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REVIEWS

Five O'clock Angel: Letters of Tennessee Williams to Maria St. Just. New York: Penguin, 1991. Pp. XI+409. $14.95 paper.

Five O'clock Angel gathers the surviving letters of Tennessee Williams to his friend the Russian-born actress Maria Britneva-now knowr as the lady St Just. The playwright corresponded profusely with Maria from their first meeting in June 1948 to shortly before Williams' death in February 1983. The book's narrative reads almost like a biography. It includes commentaries by Maria St. Just, some of her own letters to Williams, and other letters by people who had a strong influence in his life and career such as the playwright's lover Frank Merlo and his literary agent Audry Wood. Moreover the text provides abundant and precise information on publication and production dates, awards, travelling itineraries and the like.

The volume is of interest to the student of Tennesse Williams not only as a detailed account of the vicissitudes of the playwright's long relationship with Maria Britneva -here revealed as a strong attachment- but mainly as a new selfportrait of Tennessee Williams the artist and the man. From *Five O'clock Angel* emerges and image of Williams that does not exactly correspond to the one he gives us in *Memoirs*. Maria Britneva had harshly criticized her friend's autobiography when he gave it to her to proofread and asked for judgement. In *Five O'clock Angel* she gets her chance to contest Williams' memoirs armed with his very own words.

In the American edition of *Memoirs*, published by Doubleday in 1975, the status of William's and Maria's friendship appeared reduced almost to the category of an acquaintance, an inexactitude that Williams explains in a letter to Maria as prompted by editorial demands. *Five O'clock Angel* reveals Maria's role as a serious judge of William's work and as a permanent source of sanity and laughter. Outspoken and extremely vital, Maria was also the inspiration for the character of Maggie in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.*

It seems, however, that Maria's objections to Williams' memoirs were not related to her scarce protagonism in the book. Instead, they have to do with her concern for the distorted image that her friend was helping to create of himself. For obvious commercial reasons the publisher wanted Williams to overtreat his sex life and the writer was aware of the scandal that would follow publication. In a typical overstatement, he wrote to Maria in 1972: "I may have to emigrate permanently from the States when it is published."

In *Tennessee Williams: An Intimate Biography*, the playwright's brother, Dakin Williams, elaborates on Tennessee's disclosures in *Memoirs* in an attempt

to smooth his exaggerated claims. The biography provides valuable information about the relationships among the members of the Williams family but it offers few new revelations about the playwright's private life. *Five O'clock Angel* is a more "intimate biography" than Dakin Williams' book, for Tennessee Williams wrote to Maria about every single aspect of his daily life. In his letters, topics range from laundry preoccupations to his last conversation with his sister Rose, and to his fears of being in decline as a writer. A hypochondriac and a man with a strong depressive tendency, Williams kept his friend always well informed of his health condition and sought continual reassurance from her. More than anything else he liked to talk about people. Sprinkled in his observations were humorous nicknames, wich functioned like a secret code between him and Maria. Thus, for example, Williams refers to his friends the playwright William Inge and the writer Carson McCullers as "the Quarter-past-eight-feet" and "Choppers," respectively.

Williams' amusing and gossipy reports on the people he knew--including such characters as Paul and Jane Bowles, Gore Vidal, Anna Magnani, Marlon Brando, Elia Kazan and Luchino Visconti among many others--serve to make *Five O'clock Angel* appealing to the general public. To scholars of Williams, the letters are valuable as a first hand account of the true circumstances surrounding the writer at work. Thus, *Five O'clock Angel* could be used as an incomplete but informative literary log.

Obviously, in *Five O'clock Angel* the years prior to Williams' and Maria's first meeting are obscure. The letters, nevertheless, tell the story of thirty eight years of the author's adult life, starting at a turning point in his private life and writing career. First, when Williams met Maria in London on June 11, 1948 he had just spent the Spring in Italy--a country which would have a strong influence in his dramatic work. Second, in the Fall he was going to reencounter Frank Merlo, a young Sicilian whom he had met the year before in the States and who would be his lover for fourteen years. For the first time in his life Williams was happy and it showed in his works. Through the reading of *Five O'clock Angel* one can better trace these two enormous influences in his plays as he writes about them to Maria.

