Arizona* succeed in resituating the genre, complicating its definition, and restoring many previously neglected stories, and they do so with energy and conviction. The two studies are, as Smith puts it, “turning over new academic ground with a sharp stick” (xiv).

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Research on racial violence has dramatically proliferated, and it shows no signs of waning, especially as gruesome images generate interest both inside and outside of the academy. In 2000, the publication of *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* made nearly one hundred pictures of mob victims readily available. The images have motivated conferences on racial violence, museum exhibitions around the country, and a virtual exhibition on the World Wide Web. They also led the U.S. Senate to issue in June 2005 a formal apology for having never passed antilynching legislation. The nation’s
increasing willingness to acknowledge this history thus seems to coincide with the reemergence of visual evidence produced by the mob itself. Because whites took most of these pictures, and appear in them, the photographs have become testimony that simply cannot be ignored. Many current studies of racial violence are inspired by this archive, including the essays by Shawn Michelle Smith and Dora Apel in *Lynching Photographs*, yet such work also confirms the importance of contextualizing visual evidence in ways made possible by collections like Anne Rice’s *Witnessing Lynching*.

*Lynching Photographs* is not a coauthored study. Indeed, the authors’ approaches illustrate the different directions scholarship on racial violence can take. Smith’s “The Evidence of Lynching Photographs” demonstrates that an image can support multiple agendas. Her primary example is the photograph made famous because James Cameron, founder of Milwaukee’s Black Holocaust Museum, survived the violence depicted. Smith contends that although the picture represented whites’ power to kill with impunity, it became a means for Cameron to “organize, even manage, the traumatic experience of lynching” (14). Likewise, while the image was used by many mainstream newspapers as proof that white men avenge rape, black newspapers insisted that because there was no evidence of rape, the photograph documented white barbarity and injustice. In the context of Ku Klux Klan memorabilia, the picture celebrates white supremacist accomplishment (26). Yet, when placed in a French textbook, it “subtly encourages French students to overlook their own nation’s ‘racial issues’ by drawing attention to another country’s racist madness” (28). Smith also examines how the evidence provided by lynching photographs has been used by antiabortion activists, and in another context, by rap group Public Enemy as it questioned rape allegations against Mike Tyson. She concludes powerfully by discussing photography’s role in the Senate’s apology.

Apel’s essay “Lynching Photographs and the Politics of Public Shaming” follows Smith’s, and encountering them together demonstrates a point about which the authors agree: lynching photographs do not have stable meanings; everything depends on context. The same proves to be true of lynching scholarship. Current studies of racial violence are neither inherently anti-lynching nor inherently apologies for racist murder; many factors determine the implications of such work.

Apel offers description (more than analysis) and matter-of-fact statements of how events unfolded and were justified. As a result, when she says that “whites compulsively reasserted their power by violating and defiling the black body over and over again” and reproduces the photograph of the mutilated body, little analytical pressure is placed on what the community did or the justifications it offered. Indeed, Apel’s analysis only goes this far: “Lynching, meant to terrorize all blacks and to increase the economic power and control of whites, was carried to its logical extreme when it escalated into an attack
on the entire black community and drove out the black laborers who competed with whites for jobs” (51). Here and elsewhere, the scholarship makes no attempt at redressing the violence or questioning the reasons for which it was perpetrated; the violence and justifications are simply described, and the logic is left undisturbed. This scholarly approach is troubling—especially because the piece purports to offer insights about public shaming but does not take a clear stance on questions such as: Whose shame? Do the implications change given whose shame it is? Can recounting successful shaming simply reproduce the cultural work of those moments?

The manner in which Apel’s essay utilizes gruesome photographs reminds the reader of Smith’s observations: “Because their meaning is determined by context and circulation and the interests of specific viewers, the evidence in them cannot be fixed” and “viewers always see photographs through other images” (15). Apel agrees: “the context in which these photos are represented makes all the difference” (78). These remarks are especially poignant when several photographs of mutilated black bodies seem to serve as mere prelude to Apel’s clearest argument, illustrated with one Abu Ghraib image.

The visual archive’s importance will never diminish, but Rice’s Witnessing Lynching offers context that can easily go missing when scholars rely on artifacts produced by the mob. After all, “lynching photographs never represent the victim’s story” (Smith 13). And because members of targeted communities were rarely eyewitnesses at lynching sites, their understanding of the violence came from myriad representations, both visual and verbal (Smith 17). Recognizing this, Rice edited her anthology hoping that “we will listen to what [the literature] can tell us about how lynching was experienced by those who were its victims” because “another legacy of [the lynching era] is the extraordinary heroism and courage of those who stood” against it (3, 2).

Rice collects poetry, essays, fiction, and drama written between 1890 and 1935 by African American and white American writers. Because many selections address historical events, the volume is arranged chronologically, but Rice’s introduction offers guidance for grouping the selections in other ways. Helpful thematic engagements include “Militance and Masculinity,” “Lynching and Womanhood,” and “Witnessing.”

Ultimately, scholars must work with an awareness of how and why the available archives came into existence and were preserved. If the same evidence can convey different meanings, much is determined by methodology. Considering material generated by targeted communities, not just mobs, helps complete the story that pictures tell.

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Dohra Ahmad’s Landscapes of Hope and Cynthia Tolentino’s America’s Experts reframe the geo-temporal boundaries and ethical concerns of transnational and anticolonial writing in the United States between 1890 and 1940. Ahmad’s elaboration of the counterfactual world of possibility envisioned by exiled Indian nationalists and their pan-Africanist interlocutors is lucid and well written. Tolentino’s no less intellectually rigorous book is, unfortunately, jargon-laden. Both works extend the reader’s grasp of the history of Afro-Asian radicalism in the United States. Tolentino’s subjects—Filipino, Asian, and African American writers—individually seek agency and perspective in the discourse of social science, while Ahmad locates her writer-activists in communities of dissent, where they forge a redemptive social vision by reinventing utopian narrative.

