

In "Check the Technique: Black Urban Culture and the Predicament of Social Science," Robin D. G. Kelley challenges constructions, by American social scientists, of the "so-called" African-American "under-class." Kelley protests the essentialising of black urban culture as a "culture of poverty" by reconsidering expressions of black urban masculinity, such as the notion of "soul," and contemporary rap music. These and other popular cultural forms have been seized upon by the (predominantly white) ethnographic imagination as "authentic" examples of black urban culture. Kelley calls for a recognition of aesthetics—an acknowledgment of black urban culture and forms of expression as sources of "visceral and psychic pleasure" (58).

Two essays in this collection are concerned with the limits and definitions of pleasure. Both Lauren Berlant, in "Live Sex Acts [Parental Advisory: Explicit Material]," and Laura Kipnis, in "Fat Culture," address the issue of what is denied, hidden, or criminalized in the formation and "protection" of American subjects. Drawing upon nineteenth-century views of gender and sexuality, Adela Pinch's "Rubber Bands and Old Ladies" begins with an exploration of how the Victorian old lady continues to inform discussions of culture. Pinch then demonstrates that the "women's culture" described in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* functions as an instance of "the gendered nature of mid-Victorian, middle-class identity formation." In Pinch's engaging reading of the novel, the rubber-band treasured by Cranford's narrator becomes a colonial/industrial commodity, a sexual fetish, and even a symbol of "woman's flexible conceptual place" (165) in discourse.

It is the possibility, or rather the impossibility, of any "flexible" discursive positioning which engages Marjorie Levinson in the volume's concluding article. "Posthumous Critique" begins with a quotation that challenges Dirks's vision of "the ruin" and the critic's relation to it: "'A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably'" (264). Levinson describes her deliberately ambivalent paper as a type of "thought-experiment" that attempts to come to terms with a project of materialist critique in a "Wittgensteinian universe." Given the vastness of "culture" as a subject, especially within an interdisciplinary context, the many strong essays in the volume form a surprisingly cohesive and informative collection.

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Amritjit Singh, Joseph T. Skerrett, Jr., and Robert E. Hogan, eds.
Memory, Narrative, and Identity: New Essays in Ethnic American Literatures. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1994. pp. ix, 349.

Memory, Narrative, and Identity: New Essays in Ethnic American Literatures opens, fittingly enough, with a memory. The year is 1972, the location

the MLA convention. Denied space for a formal session, a group of teachers interested in ethnic American writing gathers in a corridor. Flash forward two decades. Renowned African-American scholar Houston A. Baker, Jr. presents his presidential address to a membership whose multifarious interests include Black American, Latin American, and Asian literatures. The New Americanism that has transformed the discipline has also spawned a sophisticated body of scholarship, of which this collection is part. Fourteen essays explore how ethnic American writers employ memory "to redefine history and culture, to validate both a personal and a collective identity, and to shape narrative" (jacket). Writers of diverse ethnicities are represented in essays that approach single or multiple works through close textual or multi-disciplinary analysis. Cogently treating such themes as the inseparability of individual and communal memory and the complex interplay of multi-generational experience, the essays highlight the rich intricacies of American literature's multiple traditions.

The collection opens with Terry DeHay's convincing argument that Amy Tan, Sandra Cisneros, Alice Walker, and Louis Erdrich challenge hegemonic constructions of history at the level of narrative structure. Their works' non-hierarchical, multi-vocal texture contests the individualistic and patriarchal ideologies underlying the conventional novel, dispersing narrative authority and privileging difference. Betty Bergland's essay analyses the dialogue between the critically neglected photographs of Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* and the written text. Bergland's conclusion — that the former's evocation of empty spaces belies the latter's affirmation of a successful acquisition of American identity — is persuasive, although her claim that the disjunction is "presumably invisible" to Antin (83) seems a too-easy dismissal of authorial agency. Gert Buelens similarly examines unresolved contradictions in *The Promised Land*, but in the context of two cultural roles central to early Jewish-American literature. Antin's "new-(wo)man" persona, with its claims of rebirth and assimilation, is undermined by her function as "mediator" between the immigrant ghetto and mainstream America. Buelens then offers a useful survey of the treatment of both roles by Antin's Jewish contemporaries. The focus on Jewish-American literature continues in Jules Chametzky's study of "Memory and Silences in the Work of Tillie Olsen and Henry Roth." Adopting a primarily biographical approach, Chametzky attributes both writers' extensive literary silences to the pain of personal lives and difficult political eras. His argument that writing requires memory but is unable to ameliorate pain is insufficiently substantiated by his rather cursory textual analysis.

