

BOOK REVIEWS

REVIEW OF CARLA MULFORD, ed. *Teaching the Literatures of Early America*. New York: MLA, 1999. pp. VII-XII, 402. ISSN 1079-2562.

Carla Mulford's book is the fifteenth volume in the MLA's *Options for Teaching* series, which, like the series devoted by this association to individual authors, *Approaches to Teaching*, reflects the growing interest in establishing a closer link between advanced research and teaching at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Thus, this book, without losing track of its didactic orientation, also reflects the contemporary debate on some of the questions it raises in its prologue: what these «literatures» are and what constitutes «America.»

If «literariness» is related, as it mostly was before the expansion of the canon from the sixties, to aesthetic or artistic intent, it is not surprising that early American literature remained comparatively understudied. Russell Reising, one of the contributors of the volume, is surely not alone in having begun to study Edgar Allan Poe on the fourth week of an Early American Literature course (268). Few early texts fitted those aesthetic and artistic criteria, and as a result there was a tendency either to discard texts that did not fulfill them as non-literary, or to overemphasize this aspect in texts that did fulfill them, even at the expense of distorting their main purpose or their position within their culture (such was the case with Edward Taylor's poetry). Thus, the writing of this period has benefitted tremendously from the rethinking of the concept of literature, and this new interest has been manifested in numerous recent publications, which seek both to make more primary texts available –like the Third Edition of the *Heath Anthology* (1998), Gordon Sayre's compilation of captivity narratives (2000) or Castillo and Schweitzer's *The Literatures of Colonial America* (2000)– and to suggest ways of analyzing and interpreting them on the terms Rosalie Murphy Baum suggests in this volume: in relation to their «rhetorical effectiveness in their own period» (117).

In this sense, the essays in the collection set out with a very clear theoretical purpose in mind; in fact, often with what classical rhetoric would term a «corrective» purpose. The most relevant objective of their correction is not only the concept of «literature,» but also the concept of «America,» in order to provide a broader and more accurate picture of the different cultures and traditions coexisting in the

Northern continent, beyond the British-American tradition and particularly beyond the tendency to encapsulate it in the writings of the Puritan colonies.

The first section («Issues, Themes, Methods») deals with these reconceptualizations, both within and without British-American writing. Some essays treat general issues such as multiculturalism and colonialism, emphasizing another of the preoccupations which make this collection so pertinent: the joint didactic aims of connecting the past with present-day issues, and of using primary texts as a means of resisting «received wisdom,» as Shields and Nelson argue in a later essay (99). As a rule, the authors are also aware that this «received wisdom» may include new oversimplifications derived from the post-sixties attempt to reset the ideological balance.

Other essays in this section provide brief, useful introductions to particular traditions such as African-American or women's writings, extending their scope to include texts from without the British-American colonies. Three chapters deal most directly with cultural productions in languages other than English: the Native American oral tradition, and Spanish and French colonial texts. The authors are convincing as to the pertinence of exploring these traditions, and as to the legitimacy of the use of translations, since «translation was a major literary form by which people of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries came to know about the New World» (Shields and Nelson 101). They are also extremely conscious of the difficulties involved in approaching texts whose production, transmission and reception may take place under conditions very different to those of the present. This awareness, incidentally, is yet another of the strengths of the collection: almost all collaborators stress the need to contextualize the modes of literary production, authorship and readership in the period, and suggest useful ways of conveying to their students the effects of these modes.

However, in spite of the authors' caution, and while welcoming the broader thinking encouraged by such studies, it seems necessary to wonder whether the lack of a more specific training –whether in history, anthropology, or specific philologies other than English– may not lead to an oversimplified or biased approach to these materials.¹ This consideration is most certainly not an argument against their use, but a call to collaboration and to truly interdisciplinary studies.

The essays on the more familiar British-American tradition (which compose the rest of Section I and the body of Section II, «Genre Studies») also take up the theoretical issues of the nature of literature and American identity, and mostly offer similarly useful introductory approaches in which direct reading and modern critical considerations are combined with a clearly didactic intent. The variety of genres and traditions discussed –captivity narratives, Puritan texts, poetry, drama, the novel, autobiographies, Southern writing, political essays– completes the «world vision» of a period of great complexity, always emphasizing its relevance to the American present.² It is in this section, however, where some hints of a failing not uncommon in

1. For instance, Baum's extensive secondary bibliography on French colonial writings does not include a single French source.