A letter dated March 5, 1949, begins as follows: "Have I told you that I like Italians? Well, now let me tell you I do! They are the last of the beautiful young comedians of the world." A few lines below Williams continues: "The Young Horse [Maria gave this nickname to Frank Merlo] has returned from Sicily where he had a case of galloping dysentery. . . He said it was the goat's milk that did it. They brought the goat right into his bedroom and milked it beside the bed. . ." Williams goes on to talk about marriage and sexual repression in Sicily. He sent this letter to Maria from Rome, where he was working on a play. The play in question was obviously *The Rose Tattoo*. A comedy set in the American South

within a community of Sicilian immigrants, *The Rose Tattoo* celebrates sexual love. Its male protagonist is a Sicilian named Alvaro Mangiacavallo (Italian for " eat horse") and the play's most comic moments are provided by the chasing of a goat that is too fond of coming inside the house. This is but one example of how much the letters reveal about Williams' sources of inspiration for his dramatic work.

Five O'clock Angel shows not only how much Williams drew from his observations but also how much of his own personality he put his characters. Statements such as "We live in fantasy, don't we?" or "I am completely alone, which has always been the nightmare of my life" could easily be lines from the mounth of Lara Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* or Blanche Dubois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. But the are not. They are quotes from Tennessee Williams's letters to Maria St. Just.

Even more startling than the coincidence of idiosyncrasies in Williams and his fictional characters are the similarities of style between Williams' letters and his dramatic creation. The playwright has sometimes been criticized for relying too much on repetition. He is obsessed by a few themes--among them, death, corruption, the inherent loneliness of the human being and the conflict between individual and community. To symbolize his obsessive ideas, Williams employs a reduced number of recurring motifs-i. e. water, fire, stone, roses, birds, wolves, goats, angels. Williams'letters to Maria show the same continuity of theme and expression. Very often, for example, Williams writes to her about his desire to escape from a society wich he finds increasingly oppressive. The recurrent image of a "little farm with goats in Sicily" serves him time and again to convey his idea of a perfect haven.

Similarly, the poetic quality that pervades Williams'plays emanates also from his letters. The best example of this is the very title of the collection. *Five O'clock Angel*, which was the name that the playwright used to address Maria and a borrowed phrase. Maria's grandmother, on her death bed referred to Maria as "my angel." Visiting her on the day she died, Maria appeared to her grandmother as her "five o'clock angel." Williams, as always, had a good ear for such figurative language and immediately appropriated the term as a pet name for Maria.

Thus, Williams' plays are mirrored in his letters. Both plays and letters are humorous in tone but serious in subject matter; they are full of vulgarities but highly poetic. Although the picture that emerges from the letters may be as grotesque as his fictional world, Maria St. Just integrates her own commentaries in such a way that they function as an objective framework. As a whole, *Five O'clock Angel* rectifies the distorted self-image that Williams is so inclined to portray.

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Manuel González de la Aleja Barberán. *El "nuevo periodismo" norteamericano*. Albacete: Ediciones de la Diputación, 1990, 209 p.

With the publication in 1987 of his novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities* Tom Wolfe suddenly sprang to world fame and notoriety. However, he had already been working in the literary field for decades, namely as the most prominent spokesman, both as author and theorist, of a new style of writing commonly known as "New Journalism." A new book on this subject has been published. Its author, Manuel González de la Aleja, seeks to explain such an obscure term, to put some order in it and to analyze its most representative authors and works. These goals are mostly reached in spite of weaknesses in clarity and organization, both partly due to the inherent difficulty of the topic itself.

The phenomenon of the "New Journalism," also known under many other labels, remains somewhat loose and confusing after many years. On the border between journalism and the novel and borrowing elements from both, the "New Journalism" has too often suffered the neglect of literary studies; even the present study offers a journalistic approach.