In Landscapes of Hope, Ahmad outlines the social Darwinist bent of utopian fiction, reading the works of Edward Bellamy, William Dean Howells, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman through the lens of their conservative alignment of racial purity, cultural homogeneity, and progress. Antimodernists and humanists, from Rabindranath Tagore to W. E. B. DuBois, strategically redeploy the techniques of utopian fiction (defamiliarization, historical revisionism, spatial and temporal relocation) to revalue mysticism, irrationality, and primitivism as antidotes to the spiritual malaise of the West. DuBois’s Dark Princess is a visionary work, which serves as a model of the new multicultural political idealism. Expanding her catalog of utopian texts to include oppositional periodicals and manifestos envisioning a better order and communal space, Ahmad focuses on Young India, edited by Lajpat Rai, who imaginatively works out India’s future—pre-Independence—from a position of exile. While foregrounding the New York milieu in which an anticolonial utopia takes shape, by placing diverse writers in proximity and allowing for the emergence of a discourse of solidarity, Ahmad acknowledges the many contradictions and schisms that occur throughout her study. Against DuBois’s advocacy of Afro-Asian solidarity, Rai aligns India with the United States as an emerging postcolonial world power. Whereas Young India attempts to classify Indians as white, DuBois valorizes racial hybridity as the basis of global emancipation.

The atomization of utopian elements in the literature of national liberation is instructive. Landscapes of Hope participates in the Romantic anticolonialism of its subjects by muting the distinction between actuality and possibility. Ahmad criticizes Richard Wright’s The Color Curtain both for its cynicism and for Wright’s fabrication of data acquired at the Asian African
Conference in Bandung, Indonesia. In contrast to Wright’s negative revisionism, Young India’s censorship of Tagore’s antinationalism and A. K. Coomaraswamy’s anti-industrialism is excused because the journal must project a united front to counter British depictions of India as an insular subcontinent. Young India is also praised for contesting the central myth backing up British colonial rule: the black hole of Calcutta. Ahmad avers that this is “what the past looks like when history is not written by the victors.” There seems a certain danger in conflating literary and political objectives: “the bold premise that one can write one’s way out of a present injustice” (13). Yet Ahmad’s study is persuasive. Symbolic realization can serve as the basis for critique and perhaps for communal liberation from tyranny as well.

In America’s Experts, Tolentino posits an overlooked connection between the emergence of ethnic literature and the ascension of sociology as the official U.S. discourse on race in the late 1930s. Just as imperial narratives of Manifest Destiny figured white Americans as the protagonists of civilization, canonical sociology established the white social scientist as the arbiter of racial reform. Gunnar Myrdal’s An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy (1944) clearly reflects the diplomatic urgency to counter Soviet and Axis propaganda highlighting domestic race problems as undermining American claims to political and cultural superiority. Commissioned by the Carnegie Foundation, Myrdal’s book is emblematic of liberal sociology’s advocacy of U.S. global ascension through the education and assimilation of blacks, whereby black professionals function as global mascots of progress while simultaneously being denied their own efforts at knowledge production and full citizenship. For Myrdal, Wright’s complex engagement with sociology (and communism) reveals a paradoxical conception of blacks: as problems in need of uplift (or revolutionary intervention) from without and as native informants (or professional agents) who could facilitate that intervention. Wright’s invention of a new type of black writer, a narrator of racial identity, hinges on his ability to see blackness as an object of sociological study and interest within larger narratives of Western civilization.

Tolentino’s innovation is to connect the broader discourse on black, educated professionals with colonial discourses of racial uplift and Americanization, which have their origin in the tutelary policy of benevolent assimilation in the Philippines circa 1900. Henry Luce’s 1941 editorial “The American Century” boasts a vision of professionalism that is shown to resonate deeply with Filipino and Asian American writers, as evidenced by Jade Snow Wong’s autobiographical figure: the female artist-entrepreneur. Employing a transnational framework allows Tolentino to draw parallels between the fraught self-understanding of ethnic American intellectuals of the World War II period—as professional subjects and as pathologized objects of sociology—and the model minority discourse emerging in the 1960s. Problematically, the intersections between discourses of Cold War civil rights and colonialism project ethnic American citizenship as dependent on the internal cultural reform of
the ethnic subject rather than on the elimination of the social and economic conditions that perpetuate inequality and ostracism. Countering the tendency of literary critics to view the sociological cast of twentieth-century ethnic literature as an obstacle to aesthetic achievement, Tolentino demonstrates the importance of sociology to intellectuals of color, as both an academic discipline and a nationalist discourse that calls into question U.S. domination at home and abroad, in her readings of Wright’s *Native Son*, Carlos Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart*, and Wong’s *Fifth Chinese Daughter*. While three of four chapters have been published elsewhere, Tolentino’s taut comparative analysis justifies republication in book form.

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Of the cultural studies about the effects of warfare on American literary forms, there may be no end. While a few scattered anthologies of war fiction and poetry appeared in the Civil War era and after World War I, the field quietly expanded—mostly with individual approaches to Stephen Crane or Ernest Hemingway, culminating in Paul Fussell’s monumental approach to Wilfred Owen and war poetry in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975). Stressing the impact of memory, two recent books, *Ashes of the Mind* and *The Other Side of Grief*, focus on the Civil War and the Vietnam War, respectively. Although the two wars they discuss are separated by a century, the books are yoked by fascination with memories of slaughter and defeat, survival and victories.