More theoretically rigorous is Wolfgang Karrer's study of recall and amnesia in works by Albert Murray, Sabine Ulibarri, Paula Gunn Allen, and Alice Walker. Karrer finds each text he studies representative of a

type of "ethnic recall" in contemporary fiction, all involving "grammatical and literary recodings of memory traces" (142, 143). Recall of a different nature is treated in William Keough's exploration of Irish-American responses to an often sentimentalized heritage. He traces the increasing complexity of those responses, from Edwin O'Connor's nostalgia to William Kennedy's harsh realism to Mary Gordon's exposure of a mixed Irish-American's legacy. The essay raises questions of whether this ethnic group experiences to the same anguished extent "the identity crisis of hyphenated Americans" (jacket), a fact unwittingly underlined by the following piece. The sentimentalized past in Sandra Molyneaux's essay about Charles W. Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman* is the brutal history of slavery, an era mythicized by the antebellum south. By examining revisions to Chesnutt's collection in light of earlier and later stories, Molyneaux demonstrates how his challenge to historical amnesia asserts "the power of oral testimony, intuitive wisdom, and sympathetic identification" (171).

The complex relationship between the present and enslaved past is the subject of three other fine essays. Angelita Reyes's interdisciplinary analysis of writing by Paule Marshall suggests the reductiveness of popular conceptions of carnival as mere tourist festival. She sees in carnival a reenactment of colonialism and slavery that forges links to history by ritualizing mythic and spiritual recall. Two strong essays on Toni Morrison's *Beloved* employ different routes to arrive at a similar conclusion. Sharon Jessee argues that *Beloved* demands of the other characters, and of the reader, the recovery of a West African concept of time that perceives the present as encompassing the immediate past. Jessee's argument that neither historical amnesia nor immersion in the past is sufficient is shared by Barbara Offutt Mathieson, for whom the complexities of the mother/child bond become a metaphor for the ambivalences of slavery's memory. Mathieson suggests that the slain daughter's return images the haunting of a past that, as in healthy maternal bonding, must be recognized and mourned but ultimately relinquished.

Debra Shostak's study of Maxine Hong Kingston focuses, unlike much scholarship, not on *The Woman Warrior* but on *Tripmaster Monkey*. Shostak shows how Kingston transforms both Chinese and western texts to create a narrative that erases cultural borders, proving that "to remember is to translate and to translate is to improvise" (255). Another renowned Chinese-American author, Amy Tan, is the subject of Ben Xu's essay, which links memory to the survival instinct exhibited by the mothers of *The Joy Luck Club*. The women find cohesive identity in memory's narrative continuity, a fact that must be recognized by their daughters before inter-generational conflict can be resolved. Multi-generational relations are thematically significant too in M.G. Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack*, identified by Rosemary Marangoly

George as representative of the "immigrant genre" (278). Through the metaphor of personal luggage, she explores how the novel's migrant characters, conscious of the "inauthenticity of all homes" (281), largely disavow national identity to express instead a sense of home based in familial ties. The final essay, Genaro M. Padilla's "Rediscovering Nineteenth-Century Mexican-American Autobiography," argues that contemporary Chicano personal narrative is heir to an earlier, neglected tradition treating similar issues of oppression and resistance. Particularly valuable is Padilla's consideration of how questions of literary production and genre in post-1848 Chicano/a writing can benefit from recent studies of Native American and African-American personal narrative.

The absence of such detailed cross-cultural contextualisation elsewhere highlights the collection's only major weakness: its failure to realize its objective of generating a "deeper understanding of the similarities and differences among American multicultural literatures" (viii). Buelens briefly links his "new (wo)man" and "mediator" roles to the contradictory roles imposed upon all American immigrants but doesn't consider whether his paradigm might illuminate non-Jewish ethnic literatures. Shostak's treatment of improvisation in Kingston's work suggests intriguing parallels with signifying in African-American literature, a connection that goes unremarked. This weakness aside, these generally well-written and accessible essays offer a valuable resource to those committed to exploring and celebrating the diversity of American literatures.

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Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, eds. *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*. Minneapolis, London: U of Minneapolis P, 1998. Pp. vi, 380. \$54.95, \$21.95 pb.

The nation has fallen on hard times. Once celebrated as the native, natural, nurturing site of personal identity and social enrichment, it now is reviled as an ideological weapon wielded by the West to subjugate its unruly other. Not too long ago, liberal critics comfortably assumed that all literatures were national in complexion, so that "American literature" was indisputably a distinct field whose novels, for instance, could be further subdivided (as Leslie Fielder did) into Northerns, Southerns, Easterns, and Westerns—each division marking a local sensibility as well as a cultural locale. If, as Frantz Fanon advised, "every culture is first and foremost national" in character, then the nation must serve as the guarantee of cultural authenticity. Its well-being becomes a precious heritage to be celebrated when it is robust and revived when it is sick. Accordingly, nations require suit-