The book opens with a summary of the history of journalism in the United States from the colonial days, pointing out how during the twentieth century it gradually loses its critical stand and conforms to the establishment. During the fifties and the early sixties journalism turned fearful and monolithic as the response to Senator McCarthy exemplifies. The author stresses that the revolutionary spirit of the sixties gave way to an innovative way of doing journalism. The traditional separation between fiction and non-fiction vanished, resulting not only in changes in the novel and in journalism, but especially in the creation of a new style of narrating which many authors soon adopted. Confusion again takes over when trying to establish a chronology, but it seems clear that the nowadays commonly accepted term "New Journalism" was coined in 1965 by Peter Hamill, one of its early practicioners, and had definitely caught on only one year later.

Two highly distinctive features of this innovative style are its subject matter, always real experiences, and an emotional tone which derives from the projection

of the author's self on the facts presented. For Tom Wolfe this new writing can be regarded as journalism that reads like a novel, and it should never be identified with romantic essays, moralism or political apologies. Many of Wolfe's ideas are in fact often borrowed; his book *The Right Stuff* (1979) is hailed along with Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night* (1968) and Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965) as one of the masterpieces of the "New Journalism." Since the author announces a forthcoming book on both Mailer and Capote, they are only mentioned. Wolfe is devoted one whole chapter which outlines his peculiar style and traces his development from a rich first stage, daring and vitalistic, to a poorer second one in which frustration and disillusion have lessened his literary powers.

The three most remarkable variants of the polimorphic "New Journalism" are examined in great detail and with abundant examples. "Participant journalism" departs from traditional practices by focusing on marginal sections of society and by offering the perspective of the real protagonists of events; it is the result of confronting *The Underground Press* to *The New York Times*. The common denominator of works like *Born on the Fourth of July*. *The New Legions* or *I Aint' Marchin' No More* is that in all three the authors tried to discover themselves through one concrete and intense experience, in this case the Vietnam War, a common source of "participant journalism."

James Agee's celebrated *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* operates as the "test tube" for "advocacy journalism," in which the author defends a particular stand. James Baldwin and Ingrid Bengis deal in some of their works with issues as current today as race and gender respectively. A new kind of journalistic column also develops in this direction, a groundbreaking column which openly stresses its literary aspects and which attacks society. Jimmy Breslin or Peter Hamill are among its leading figures.

"Investigative journalism" functions as the watchdog of institutions, mounting a fierce opposition. Its origins go as far as the eighteenth century, but it is Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* the most direct forerunner. For these "new muckrackers" facts and figures constitute an end in themselves; what matters is the who, what, when or where. The most famous and effective instance of investigative journalism is *All the President's Men*, a tedious and poor work for González de la Aleja, who regards John Hersey with his long article "Hiroshima," published in the *New Yorker* in 1946, as the true exponent of this variant.

The diverse devices which define the "New Journalism" are also thoroughly commented upon. In addition to the scene and the dialogue, both fundamental for Wolfe, this new production is determined by other common features: frequent allusions to popular culture that shock and trap the reader, a camaleonic language in clear opposition to the solemn voice of the fifties, a metajournalistic nature which highlights the elaboration process to prove its veracity, or the use of the "composite character."

After an exhaustive review of the different narrative options that authors like Plimpton, Thompson, Southern or Didion have used, González de la Aleja concludes that a crucial distinctive feature of the "New Journalism" is what Wolfe called "the third-person point of view." It consists of an attempt on the writer's side to faithfully recreate the stream of consciousness of the diferent characters. Such a difficult task has been successfully achieved in Norman Mailer's *The Executioner's Song* or in John Sack's *M*.

The *book* closes with *and* adequate bibliography of primary and secondary sources, but it lacks a name index as it is still unfortunately common in many Spanish publications. González de la Aleja's *El "nuevo periodismo" norteamericano* contributes to the interest in American Studies in Spain and provides an informative basic approach to a subject as rich and ambiguous as the "New Journalism," still in need of further literary analysis.

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Gordon Poole, *Taking Hawthorne's Coverdale at his Word (On Blithedale and Other Writings)*. Naples: Franco Di Mauro, Editore, 1991.