Well into his brilliantly theoretical *Ashes of the Mind*, Martin Griffin explains his methodology: “As styles of mourning and cultural assumptions about the status of the dead in social memory change, so the capacity to read specific commemorative texts and grasp their emotional background fades also, often rendering the older form of expression anachronistic, even indecipherable” (70). Excluding Southern writing because of its relatively simplified conviction of moral superiority in defeat of the Lost Cause, Griffin seeks—usually successfully, at times superbly—to decipher “the Northern journey through loss, uncertainty, memory, and self-criticism” (8). Eschewing new critical, historical, and deconstructionist models, the book, through close readings of carefully selected texts, expands a distinctive canon of U.S. war literature.
The study consists of five chapters (and a coda, plus thirty pages of dense footnotes mainly theoretical and bibliographical). It begins with a reading of critically overlooked poet James Russell Lowell’s 1865 Harvard “Commemoration Ode,” which provides the book’s title and theme: the “ashes of the burnt-out mind” are compared negatively to the existential danger of battle (23). Griffin gives a fine reading, often with comparisons to Walt Whitman’s “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d”—with critical theory ranging from Cleanth Brooks to Harold Bloom.

The second chapter successfully studies Herman Melville’s “democratically anonymous tones” and minimalist aesthetic in Battle-Pieces (23). The third chapter, on Henry James—yes, The Bostonians as postwar novel—blew this reviewer’s mind: Griffin argues that Basil Ransom and the spirit of the Lost Cause provide the book’s key as Civil War fiction. The critique is fresh and fascinating. Almost as revealing is an excellent psychological examination of Ambrose Bierce’s short war narratives (and briefly, references to Stephen Crane). The final chapter, also innovative, concentrates on Paul Laurence Dunbar’s sonnet “Robert Gould Shaw”; the coda brings to life three non-canonical readings of texts by Josephine Shaw Lowell, Sherwood Bonner, and Jane Addams.

This study is rich in critical and cultural insights, adding to the list of writers who have not been perceived as creating war literature (as in the cases of, say, Emily Dickinson or Virginia Woolf). Ultimately, “Lowell’s elegiac celebration, Melville’s recalcitrance, James’s complex sympathies, Bierce’s nihilism, and Dunbar’s irony” sustain Griffin’s forceful argument that while Southern Civil War authors were authentically nostalgic, these Northern authors created authentic realisms (212).

Maureen Ryan’s The Other Side of Grief is a different scholarly endeavor. Rather than focusing on a few complex texts for explication, Ryan deals fulsomely with two massive projects. The size of her subject is awesome: the thousands—literally—of representations of cultural productions treating what she calls in the introduction (after Fussell) “the Vietnam War and Modern memory” (1). To make sense of this plethora of novels, short stories, plays, and films—La Salle University’s special collection includes nine thousand volumes of fiction and poetry alone—Ryan falls back on an earlier tradition of American literary study, with works by critics such as Van Wyck Brooks, Joseph Warren Beach, and Alfred Kazin providing a model. But Ryan does not simply provide a bibliography; she also supplies a controlling, inclusive metaphor: “You had to be there.” Narratives from the perspective of the soldier, prisoner, wife, widow, veteran, patient, and evacuee provide a nuanced understanding of the war.

Thus, The Other Side of Grief deserves two main audiences. The book should be an invaluable starting point for teachers, students, scholars, and pundits who need help choosing which works to study. At the same time, this literary critical work makes a massive sociohistorical-political point: the Viet-
Vietnam War was everywhere, harming soldiers, civilians, protesters, relatives, and lovers.


Ryan does spend some time with well-known narratives by Robert Mason, Larry Heinemann, Tim O’Brien, and with the perhaps lesser-known work of Ward Just and Robert Olen Butler. Still, the genuine power of *The Other Side of Grief* comes not from the book’s encyclopedic scope but from the author’s sympathetic discoveries and illuminations among the many who truly were there, physically or spiritually, and utterly changed. Thus, what may have seemed to be broad scholarship becomes passionate homage.

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The 2002 film *Men in Black II*, with its alien invaders, battle over the Statue of Liberty, and enforced forgetting of the past, enacts many long-standing tropes of immigration narratives on the popular stage. It raises three central questions, argue Rachel Rubin and Jeffrey Melnick in *Immigration and American Popular Culture*: “What are immigrants going to ‘do’ to American culture? And what is American culture going to ‘do’ to immigrants? And also: what will American popular culture producers do ‘about’ immigrants?” (3). These questions merge in current studies of immigration in the United States, as scholars have come to consider the immigrant and America as mutually constitutive. This is the underlying approach of both Sarah Chinn’s *Inventing Modern Ado-
iescence and Rubin and Melnick’s volume. Both books examine the give-and-take in fresh, evocative ways, often with surprising results. The immigrant origin of modern American adolescence forms the centerpiece of Chinn’s work, while Rubin and Melnick explore the ways in which developments in immigration history and ethnic experience and relations in the United States have been acted out, worked through, and even produced by popular culture.

Asking “What is the history of [the] assumption of antagonism between adolescents and their parents?” (3), Chinn sets her sights earlier and elsewhere than standard histories of American adolescence. She contends that adolescence was “invented” at the turn of the twentieth century by urban working-class children of immigrant parents. Reformers wrung their hands as they observed these rapidly Americanizing teenagers disown the ways of their parents, and they interpreted what they saw as a terrifying breakdown of family and authority among new Americans. Their concerns, Chinn claims, established a framework for understanding adolescence that would be applied to all American teens in short order.

Chinn argues compellingly that what led the young-adult children of immigrants to assert themselves was not only their desire for a place in the United States but also the economic and social realities that enabled them to claim it. With child labor laws taking children under fourteen largely out of the workplace, older teens were encouraged to work. Workplace camaraderie helped create a sense of distinctive identity. So did the money earned. Although it was not much and often had to be turned over to parents, the very fact of their earning power instilled in these young people a sense of freedom and entitlement. It also enabled them to pursue commercial leisure activities that allowed them to be together and engage America. They congregated in dance halls, cinemas, and amusement parks, and there, away from the surveillance of parents and community, they experimented with Americanism, consumption, and sexuality.