2. In this sense, I would like to call special attention to Frank Shuttleton's essay on the American Enlightenment for its lucid analysis of the resistances to Enlightened thought on the part of present-day students and for its equally lucid criticism and validation of Enlightened ideas.

this MLA series may be detected: two or three papers threaten to fall into the development of a particular, almost punctual thesis in relation to specific texts rather than deal with the issues involved in teaching that period or genre as a whole.

Section III, «Selected Courses,» is in theory the most teaching-oriented, as it offers specific examples of courses based on Early American material. While acknowledging that, like the rest of the book, this section is extremely well documented and theoretically argued, it seems to me the least relevant to non-American teachers. Conditions in most Spanish universities, for instance, preclude the high-intensity, small-group framework that is assumed in these proposals; postgraduate courses may offer the right numbers, but generally cannot offer the right level of full-time commitment. Even given ideal conditions, most of the courses offered seem to me over-ambitious in the amount of material they intend to cover, especially if it is to be accompanied by sophisticated theoretical discussion.³

Thus, paradoxically, as a whole these «Selected Courses» are less helpful from the didactic perspective than the previous sections, where suggestions for teaching abound. Some of them, again, are unlikely to be carried out in a Spanish context: whether it be out of a reluctance to establish higher degrees of intimacy with students, or out of the difficulty of sheer numbers, unfortunately I cannot imagine many teachers here reading and discussing students' self-narratives in imitation of Early American autobiographical forms, or engaging them in dialogue about their personal conception of «freedom» or «the people.» However, even less adventurous readers of Mulford's volume will find a variety of adaptable ideas, ranging from the conscious introduction of theory through guided reading to the use of electronic discussion groups, theatrical readings, or visual material such as facsimiles of early editions. There are also interesting suggestions for assignments, such as the preparation of an anthology entry for a not yet anthologized early author, review essays on secondary sources, or the elaboration of annotated bibliographies. Yet beyond these specific ideas, what is most praiseworthy is that the book's approach as a whole practically always keeps the teaching-learning process in mind.

The last section of the work is an extensive annotated bibliography prepared by Edward Gallagher which includes further bibliographies, films, CD-ROMs, and other electronic resources. Apart from the inevitable –and sometimes quite intentionally humorous– flippancy involved in one-line summaries of complex arguments, this section is invaluable, particularly in its specific reference to articles and chapters in book collections. Although growing interest in the field has led to an increase in the publication of volume-length studies, much valid research still appears in articles in such journals as the *William and Mary Quarterly* or *Early American Studies*. Together with the generally extensive and «user-friendly» bibliographies that follow each essay, this section renders the work of great value as a reference guide.

3. Incidentally, while not fully avoiding this danger, José F. Aranda's improbable-sounding juxtaposition of Chicano/a and Puritan writers in a post-graduate course seemed to me a most enlightening way of analyzing the constructed nature of national «myths of origins».

In conclusion, this is a book well worth recommending. It provides a broad and serious introduction to a relatively under-researched field; it is, for the most part, consistently oriented towards teaching; it supplies ample bibliographical reference. Furthermore, with a consistency often lacking in multiple-authored texts, it addresses, and successfully deals with, some of the central theoretical issues involved in the study of the literatures of Early America.

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- Lauter, Paul, et al., eds. *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*. 3rd Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.
- Sayre, Gordon M., ed. *American Captivity Narratives*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

MARÍA EUGENIA DÍAZ SÁNCHEZ, and VIORICA PATEA BIRK, eds. *Anarchy and Dissent. American Literature in the Sixties*. Salamanca: Plaza Universitaria Ediciones, 2000. 254 p. Paperback.