The literary critic, when dealing with fiction, inevitably needs to make use of a metalanguage sophisticated enough as to provide for the subtleties of the narrative artifact or, if the reader prefers, text. One of the main problems, in my opinion, existing nowadays in the field of literary studies, is the profound isolation of theory and actual criticism. While theory has reached a high degree of sophistication and can be said to offer a wide range of solutions for the many problems narrations pose, criticism tends to ignore such developments and avoid therefore the myriad of technical nuances which underlie the text. Narratology is the discipline which studies how a narrative works, how it builds its world out of words, and how that fictional world relates to our real world. Far from being a monolithic field, it has attracted specialists of such different areas as psychology, philosophy or linguistics, and its origins can be traced back to Plato and Aristotle. It offers strong theoretical support for the critic who wants to examine thoroughly a new work, or readdress those in the canon, as Gordon Poole does in this short but interesting book. As a literary critic, he attempts to bridge the gap between theory and what we can define as traditional criticism, by developing a well-knit analysis of the role of the narrator, as both story-teller and protagonist of the action, in Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*.

Professor Poole centers his dissertation on the reliability of Coverdale the

narrator, different from Coverdale the character, in that romance; an issue which has been central in narratological studies since, at least, Wayne C. Booth and his "reliable" and "unreliable" narrators, and concerning this text, widely discussed. For most critics, Coverdale's recount of the events that took place in that utopic farm of Blithedale cannot be trusted because they are imperfect and partial; for Poole, this is precisley where the richness of the technique deployed by Hawthorne lies. This technique, which can be defined as "limited first-person narrative," as contrasted with the ommiscient first-person narrator, has been widely used afterwards, and an example that comes to mind is that of Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*, who, like Coverdale, uses his own narrative as a means of understanding (making sense of) the experiences he has undergone as a character. Poole distinguishes three levels in the text: what the reader should understand (or supply), what Coverdale the narrator understands and what Coverdale the protagonist understands. There is no objective viewpoint from which to focus the action. It is important, then, to decide if what Coverdale tells really did happen, or happened the way he says. After reviewing some of the radical positions which strive to get behind Coverdale's understanding of the events in order to prove certain exotic hypotheses, Poole reaches a sound conclusion: "What *really* happened is that Nathaniel Hawthorne sat at his desk and wrote *The Blithedale Romance*, and that is all" (p. 56). There is no point in asking, for example, whether Zenobia was pregnant when she committed suicide or not; such questions are irrelevant for the text and as such, useless.

Poole takes for granted Coverdale's reliability as a narrator, and in several chapters he develops that proposition, providing abundant evidence which proves the truth -if partial- of Coverdale's story. One of the main errors most critics make is to mistake Coverdale the protagonist, a young man in a painful process of learning, and Coverdale the narrator, a character that has reached maturity both physically and intellectually, and who is able to grasp the meaning of those events he didn't fully comprehend at the time. And much of their suspicions arise precisely from this confusion. The narrator himself acknowledges that his tale is somewhat of a puzzle; that is, it requires an active cooperation from the reader who, following the clues given by the narrator -mainly after his final confession-, must solve it. In other words, he doesn't pretend to be telling the whole story objectively, yet his is the only version the text offers. And the reader's task is to gain a fuller understanding than Coverdale himself. The conventions of the *romance* require the reader's fanciful filling in of the "missing links that allow one to understand a reality for which there is no omniscient narrator" (p. 83). As the narrator does in his process of detection, because, according to Poole, Coverdale acts as a detective who finds out -although too late to avoid catastrophe– the reality underlying that socialistic utopia which proves to be, as so many others afterwards in literature, a tragic failure.

Another aspect which Poole analyses is the potential symbolic value of the setting, usully loaded with meaning in the *romance* as a genre. And his analysis is convincing. He traces the intertextual reference to the *Divine Comedy* that Coverdale makes and exploits the possibilities this apparently innocent reference introduces, showing its importance in the symbolic structure of the text. The different stages where the action takes place acquire a symbolic -I would say, archetypal- value, as do the spatial movements between these places: the city, symbolizing modern capitalistic and industrial society and, later on, "reality," as opposed to Blithedale, the farm representing idealism and fraternity in the beginning to become a place "irreal" from which Coverdale feels the need to escape; or the river, dragged by Coverdale and others in search of dead Zenobia, whose potential content Poole doesn't, however, explore in depth.