Reading a remarkable range of sources, Chinn provides an exhilarating analysis of the ways teenage identity emerged from the experience of these young people. The book’s one weakness is that it offers only suggestions as to how their culture spread. The final chapter explores its links to bohemians and academics but leaves readers wondering whether later mainstream youth culture was an outgrowth or a parallel development. Such analysis is beyond the scope of Chinn’s book, which convincingly demonstrates that as much as they were shaped by the United States, these young, working, new Americans “etch[ed] new ways of being onto the surface of American culture” (12).

Rubin and Melnick contend similarly that “‘immigrants’ and ‘American popular culture’ have created each other” (3). Employing a case-study approach, they explore the role of immigrants as subjects, consumers, and producers of popular culture and what this has meant for diverse ethnic groups and for U.S. culture more broadly. They closely examine pop-cultural productions from six decades—1930s gangster movies, 1940s zoot suits, the
1957 musical *West Side Story*, 1960s work by Ravi Shankar, 1970s Jamaican origins of rap music, and early-twenty-first-century Asian American zines. This array enables Rubin and Melnick to provide a rich transcultural and transnational analysis grounded in histories of immigration law, foreign policy, and globalization. They make no claim to exhaustiveness, suggesting that “the best response we could hope for would be a reader who encounters something . . . here and thinks, ‘Yes, but also . . . ,’” and their book produces many such moments (11).

Particularly interesting is their placement of an exploration of the gap between representation and self-representation of immigrant subjects in popular culture within the context of minstrelsy. Their chapter on *West Side Story* considers how the musical’s Jewish writers voiced Puerto Rican American experience. Dealing with the ambiguous position of newly arrived “brown” internal migrants, whose trajectory had been shaped by U.S. imperialism and capitalism, these writers represented Puerto Ricans as the next immigrant group positioned for assimilation and intermarriage. Meanwhile, Puerto Rican immigrant artists were far more concerned with the immediate realities of racism, economics, and cultural retention. Other chapters show how new ethnic voices could take center stage, under what conditions and at what cost. The chapter on Shankar illustrates how his popularity was based on his ability to stand for India as a spiritual alternative to U.S. militarism and materialism and reveals the irony of young white Americans accessing this India through consumption of music and fashion. In contrast to the near invisibility of South Asian immigrant experience in the pop culture of the period, Rubin and Melnick explain the centrality of Jamaican immigrants to American music. As “victims” of U.S. cultural imperialism, they had acquired pop-cultural literacy and strategies before ever leaving the West Indies, making them immediately able to cut, mix, and repackage what they found on arrival in the United States.

From zoot suits to zines, many of the artifacts described in *Immigration and American Popular Culture* were produced or consumed by young adults. This is not Rubin and Melnick’s focus, but reading their book alongside Chinn’s highlights the particular significance of immigrant youth to American culture.

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James Winn’s *The Poetry of War* and Jon Adams’s *Male Armor* examine images of masculinity defined by war literature. Winn’s study, as the title suggests, focuses on poetry and the culturally defined tropes that establish manhood and glorify prowess in war. Words such as “honor” and “courage”—words Ernest Hemingway “declared obscene” (32)—appear with frequency from Homer’s *Iliad* to Richard Lovelace’s “To Lucasta, Going to the Wars,” which provides for Winn a sort of starting point with its final lines, “I could not love thee (dear) so much, / lov’d I not Honour more” (21). Winn’s book, while a fairly traditional literary study, offers cultural commentary and personal observations that clearly illustrate Winn’s stake in this issue, important in the days of Homer as well as those of Bruce Springsteen. In ways more highly theoretical than Winn’s, Adams’s book examines “the persistent gap between civilian expectation and soldierly experience of war” (23), a gap which, Adams argues, facilitates the continuation of war. The authors share a distaste for violence and definitions of manhood based on hostility. Adams hopes to obliterate that persistent gap and thereby end cultural sanctions of war, but both books convey the message that war is more about blood, gore, and death than it is about glory.

Winn begins *The Poetry of War* by citing Douglas MacArthur’s 1962 address to the cadets at West Point, in which the old soldier alludes to “Duty . . . Honor . . . Country,” all, in MacArthur’s economy, “hallowed words” (12). The oldest of these concepts, according to Winn, is honor, which motivated first the Greeks and succeeding poets who sought to overlay the poetry of their own times with the language of history. Even World War I poets, eager to get into the fight, used the language of the past to describe what was to become the defining moment of the twentieth century in terms of the cynicism it ultimately generated. Wilfred Owen, among the most graphic anti-war poets of the time, eschews the language of history and depicts war as the soldier experiences it. Exploring the concept of shame as a motivator of war valor as it appears in Homeric epics, the brutality of later empires and their apologists, and finally the fight for liberty against potential oppressors, Winn also explores the homoerotic nature of men living and dying in such close proximity. Greek homoeroticism has long been acknowledged, but Winn also delves into twentieth-century poetry’s depictions of male bonding. Ending his chapter “Comrades in Arms” with Owen’s poem “Strange Meeting,” he finds a curious tenderness in the suggestion that the enemy dead lie down to rest with his now-dead killer, the line “Let us sleep now . . .” suggesting a kind of intimate knowledge.
Winn argues successfully that language both reflects and creates the meaning of war. Poetry, as in the case of Rudyard Kipling, can reify wartime propaganda or it can undermine that voice with images of brutal death. Closing his book with the lyrics from Springsteen’s “Born in the U.S.A.,” Winn argues that the poets who deserve recognition are not the ones that “sustain false versions of honor,” but those who have “made real the rich, contradictory emotions” of war (219).