Once the twentieth century has finally come to an end, it seems indisputable that in the United States the 1960s was a period of profound changes, a decade only comparable perhaps to the «Roaring Twenties.» The social, political, and cultural transformations undergone by the national fabric in the 1960s have greatly shaped how we nowadays conceptualize both U. S. Literature and U. S. Studies: it was the time of John Kennedy, Woodstock, Stonewall, Pop Art, the Chicago Democratic Convention, César Chávez, Vietnam, Malcolm X, or *The Feminine Mystique*. A conference was held at the University of Salamanca (Spain) in 1998 to assess the literary production of that decade and the proceedings have just been published, a valuable contribution that includes 10 articles both in English and Spanish approaching the literary legacy of the 1960s from a variety of perspectives.

At the outset of her introduction, «Revisiting the Sixties: A View from the Postmodern Age», coeditor M^a Eugenia Díaz states that «the interest in the decade has admirably resisted becoming just another drydust subject of scholarly inquiry» (13), and she then establishes the two major premises of the collection: to question the logic of dissent and to stress the links between the literature and the arts of the 1960s and a determining trend of the period like postmodernism.

Appropriately enough, the opening contribution is an enlightening approach to the sociopolitical atmosphere of the time, in which historian Richard Fried develops a revisionist idea that has gained much currency lately: the origin of many changes of the 1960s must be traced back to the second half of the previous decade. Fried persuasively suggests that 1955 marks the beginning of a new era in contemporary U. S. history with seminal events such as the publication of *Lolita*, the first public reading of *Howl*, musical innovations like be-bop or rock 'n roll, or the emergence of Martin Luther King as the leader of the Civil Rights Movement.

In the only article in the collection devoted to poetry, «Tres acercamientos poéticos para la nueva conciencia,» Manuel Brito also stresses the connection between the 1950s and the 1960s as he studies three poets whose celebration of the self goes back to Emerson, Whitman, or Thoreau: Allen Ginsberg, Robert Duncan, and Jackson Mac Low. In books like *Kaddish* (1961) or *Planet News* (1968) Ginsberg insists on his defense of individual freedom while Vietnam was raging and dividing the nation. A member of the San Francisco literary scene, Duncan also opposed the war and contributed to the cause with a poetic series entitled «Passages,» which in Brito's analysis exhibits an innovative technique derived from Pound, Williams or Zukofsky. Less well-known, in the mid-1950s Mac Low developed in the wake of a guru of postmodernism like John Cage an experimental poetics which in the late 1960s led him to write influenced by computers and cybernetics.

In «The New Black Consciousness: Writing and the Construction of a Black Aesthetic; or, Looking Back at the Handwriting on the Wall» Isabel Caldeira uses Harold Bloom's concept of «*the anxiety of influence*» to elaborate a dense analysis of how the nationalist radicalism of the Black Aesthetic was not only an answer to white

cultural hegemony, but to the Harlem Renaissance as well. In her study of manifestos like *Black Fire* (1968) or *The Black Aesthetic* (1971) Caldeira stresses that Larry Neal's extremism made him repudiate W. E. B. Du Bois' seminal notion of "double consciousness" and explores the heated debates that the legacy of the Black Aesthetic has generated over the years, including the one between Houston Baker and Henry Louis Gates.

In «From Nausea to Defeat: Norman Mailer in the 1960s» Juan José Cruz focuses on a polemical and prolific author he defines as «an existentialist rebel» (100) and his main contention is that «[I]n the 1960s Mailer clearly intended a holistic opposition against the Establishment that fostered the "plague" of postwar America» (99). Cruz also goes back to the 1950s when he asserts that the starting point to understand the evolution of Mailer's oppositional discourse during the sixties is his much-debated 1957 essay «The White Negro», in which he formulated his concept of the «hipster»; one of the texts discussed is *Armies of the Night* (1968), Mailer's postmodern rewriting of the Pentagon March.

In her second contribution in the collection, M.^a Eugenia Díaz offers in «The Ontological Power of Language: William Gass in the Tunnel of the Word» a thoughtful meditation on postmodern U. S. literature of the 1960s, centering on one of its foremost spokesmen. Díaz convincingly traces the philosophical leaning of Gass' texts, a writer who shared Nabokov's belief that the word is an autonomous entity dissociated from the so-called «real world»; she draws intertextual connections with Wittgenstein and Valery, with French experimental groups like Tel Quel or the Nouveau Roman, or with Barthes and Foucault's theories of the author.