Besides the chapters which deal with *The Blithedale Romance*, there are some others which analyse, again from a narratological perspective, some of Hawthorne's traditionally considered minor stories, like "Alice Doane's Appeal" or "The Maypole of Merry Mount." In these chapters, Professor Poole studies the different narratorial voices, or, in Bakhtin's terms, the "poliphonic" quality of Hawthorne's stories. "Alice Doane's Appeal" is a good example of how a story can be told simultaneously by several voices, and underneath the events there lies a discussion of the problematic relationship among the different participants in the narrative act: "The fact is that the title is deceiving: the tale is not really about Alice and her appeal but about the rhetorical problem of the relationship between text and public, narrator and text, public and narrator." In that sense this story is concerned with some of the issues contemporary writers like Barth, or Borges, are worried about, and, being literature about literature (or, if you want, metafiction), it represents a fertile ground for the narratologist. "The Maypole of Merry Mount," on the other hand, reveals a technique, defined by Poole as "rhetorical exclusion," which contrasts with Hawthorne's later narrative strategies, and which is characterized by the ommission of all reference to the human body in those areas that might suggest sexuality, being a tale about carnal love and, in general, sensualness. Finally, the author bestows a chapter to *The House of the Seven Gables*, posing the question of the narrator in this text in search of some insights that may help understand *The Blithedale Romance*. Poole inevitably touches the question of the generic differences between romance and novel. In both romances, Hawthorne is not trying to reproduce a faithful imitation of reality, but to create a fictional world where the rules of our real world function only partially: "The work then, is a work of imagination. We are visiting, not a house and real people -such would have been the pretense of a novel -but a castle in the air, an admitted figment of the author's fancy. The house is a house of words" (p. 38). Each genre, with its own peculiar conventions, requires then a different approach on the part of the reader and the critic, something not always acknowledged.

To sum up, Gordon Poole's book on Hawthorne's fiction represents a fruitful attempt at analysing the different strategies designed by the author in some texts generally considered Hawthorne at his worst. Poole skilfully discovers the true value of these tales and offers some clever insights into the nature of narrative, revealing throughout a profound awareness of the theoretical speculations fiction arises. A further merit is the limited use Poole makes of a metalanguage which, for the average reader, might be too obscure and confusing. The book, nevertheless, lacks clarity in some parts and demands a careful reading so that the main arguments can be followed all the way through. The only other fault I find in it is the absence of a conclusion which might have rounded up the individual analyses. The bibliography, althoug necessarily partial, includes a good number of critical works on Hawthorne and *The Blithedale Romance*, most of them referred to in the text. Gordon Poole demonstrates in this book that cooperation between literary theory and criticism in not only useful, but essential, without rejecting the traditional kind of "scholarly" criticism which he himself puts into practice as a complement to his "narratological" approach.

MANUEL BRONCANO
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Douglas Tallack. *Twentieth-Century America: The Intellectual and Cultural Context* Longman Literature in English Series. New York: Longman, 1991.

Writing a book with such a title as this is necessarily a thankless task, as the breadth of the subject lays the author open to attack from any specialist in the themes discussed in it. A less ambitious title (*An* Intellectual...? *Some* Intellectual...?) might improve Tallack's chances, but it is only human that the book should start with an allusion to the "bewildering" nature of the task and with a consciousness of its limitations.

A brief descripcion of the book may help to see how far this improbable objective has been achieved. As Tallack points out in his preface, the book is organized around a linking theme: "[a]n argument about modernity and postmodernity" (xvi). An introduction, centred on social history, traces the appearance of modernity in the USA; after this, the book is divided into two main areas. "The Politics of Culture" analyzes three art forms from the point of view of this debate; "The Culture of Politics" outlines and examines several areas of political and cultural thought, including feminism and black politics, which are treated separately and, as the author acknowledges, with less reference to the question of modernity/postmodernity. The issue is updated to the early eighties in the concluding chapter. Finally, three appendices provide a year-by-year

chronology of political and cultural events (1890-1989), a series of annotated bibliographies, and short biographies and "further reading" about some of the individuals discussed (these include Frank Capra, W.E. Dubois, Betty Friedan, Georgia O'Keeffe, Richard Wright).