In *Male Armor*, Adams interrogates the notion that performance in war defines masculinity, that war makes men. Instead, war and its cultural expectations undermine the soldier’s ability to reintegrate into civilian society once war is over. Beginning with examples of soldiers from Operation Iraqi Freedom, Adams illustrates first the ubiquity of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the continued inability or unwillingness of the military to successfully deal with it. Soldiers suffering from PTSD are often belittled or feminized because an admission of psychological distress contradicts common definitions of masculinity. Adams examines literary works, beginning with Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*, which in the character of the old man Santiago establishes a template of manliness—strength, endurance, bravery, and finally humility. But Hemingway’s model, Adams argues, is anachronistic. As World War II veterans, Norman Mailer and James Jones among them, began to write of their war experiences, their views contradicted the public understanding of what that war had been. Characters in Mailer’s *The Naked and the Dead* and Jones’s *The Thin Red Line* experience fear and are unsure how or why they are where they are. A third World War II novel, Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*, further illustrates the absurdity and futility of war. According to Adams and other critics, the novel links World War II with Vietnam, in which the goal of the soldier becomes not honor or valor, but survival, the effort to remain whole.

Like Winn, Adams also looks at homoeroticism in war literature, especially in works such as David Rabe’s play *Streamers*, which seeks to debunk the myths linking war valor and masculinity. Among other works Adams discusses are Michael Herr’s memoir *Dispatches* and two post-Vietnam works, David O. Russell’s *Three Kings* and Anthony Swofford’s *Jarhead*, both of which were made into films. In all of these works, Adams focuses on that “gap between civilian expectation and soldierly experience of war” (23). Except for an overreliance on quotations from other theorists, Adams is quite adept in underscoring that distance and its often deadly results. His hope in writing this book is that civilians will come to understand this gap and perhaps bring an end to armed conflicts, an admirable if idealistic aim.

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These books are certainly illuminating to read together. Both look back at the Vietnam War and the subsequent decades of literary and cultural representation from the vantage of yet another disastrous war, the Bush administration’s invasion and occupation of Iraq. Both are about memory and forgetting, truth and fiction, and what role literary representations of the American experience in Vietnam played in where we find ourselves today—in another century, and in yet another foreign country.

Tobey Herzog’s superbly conceived book of interviews debriefs four veterans, each of whom as authors transformed their military experiences into canonical works of American literature of the Vietnam War. In Writing Vietnam, Writing Life, Herzog gives each of these men ample room to reflect on the meaning of the war for his own life and for the United States today; any student of the war will welcome the lucid and thorough contextualizing of central literary narratives provided by these authors in response to Herzog’s empathetic prodding.

William Spanos’s work of literary and cultural criticism, American Exceptionalism in the Age of Globalization, applies poststructuralist theory to works by two of these same authors (Philip Caputo and Tim O’Brien), as well as to The Quiet American by Graham Greene, to argue that the Vietnam War continues to haunt America’s self-concept as a “redeemer nation.” For anyone familiar with scholarly work on the American literature and culture of the Vietnam War, Spanos’s chapter-length studies of The Quiet American, Caputo’s A Rumor of War, and O’Brien’s Going after Caciatto cover already well-trodden ground. His lengthy assertions about the relevance of the Puritan jeremiad and American frontier mythology to the Vietnam topic do not come as news. One might well wonder if Spanos would have done better to boil down what he has new to say in this post-9/11, post-Bush era into an op-ed piece for the New York Times or perhaps a polemic for a magazine of thought and opinion. For all the invocations of Martin Heidegger and Louis Althusser, Spanos tells a more than twice-told tale of Viet-vet writers as “American Ishmaels who have seen America’s shadow” (259). He does carry forward the literary and cultural conversation somewhat in claiming that the attempt “to lay the ghost” by forgetting Vietnam “transformed a healthy debate over the idea of America into a national neurosis” (ix).

In Herzog’s book, Caputo and O’Brien in particular appear as frustrated as Spanos about the seeming lack of impact of the literature of the Vietnam War on U.S. foreign policy as evidenced by the U.S. invasion of Iraq. In a canny
move, Herzog concludes each of the interviews by interrogating his subjects about what they have retained or let go of their Vietnam experience in their lives in the twenty-first century, and what talismans they have kept from their service. Referring to the medals on his wall, medals he had asked to possess again after returning them to Nixon's White House, Caputo says: "You can't escape [the war]; you might as well try to deny you were born for that matter" (43). Of the dress uniform he keeps in his closet, O'Brien asserts that it is "an artifact of history in the same way that, say you robbed a bank and went to jail—you'd want artifacts of your own mistakes around . . . to remind you of the person you were and don't do it again" (132). Of the uniform hanging on his closet door, Robert Olen Butler sees an "artifact of my life and very much of my writer's life," since "I can't imagine what I would be without having done that, but it wouldn't be this" (177). Always the least abstract of the Vietnam authors, Larry Heinemann announces that he threw his uniform away, but that in the 1980s he carried his medals "to Vietnam and left them at the Truong Son Cemetery near the old DMZ, where something like ten thousand Vietnamese war dead are buried" (87).

Such reflections by these "American Ishmaels," along with the election of a new president—a memoirist himself capable of a nuanced, reflective rhetoric that draws on the language of Abraham Lincoln, William Faulkner, and Martin Luther King Jr. to acknowledge past national errors while insisting on the foundations of what is best in American traditions—can perhaps yet offer some hope that the Vietnam memory will in the end prove more productive than either the Vietnam syndrome that obsessed neoconservatives or the Vietnam neurosis diagnosed by Spanos.

