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as Dimock implicitly claims. At one point, Dimock quotes Emerson, who is describing the value he imputes to a variety of Eastern religious texts: "Do we not feel in reading these elemental theories that these grotesque fictions are globes and diagrams on which the laws of living nature are explained?" (35). Dimock sees this quotation as showing Emerson's embrace of these texts' "parallel descriptions [alongside Christian accounts] of the planet" (35). In praising Emerson's recognition of hybridity, Dimock ignores Emerson's use of the words "elemental" and "grotesque." In these adjectives we might find grounds for understanding these authors not as conduits for Dimock's admirable message about America's off-center and deeply intertwined relationship to the span and duration of the world but as writers whose own understandings of this relationship was shaped by their sense, however problematic, of their status as Americans.

Faye Halpern

Kenneth Mostern. *Autobiography and Black Identity Politics: Racialization in Twentieth-Century America*. Cambridge UP, 1999. Pp. 276. \$54.95 cloth.

Autobiography offers obvious access to representation of identity, subjectivity, and conceptions of community, and Kenneth Mostern aims through the venue of life narratives to provide, in his words, "a genuinely radical analysis of political identities" (8). Mostern's project is to recuperate identity politics from the suspicion in which it is held by infusing the concept with a Marxist structural analysis. Although Paul Robeson, bell hooks, James Baldwin, Barbara Smith, Michel Wallace and others get respectful attention, Mostern selects the autobiographies of W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Malcolm X, Nikki Giovanni, and Angela Davis for the main focus of his argument, and it is his reading of these texts and their contexts that is the great strength of this study. He names the three arguments that make up "the key political content of this book: the relationship of feminism to the contemporary revision of black identity politics; the bifurcations of race and culture and the confusion over terminology that results from this bifurcation; and the question of narrative as a fundamental moment of political action" (13). The promise of this assertion is sometimes muddled by Mostern's theoretical entanglements, but the weight Mostern gives to specific historical contexts and to the particular elements at play in the narratives of his main authors makes the torturous reading of theoretical jargon worthwhile. Mostern really

has constructed an alternate perspective of how to read identity and politics in autobiography, and the fine insight he brings to the texts shapes a new historical narrative in twentieth-century African American life-writing.

The explosive development of autobiographical theory in the last two decades has produced a range of reading practices that allow multiple perspectives on multiple subjectivities. Mostern reviews this history, with a refreshing admission of his reliance on feminist thought, inflecting his discussion of each major theorist with his own critique. Some aspects of this conventional strategy are highly effective as he exposes tensions among theoretical positions. Here is one example: regarding critical treatment of Rigoberto Menchú's autobiography, using Doris Sommer's position to correct Sidonie Smith's, "the text, far from being permeable and having unstable categories as Sidonie Smith claims that many minority women's texts have . . . in fact sets up intentional and highly specific political and national boundaries" (44). Mostern is at pains to demonstrate that the individualism at the root of any subjectivity-based theory will be inadequate in recognizing or theorizing the "content of solidarity, or why it might be typical of certain groups" (48); and he does (barely) acknowledge that others have addressed the I/we dialectic in diverse feminist and African America autobiography theory. At the conclusion of his long introductory section, Mostern rather diffidently asserts "as with Gilroy, it needs to be investigated how race remains an always present and nearly always self-chosen sign. . . . What we must confront when looking for racial identity in an autobiography is not so much difference itself (which is always there) but 'what difference that difference makes'" (51). That Mostern should choose to set his key thesis or position in the words already used by Paul Gilroy and Michel Eric Dyson suggests an uncertainty in his ability to articulate forcefully his own theoretical ground.

Fortunately, the convolutions of his opening discussion are almost completely dispensed with in the two remaining sections of the book. In Part II, "The politics of Negro self-representation," sixty odd pages present an informative and illuminating treatment of African American or (as Mostern says, in respect for the language used by Du Bois, Ida B. Wells and others of the time) Negro political thought. In careful steps Mostern demonstrates his claim that "books by African Americans about race theory are often written in the forms of autobiography" (59). Using Du Bois' autobiographies, Mostern discerns "three theories of the race of W.E.B. Du Bois": the liberal individualist, the pan-African Marxist, and the international communist. Provocative gems, such as Mostern's observations that "Du Bois . . . [has been trying to] to show the 'full psychological meaning of caste segregation,' which made the invention of the Negro race necessary and useful for the African Americans

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who participated in it (quite regardless of the racial projects of white people) and which sustains this racial formation without reference to biology” make the reader’s task a pleasure (69–70).