In some ways these appendices are the most useful part of the book, and in fact it seems to me that the main objection to this work is that it is more successful in what it aims at doing secondarily than in its main intent. There appear to be two problems with the chapters which may be considered "central." One is the question of the "student, teacher and general reader" at which it is aimed, according to the back cover. The very extension of the subject matter forces the author to be extremely dense in his argumentation, and as a consequence he both approaches obscurity and assumes that the reader has previous and detailed knowledge (especially of terminology). At random, one could quote: "The verticals of rough stone are the vernacular element in the building and pick up the bedrock outcrop, while the smooth cantilevered concrete slabs are pure modernism. . ." (128). The second problem arises as a consequence of the same need for concision: the conducting thread of the debate is not always clear, as Tallack's argumentation is often developed at breakneck speed. Probably a further reduction of the areas discussed would have contributed to make his insights more valuable because more intelligible.

In fact, it seems that the very extent of Tallack's knowledge and documentation acts agains him, as in their clearly sketched broad outlines the two chapters that are less documented (black culture and feminism) are more useful as general introductions than the rest. The abundance of references, however, is definitely one of the strong points of the book; films, building, paintings, magazines, authors, theorists, are quoted abundantly, and all these, both in the body of the text and in the appendices, provide numerous and relevant starting points for research. It is in this sense that I believe that secondary purpose of the book has been more successful than in main object of constructing a framework for the facts it presents.

All in all, then, it seems that there is no escape from the dilemma of concision vs. depth in a volume of these characteristics. However, Tallack's book is worth including both in a university and a personal library, not so much for its analysis of the intellectual contexts of the USA in the twentieth century, as for its value as a reference work. For anyone interested pursuing a particular aspect of this dazzlingly complex and "bewildering" culture, here is a starting point.

MARIA ANGELES TODA IGLESIA
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David S. Reynolds. *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Up., 1989.

Beneath The American Renaissance is a large book which asserts a relatively simple thesis: the great writers of the American Renaissance were neither isolated nor alienated from American culture but, rather, were greatly indebted to and influenced by the explosion of new literary genres between the years 1830-1850. New, more imaginative religious discourses arose as "stylistic alternatives to threatened faith," (16) and this expanding -though second rate- literature provided new forms for the great authors who were preoccupied with the American "writer's need to reflect his own times and circumstances." (495-6) Writers such as Whitman, Emerson and Thoreau "were incorporating popular images with the aim of giving them suggestiveness and direction, whereas in their crude state they often remained savage and uncontrolled." (516) Emerson and Thoreau, seeking a middle ground between the tame smoothness of Anglophile literature and the sensational, literarily inferior texts aimed at America's popular culture, "were intent on discovering a distinctly American literary voice, which they believed could not be found in parlors or universities but rather on the streets and on the frontier. (484)

Reynolds also suggests that the great writing of the American Renaissance was determined, in part, by democracy itself, which he describes as "a kind of carnival culture," citing the turbulent, linguistic anarchy that Tocqueville saw as a distinct feature of American democracy; and also noting, that for Tocqueville, "the continual restlessness of democracy leads to endless change of language." (444) Referring to Mikhail Bakhtin, who "argues that in order for literature to appear there must be a preparatory stage in which language and value systems are relativized, or detached from single ideological meanings," (443) Reynolds cites instances of carnivals and masques in the literature of Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville in order to show "the American writer bringing the high and the low together in carnival scenes with democratic implications." (444)