John Hellmann, Ohio State University

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In Art as Performance, Story as Criticism, Muskogee Creek writer and scholar Craig Womack takes a unique approach to literary scholarship by including fiction, some of which offers accounts of his subjects. (Lynn Riggs is a character in the play Lightning, for example). Womack explains that he wants "authors, and the subjects of their creations, to emerge as characters, the way fully rounded subjects of fiction do" (51). Here Womack makes the value judgment that fiction constitutes performance in a way traditional criticism
(merely “talking about”) does not. The monograph opens with a short story about a fictional Indian filmmaker, a story which can be seen as “a vehicle for discussing some of the more universal aspects of the role of the artist” (47). What is especially unusual here is that Womack devotes the subsequent chapter, or “Mus(e)ing,” as he names the chapters, to an in-depth analysis of his own story, lamenting at one point that he has “hidden lots of secrets throughout [his] books, and most go unremarked upon by readers” (43). By providing his own critique, he can share some of those secrets with obtuse readers.

In other Mus(e)ings Womack reintroduces works by several American Indian writers to which scholars have paid lamentably little attention (works by writers such as E. Pauline Johnson, Alexander Posey, Lynn Riggs, Durango Mendoza, and Beth Brant). In “refracting characters through as many different fiction and nonfiction angles of vision as possible” (52), Womack brings to life, as it were, these authors and thereby offers both scholars and teachers new literary and critical approaches to their works. He also weaves into his scholarship examinations of how literature speaks to contemporary concerns such as the Creek freedmen issue, the Iraq war, and the ban on gay marriage. He argues that “[n]ot enough Indian artists are talking about the things that matter,” and that as an artist and musician he has “a responsibility to deal with the real world” (113). In providing his readings of the texts, the authors, and world politics, Womack continually “vacillates between analysis and performance,” thus always furthering his thesis that art itself is performance and storytelling is a fruitful form of criticism.

If it is true, as Womack asserts, that “artistic performance has been the major means of breaking away from the ethnographic gaze” (50), then in We Will Dance Our Truth David Shorter can be said to take steps to break away from that gaze, even while writing what he acknowledges is an ethnographic work about the Yaquis (Yoemem) of Sonora, Mexico. As Womack endeavors to expand on traditional approaches to understanding and writing about American Indian literature, Shorter sets out “to examine how Yoeme historicism provides a means to expand Western notions of writing and the contours of historical discourse itself” (13).

In his study of the Yoemem, Shorter, a non-Yaqui anthropologist, maintains that “each of the chapters develops the central claim for a performative approach to understanding Yoeme place-making” (4). His own approach to writing ethnography is consciously to call the ethnographic endeavor into question, in a sense deliberately undermining his own authority. In each chapter he includes a transcript from his field interviews, arguing that “[w]ithin the intersections of the chapters and the interviews lies a critique of the ethnological sciences” (20). Shorter also provides several of his own first-person journal entries recounting his experiences as a field worker. He does this, he submits, “in order to raise questions about the spaces between data, authoritative interpretation, ethnographic analysis, and the narrative form” (57), even though by so doing he sets up a sort of value hierarchy through
which actual “data” (analogous to Womack’s fiction) somehow have a different value than analysis of that data, and even though the raw data he includes is necessarily carefully selected. Its inclusion nevertheless offers the reader a view of the ethnographic process, and it provides an arena for consciously and openly considering the constructedness of an ethnographic study in the first place. The result is perhaps a more honest ethnography in that it calls attention to the unavoidable fact that the science is heavily mediated.

Shorter claims that his project is different from previous studies of Yaqui culture and people in part because he sees and appreciates “Yoeme oral traditions, dances, and processions as ways of understanding historic events and manifestations of Yoeme historical consciousness” (13). He argues that “‘religion’ is not some underlying ‘spiritual’ essence but a dynamic process, inscribing histories in specific places and valuing actions and texts within relations of power” (21). In that it offers a thorough analysis of previous ethnographic studies of Yaqui culture, as well as a new “study of a people . . . [and] a study of the ethnography of a people (3), Shorter’s book should be of interest to a wide range of scholars and other readers.

One result of both projects is that each author himself is very present in his work. In addition to including fiction, Womack repeatedly refers to himself, to his own previous works, to his being a musician, and to several of his travels. Similarly, Shorter insures for himself a prominent place in his ethnographic text by including many of his journal entries and field notes. Both texts thus raise questions about the place of the scholar in scholarship. Both imply that the scholar must indeed foreground himself or herself. Is this the direction such scholarship is taking? Is there a difference between acknowledging that scholarship is mediated by the scholar and writing about one’s subject apropos of oneself?

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literature as a discipline had more to do with the “top-down” forces of racial, economic, and gender formations. Although this conclusion may appear facile, Renker’s book fortunately avoids the recondite and introspective tendencies that sometimes mark metadisciplinary studies. Renker analyzes curricular change at four representative U.S. institutions to show how the proverbial ivory tower has always shifted with the ground beneath it.

As the U.S. research institution took shape, schools like Johns Hopkins University led the way. Renker notes that while the emphasis on philology in formal literary studies in the period caused many to look askance at American literature for its “thin body of texts” (23), the field over time was swept up in the tide of professionalization, eventually taking its place alongside English literature. This does not mean that American literature would receive uniform treatment. At less elite institutions, the status of the discipline remained in doubt. At Mount Holyoke College, which in 1888 was transformed from female seminary to college, American literature was taken less seriously, and Renker argues that the field’s relatively minor role reflected the devaluing of preprofessional training for aspiring female teachers. At Wilberforce University, the treatment of American literature paralleled larger debates about the education of African Americans, and the institution’s weak emphasis on the subject makes clear that African American teacher training, like the training of female teachers, was not considered a serious instance of professionalization. (Renker points out that one of the early teachers of American literature at Wilberforce was moved from his position as a teacher of the sciences). The founding of Ohio State University as a land-grant school in 1873 is the focus of Renker’s final chapter. Her careful research into administrators’ perceptions of the school’s mission and its meaning to the U.S. marketplace underscores the historical transformation of American literature from marginalized subject to centerpiece of the liberal arts.