Mostern then shifts his attention from autobiography to the politics of black responses to lynching, contrasting Du Bois, Walter White (a founder of the NAACP), Ida B. Wells Barnett (the great journalist and crusader against lynching), and James Weldon Johnson, each of who articulated Negro racial identity in relation to lynching. And finally, Mostern provides a concise analysis of Negro proletarian politics, making a powerful argument for the specific role African American theory and practice played in the shaping of the American Communist Party. While the support the CPUSA gave to various causes (the Scottsville trial for example) and the commitment of Paul Robeson and Richard Wright to Marxist principles are well-known, Mostern’s is the first to make a coherent narrative asserting the essential role of African Americans to leftist policies and praxis, not just in America but in Marxist anti-imperial struggles internationally. Mostern’s understanding of the perspective of Marxism is almost completely free of ideological jargon. Instead he offers openings to thought: “since Marxism derives class not from ‘discourse’ but from the economy, when a Marxist notices that race and gender, like class, are centrally important political categories, s/he asks what structure or system of material determination produces these categories as discourses” (9–10). While this may seem an odd stance for a writer whose concern is identity politics, Mostern’s approach is so multidimensional that even if he loses a thread occasionally, his connections hold steady.

The third section, “Autobiography and Black Identity Politics,” consists of a wonderful chapter on Malcolm X, his autobiography and his political framework. Again, Mostern brings an intense reading to the text and meshes it into America’s race politics of the 1960s and links it to the present. One strategy he uses is to offer “four ways of reading the Autobiography [of Malcolm X] as a bildungsroman” which will include sexuality, race, education, and the politics of black masculinity (143). The book concludes with two chapters focusing on black feminist thought. The segment dealing with Nikki Giovanni and Angela Davis is again splendid in its contextual reading of the autobiographies, but in the last chapter Mostern struggles a bit. Because his reading and reference to African American (and white) women/feminists is so broad, and because he seems loathe to omit anyone, the argument seems rather scattered. I was rather sorry to find the now obligatory gesture toward self-reflexivity, since, as usual, it deflects attention away from his material, although in itself the sentiments are salutary: Mostern is properly concerned that white male scholars resist the tendency to “spend [their]

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research lives theorizing the subjective marginality of [their] socially empowered position,” and he concludes with the statement that we must choose our ethical battles with the ability to objectify ourselves in “the mirror of our particular others” (209). On the other hand, his closing discussion of bell hooks’ failure to distinguish class origins from class position, and his response to Anne DuCille’s view that black feminist scholars must escape the domination of autobiography infect the whole argument of the book and invite one to continue to chew on his ideas. Mostern’s scholarship is exemplary, and this study is a promising approach to reading class through the ferocious entanglements of sex, gender, colour and race.

Jeanne Perreault

George Bornstein. *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001. Pp. xii, 185, £35.00.

Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page integrates modernist scholarship and editorial theory in an argument that contests how modernists are “often abused as being politically rightwing rather than leftwing, and culturally upholders of authority rather than challengers of it” (33). However, rather than engaging such criticism directly, Bornstein’s book attempts to debunk by demonstrations of editorial theory’s utility for modernist scholarship. Each of *Material Modernism*’s chapters attempts to add to current demystifications of the notion of an apolitical modernism by demonstrating how reading the politics evident on the originally published pages of modernist literature against subsequent republications (in anthologies, collected works, and scholarly editions) suggest the “mistaken notion of permanence and completeness” (2). Bornstein charges that such editions remove modernist texts from their original “social or political setting . . . and inserts them into a decontextualized realm which emphasizes the aesthetic and stylistic” (14).

The first two chapters establish Bornstein’s theoretical foundation and contend that, “in our age of relentless demystification, the text itself often remains the last mystified object, with critics naively assuming that the paperback texts that they pull from their local bookstore somehow ‘are’ *King Lear*, or *Pride and Prejudice*, or the *Souls of Black Folk*” (5). Bornstein demonstrates the utility of three concepts in his approach to texts: 1) that “a text is always a construction,” 2) that “alternative versions to a text we are studying do or might exist,” and 3) “that the literary text consists not only of words (its linguistic code) but also of the semantic features of its material instantiations (its