Chuck Grey's «"Separate Mysteries": Stalinism, the Fragmentation of the Marxist Meta-Narrative, and the Postmodernity in E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*» offers a lucid neo-historicist reading of one of the major political novels in contemporary U. S. literature, a text from 1971 which illustrates the complexities and contradictions of the New Left and its ambivalent relation with the Old Left. Grey demonstrates that Doctorow's young protagonist resists the dogmas of Marxist rhetoric his father had blindly followed: from his skeptical postmodern stance Daniel deconstructs the logic that in the 1930's legitimized the Nazi-Soviet Pact or the Stalinist purges, episodes that shattered the Communist Party and paved the way for the anticommunist hysteria of the postwar years.

Departing from the prevailing literary tone of the collection, in «Comedy, Jazz, and Dissent: The Case of Lenny Bruce» Will Kaufman discusses one of the most controversial and rebellious artists of the decade. From a Cultural Studies approach Kaufman links Bruce's improvising techniques with the jazz aesthetic, especially bebop. Adhering to the goals of the book, this essay scrutinizes both anarchy and the logic of dissent, since the oppositional discourse of Lenny Bruce's vitriolic monologues alienated him increasingly not only from his audiences, but also from the authorities, which curtailed his freedom of expression until his career was ended. As Kaufman aptly notes, Bruce's strong self-destructive impulse was partly responsible for his fall.

In a more straightforward vein, in «Richard Brautigan: el mundo mágico de *Trout Fishing in America*» Daniel Pastor rescues from oblivion one of the writers who best symbolized the mood the 1960s with novels like *A Confederate General from Big*

Sur (1964) or *Trout Fishing in America* (1967). Pastor suggests that Brautigan was forgotten as soon as the decade ended probably because both in his public image and in his texts he was the ultimate incarnation of the hippie stereotype. Thus, a text as fragmentary and transgressive as *Trout Fishing in America* becomes a journey into the heart of darkness of a country that has betrayed its very dreams and ideals.

The two final essays both deal with another central figure of the countercultural movement, the novelist Ken Kesey. Even more inscribed in a Cultural Studies framework than Kaufman's study, Matthew Roberts' «All-American Acid Avant-Garde: Masculinity, Whiteness and Technological Ecstasy in the Sixties Psychedelic Movement» offers a long and dense interpretation of a signifying practice hardly studied so far: the drug experiments that Kesey's group of the Merry Pranksters undertook in California in the mid-sixties. Roberts challenges the logic of dissent of the 1960s when he contends that «the Kesey group were straightforwardly nationalistic and quite seriously devoted to consumer technology; they were also... white supremacist and crypto-fascistic in their attitude» (198); from a much-needed demythologizing perspective, Roberts proves that the ideology of the Merry Pranksters was never as subversive as believed, especially concerning their racial views.

Quite different is David R. Williams' approach in «Madness and Death: Two Ways Out of the Cage: Ken Kesey's Liberation American Style», an analysis of Kesey's most celebrated work, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962), a paradigmatic text of the 1960s. According to Williams, the hospital and the chief nurse are metaphors to decry the control exercised by the State over the individual in modern society, whereas the protagonist is a (post)modern reincarnation of Emerson's concept of "self-reliance." While the notion that the death of the protagonist links him with icons of the 1960s like John and Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Janis Joplin, or Jimmi Hendrix is convincing, less satisfying is Williams' religious reading of the novel, according to which the central character is a Christ-like figure who sacrifices his life for others.

The publication of critical studies like *Anarchy and Dissent. American Literature in the Sixties* is an event to be celebrated both nationally and internationally, since its different contributions provide a thoughtful rereading of the culture of one of the most fascinating periods in U. S. history. Undoubtedly, a stronger emphasis on genres like poetry or drama or on literature produced by groups who reclaimed their voice precisely in the 1960s –namely women and ethnic minorities– would have enhanced even more the merit of this collection.

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