As more Americans attend college, Renker’s book offers a way for us to consider what we value and how we teach. Are we training students as scholars? Offering them practical preprofessional training “skills”? How do our perceptions about who students are affect the way we configure our discipline?

Joel Pfister’s Critique for What? examines what we do once curricular decisions have been made. Like Renker, Pfister is interested in how academic work is refracted by political and economic interests. To what degree is “doing” cultural studies the same as “doing” politics? Are U.S. academics who offer critiques of “hegemony” really making political change, or are they members of the “professional-managerial” class?

In his first chapter, Pfister recalls his attendance at a 1990 conference at the University of Illinois, and quotes Stuart Hall, who told the conference that U.S. cultural studies was experiencing a crisis. This moment informs debates that Pfister traces throughout the book. He pays special attention to the work of Hall and to the careers of C. Wright Mills, Raymond Williams, and E. P.
Thompson to show that the academy can engage “the world outside” (18). The study is divided into three major sections. The first examines critiques of U.S. cultural studies from the point of view of the British New Left; the second looks at the relationship between historical and literary studies, asking whether work in such fields qualifies as true political agency; and the final portion analyzes how cultural studies turns toward popularizing its subject matter in order to appear relevant. Can we critique the culture that we belong to in constructive and meaningful ways without at the same time finding ourselves dominated by it?

Pfister thinks so. In his final chapter, he notes how in 1997, graduate students at Yale University organized to form GESO (Graduate Employees and Students Organization). The formation of this union shows what is “made possible through collective agency” (202). As a founding member of a graduate employees union, the GEOC (Graduate Employees Organizing Committee) at Wayne State University in Detroit, which was organized before GESO, I see Pfister’s point. Organizing represents political agency; it leads students to bridge the disciplinary divides that can make the university a microcosm of a corporatized society. In thinking further about Pfister’s focus on Yale, however, and on his teaching at Wesleyan University, I would add that questions of scholarship, politics, economics, and agency have less relevance when limited to discussions of “elite” institutions. Beyond asking questions about what cultural studies should do, how it is done, and why, we might also ask: Who is being trained to do these studies?

Critique for What? ends with a quotation from Harold Pinter’s 2005 Nobel Prize speech, which criticizes Anglo-American imperialism yet holds out hope for the formation of a “coherent political force” (213). Pfister’s book, published in 2006, might look different had it been published just a few years later. The end of the Bush regime, the election of President Obama, the economic crisis, and the continuation of the war on terror are signs of both hope and despair. Resistance to the perceived domestic tyranny of the federal government by the “tea partiers” may constitute a “coherent political force” itself, but not the kind Pinter or Pfister imagines. Members of the movement imagine it as grassroots and opposed to “elitism,” a shorthand term for academics, among others. Once again, we are faced with the question of what to do.

Joseph Helminski, Oakland Community College

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As various scholars have engaged in the public humanities or have become public intellectuals over the last two decades, a number of them have produced works that push against the label of “scholarship.” Perhaps no one has done so more than bell hooks, who made the decision fairly early in her career to produce essays for a popular audience—feminism and black studies for everybody. Often footnote-free, these books are designed, hooks claims, “to speak to people who aren’t necessarily essay readers, and who aren’t necessarily in academic institutions, but who are, or have the potential to be ‘organic intellectuals’” (2). In order to reach broader audiences, many other academics are writing, albeit not exclusively, in popular publications and—most recently and particularly—in blogs. Both Homegrown, a book consisting of conversations between hooks and visual artist/scholar Amalia Mesa-Bains, and Michael Bérubé’s Rhetorical Occasions ask us to consider not only content but form, and to explore what intellectual or pedagogical occasions would make these texts useful for readers.

Because hooks and Mesa-Bains frame Homegrown as directed toward those who are not formally trained as scholars, the text should be judged in those terms. The book begins with a large presumption, that the conversation format is necessarily more accessible than the essay. An unfamiliar form can be disconcerting to the kinds of nonacademic readers that the authors address, particularly when the form is utilized to address subject matter with which the audience may not be familiar. The authors address topics such as family, feminist iconography, resistance pedagogies, multiculturalism, and memory. The first chapter, “Family,” largely consists of the personal family histories of the two women, thus historical knowledge is not as necessary. However, in other chapters, these conversations may best serve those who are already knowledgeable about some of the material. These chapters are filled with conversational introductions to various figures and concepts, and yet many readers would not be familiar with Jean-Michel Basquiat, Carrie Mae Weems, or Lyle Ashton Harris, and a brief mention provides neither context nor history (54). Therefore, these chapters might provide a productive addendum to undergraduate class readings that cover a topic in depth. For example, the chapter “Feminist Iconography” addresses the commodification of Frida Kahlo and could prove useful in discussions of the commercialization of political figures. The writers spend a great deal of time discussing existing arguments about art and visual culture, and readers who have been introduced to the material can take more from their exchanges. hooks argues for the impor-
tance of “sharing conversation as a radical act” (73). Although this conversation between like minds is not particularly radical, the form, occasionally seen elsewhere, could prove a useful prompt for exploring the various ways we might engage in writing practices as scholars. The “conversation” and epistolary exchange can be modes of academic production that highlight intellectual collaboration in ways that can be infrequent in humanities writing projects.

Bérubé speaks to the vibrancy of intellectual exchange that can take place in blogs, finding that they merit publication at the end of the collection of previously published essays that shape *Rhetorical Occasions*. But if, as Bérubé suggests, part of what makes blogs intellectually interesting is not only the post but the comments and exchanges that follow it, the final section of this collection lacks the vitality of their initial form. Reader comments would have been an interesting cap to this project, as *Rhetorical Occasions* discusses various high-profile intellectual debates in the humanities. Bérubé tries to capture the energy around those conflicts for younger scholarly audiences, while providing a largely centrist response.