Reynolds effectively illuminates the rise of what he terms the American Subversive Style: sensationalism, immoral didacticism, the reform impulse, dark adventure; along with the rise of new American characters such as the likable criminal, the justified pariah, and the oxymoronic oppressor, who are transformed aesthetically into complex characters like Arthur Dimmesdale and Captain Ahab. According to Reynolds, the great American writers saw in popular forms "an excessive savagery and linguistic abandon that they associated with the worst aspects of democratic culture," (484) but did not retreat from the myriad, fragmented images abounding in its literature. Rather, they immersed themselves in the forms available to them. Seeking to incorporate and improve upon their culture's representative images and personae, they did not distance themselves

from popular culture but attempted a synthesis, transforming aesthetically its predominant themes and modes of discourse. Emily Dickinson, for example, "recognized the need for an artistic form that would represent these often fragmented images but at the same time would serve to control and fuse these images. (432) For Reynolds, "the art of literary fusion rechannels the metaphorical energy of naive or vulgarized popular images and releases a flood of fresh associations." (563) The major writers of the American Renaissance attempted to act upon their immersion in subversive forms and styles, which, "through an assertion of the humanizing artistic imagination," (563) they transformed into more serious, aesthetically pleasing works.

There are moments in his critique when Reynolds seems to force the connections between America's high and low cultures. His linkage of Davy Crockett and Emerson, for example, is questionable. Emerson was aware of "the linguistic invasion of the frontier." (486) and yes, the crude fictions of popular literature featured violent scenes of gouged eyeballs; but why would Emerson want to evoke such a connection when speaking of serious, philosophical questions?

> If Crockett gouged out other people's eyes and carried them in his pocket, Emerson metaphorically transformed himself into a walking transparent eye-ball. In a more general sense, the Crockett almanacs and Emerson writings were different products of the American writers' instinct to exaggerate democratic individualism in both theme and language. (451)

Reynolds refers to the fictional Crockett's crude exploits as the "pornography of violence," (451) and does not present a persuasive argument for connecting Emerson to the fiction of the frontier.

Reynolds again seems to force the connection with Melville when he writes that "Melville seems to have been most directly indebted to Barnum in his conception of the crew of the *Pequod*." (546) The facts that Melville mentions P.T. Barnum in writings from 1847 and that Barnum, had hoped to convene "an assemblage of representatives of all the nations" (546) is unconvincing evidence in support of this contention. Reynolds does not stop to explore Melville's "conception of the crew of the *Pequod*," its linkage with the Pequot Indians or the myth of the democratic melting pot: he is content to submit scanty information, and then move on. At times, Reynolds sometimes seems to be forcing the connections in order to validate the major premise of his thesis: the major writers of the American Renaissance were more indebted to the literature of the popular culture than we had previously supposed. Reynolds generally goes on to assert that these influences were transformed by the great writers, through "artistic imagination." He provides interesting hypotheses backed up by voluminous

research; but ultimately, some of his assertions seem at best circumstantial, at worst, unconvincing.

Reynolds cannot be faulted for lack of research: his critical methodology he calls reconstructive criticism, and in attempting "to reconstruct as completely as possible the socioliterary milieu of literary works" (561) he has delved into contemporary reviews, journals and diaries, personal correspondences and, above all, a wealth of popular literature, both conventional and subversive. He attempts to illuminate the debt that these major writers owe to the much neglected literary history of early nineteenth-century American popular culture. Biographical insights and historical context are important tools that aid us in making sense of serious literature, but Reynolds places too much importance on his own critical method when, in his epilogue, he says "I trust that we are leaving the period of hermetic close readings, based on the myth of textual autonomy, and are entering the era of reconstructive close readings, based on the reality of socioliterary dialogism." (564) Though David Reynolds does not engage in what we would call "close readings," there is much to be gained by evaluating serious works of literature in terms of artistic unity, symmetry, and structure. Close reading is one of many valid theoretical approaches; and though perhaps "politically incorrect," it has not yet been exhausted as a valid tool for incisive literary analysis. Reynolds admits that the major writers transcend the bounds of mediocrity that distinguish them from America's popular literature, but he is vague in explaining just how the major writers achieve this transcendence. Reynolds's methodology is interesting, useful, informative and valuable, but it is not the only one. Finally, his book is an important contribution to the study of American Literature, but is noticeably repetitive, and seems unnecessarily long for the subject he treats.

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