Part 1 addresses the Sokal/Social Text hoax, and Bérubé argues that Alan Sokal, Jean Bricmont, and their supporters “are right to insist on brute fact (hydrogen, gravity, globular clusters) as an observer-independent realm” while asserting “that it is considerably harder to distinguish between brute fact and social reality than Sokal and Bricmont care to admit” (68). Two of the essays from this section are reprinted from *What’s Left of Theory: New Work on the Politics of Literary Theory* (2000) and *Tikkun* magazine, and they are measured, thoughtful introductions for those who are not familiar with these debates. Part 2, “Positions,” takes up various intellectual debates, from the disappearance of reader-response criticism to Martha Nussbaum’s ethical claims about the importance of the humanities. The best essay in this section is “American Studies without Exceptions,” previously printed in *PMLA* (118 [January 2003]: 103–13), which looks at the history of American studies and state sponsorship. Part 2 and part 3, “Professions,” are ultimately connected, part of a broader literature addressing how the field of the humanities proves its value in the contemporary world.

Part 4, “Politics” (a bit of a misnomer, as politics are present throughout the volume), reprints Bérubé’s post-9/11 commentaries, pieces that condemn a Left he sees as often having made the wrong arguments about Afghanistan (a war he supported), and Iraq (a war he protested). Situating himself in the vast gulf between Richard Rorty and Noam Chomsky, Bérubé provides an interesting chronicle of his responses to a moment that was pivotal for the academic Left. What holds the first four parts of the volume together is that he focuses on moments of crisis in the humanities. Although perhaps only a graduate course about the state of the humanities would merit its inclusion in a list of course readings, the volume archives the changing mode of academic writing in the twenty-first century and reveals how these changes are a response to
the challenge of making the humanities meaningful to those who are unconvinced about its value.

Rebecca Wanzo, Ohio State University

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The self has been making a tentative comeback. No longer imperial, nor master in her own house, nor capable of achieving what used to pass for self-knowledge, this new self does, however, have feelings. They don’t issue from instincts or wear the badge of authenticity; they have new etiologies and are valued differently. Neuroscientists have identified seats of emotion in the brain, and they contend that without feelings such as excitement, tension, and relaxation, we lack the contents of mind we call consciousness. Those working on artificial intelligence inform us that without emotions there can be no artificial thought; without affect language doesn’t “work.” In other precincts, moral philosophers declare feelings our last hope for achieving a more just society, and from cultural criticism—the category to which this book belongs—we learn not only that emotions are cultural constructs but that they can be and are used against us. The recent surge in interest in emotions from every imaginable discipline is richly explored in Kathleen Woodward’s lively new book, _Statistical Panic_.

Largely driven by a laudable sense of dis-ease with emotional entanglements in our media-saturated, economically challenged everyday life, Woodward explores how we move beyond feeling to activism, or under what conditions feelings themselves can move us. She is interested in shame and anger, emotions that possess a “cognitive edge” and can lead to critical insights (80). In some very original work she explores how specific feelings are proscribed by the work of rhetoric and representations to different age groups. The author of _Aging and Its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions_ (1991), Woodward speaks with authority on “the denial of a rich emotional palette to older people” (31), claiming that the attribution of “wisdom” disallows the elderly their rightful expressions of anger. She turns her ire on the conservative appropriation of the traditionally liberal rhetoric of compassion. Examining “compassionate conservatism” and the argument that liberals have become addicted to feeling compassionate and so must maintain a constituency of misery, Woodward draws a perhaps unwitting parallel to recent critiques from the Left of this troubled affect. Throughout this section of the book she juggles the pros and cons of instrumentalizing emotions.
Her salient study of feeling in the contemporary scene then turns to new “structures of feeling” (135), a term she borrows from Raymond Williams. If, as Walter Benjamin claimed, modernity introduced us to shock and its dulling effects, and if the cinema and amusement parks introduced us to the pleasure of the thrill (fear as entertainment), then what Woodward calls “sympathy for cyborgs” (139), “bureaucratic rage” (165), and “statistical panic” are feelings that belong to our increasingly disembodied time. Our feelings for the digital and robotic world, “robo sapiens,” call on our sympathies, increasing our capacity for relatedness (162). At MIT, a robot is learning to feel emotions, a process modeled on that of human infants, who acquire emotions through sharing and exchanging.

Bureaucratic rage requires no definition, and Woodward finds her strongest examples in the inflamed impotence experienced by caretakers of the ill. After taking us deeply and sympathetically into three accounts of illness, Woodward surprises us by drawing the chapter to a close with a critique of these “individualistic” narratives written under the sign of self-help. Generated mostly in relation to illness, projections, prognosis, and now genetic testing, statistical panic is described as “the deadly looniness of being lumped into a statistical aggregate that doesn’t represent your own life” (202). Drawing on Sigmund Freud’s distinction between fear and anxiety, Woodward works hard to tease out a new kind of dread produced by the world of numbers that can spell our fate.

It is both a strength and weakness of this rich and energetic book that Woodward is so steeped in current scholarship; she acquaints us with many works we are glad to know about. On the other hand, sometimes she shifts from one theorist or critic to another as if there were no difference in scale or significance between them; an insight by Primo Levi is given equal weight with a current academic of only passing interest. Sometimes we sense a deliberate breaking down of hierarchies or a wish to test the results of mixing unlike chemicals, but at other times one questions the author’s judiciousness. Impressively overstuffed with juicy material and inventive propositions, Statistical Panic may leave the reader craving a consistent ground of inquiry or set of limiting terms.

Maura Spiegel, Columbia University

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