
REVIEWS

John Lowe, ed. *Louisiana Culture From the Colonial Era to Katrina*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008. 327p.

BILLY MERCK
CLARK COLLEGE

It's easy to pick a piece of Louisiana culture—or anything in the South, for that matter—and reduce it to an easily consumable thing. Mardi Gras, music, religion, politics, architecture, race, food: the list goes on. Whatever the item, that thing is a unique and important piece, a part of something larger than the city of New Orleans, the Louisiana Purchase, and even America. In a time where contemporary notions of Louisiana center on seasonal events or catastrophes, *Louisiana Culture From the Colonial Era to Katrina* explores a more linear history that helps give understanding to the whys and hows of the more cyclical identities of Louisiana and Louisianans.

From the introduction of the five-part collection of essays (one edition in the Southern Literary Studies series), editor John Lowe posits the origin of the trajectory of this book in a study of place. Lowe leans on the words of Mississippi native Eudora Welty:

It is by knowing where you stand that you grow able to judge where you are. Place absorbs our earliest notice and attention, it bestows upon us our original awareness; and our critical powers spring up from the study of it and the growth and experiences inside it.... One place comprehended can make us understand other places better. Sense of place gives us equilibrium; extended, it is send of direction too. (1)

Welty's words resonate primarily because the book provides a linear look that explains how such a truly diverse region of our country could produce all too often collective, simplistic, and tourist-ready pieces of identity.

Louisiana Culture digs deep to the bone in "Part 1: Indian, French, Spanish, African, German: The Early Origins of a Unique Culture." Spanning from Native Americans to slavery, the three essays that begin this collection—and the (re)examination of the region's identity—challenge the conventional epistemology too long ignored. With claims like Germain Bienvenu's assertion that "possibly no American colonial literature manifests as total and positive a consensus toward Native Americans as does the canon of writings from Louisiana's first French domination" (44), the essays in this part initiate a beginning to the goal laid out by Mr. Lowe in the introduction: "We also intend for this collection to inspire a new meditation on history" (16).

Part 2 explores the question of Creolization and juxtaposes two essays—the first with a broader lens on the issue, and the second with a more focused approach on the complications of race relations—that not only complement each other but illustrate the beautiful complexities of looking at Louisiana with a mixture of broad understanding and reconciling specific anecdotal evidence. The movement in the mind at this point in the book has the reader realizing he is heeding Lowe’s call to action.

Peggy Whitman Prenshaw’s Part 3 essay, “Louisiana and the American Literary Tradition,” glosses over some of the more notable writers and instances in Louisiana literary history before reaching the summation—drawing from John Kennedy Toole’s *A Confederacy of Dunces* protagonist leaving Louisiana—that Louisiana “is a fascinating, sensuous place that galvanizes the imagination. It is a good place for writers—and readers” (158). Reading on to the next essay, Lowe’s “The Carnival Voices of *A Confederacy of Dunces*,” and through “Part 4: Louisiana Mythologies, from the Kingfish to the Peculiar Fascination with the Dead,” Prenshaw’s seemingly simple assertion holds up on its own. Together, with the book as a whole, *Louisiana Culture*’s single essays weave a complex, accessible, and enjoyable readjusting of the reader’s understanding of the region.

The book’s final three essays incorporate another noted Louisiana trope: music. Brenda Marie Osbey’s “One More Last Chance: Ritual and the Jazz Funeral” is a fitting penultimate essay. Miss Osbey provides a context that serves the entire volume, and perhaps due to its placement in the text seems a good place to bring the book home, though it could easily also be the beginning:

When ritual and myth are suspended abruptly or by force, they are inevitably reduced: at worst to the category of superstition, at best to unexplained sayings. These last, in spite of all our claim to modernness, ring with the subtleties of deeper mysteries. They give shape to the traditions we cling to without explaining why. (291)

Hurricane Katrina thrust Louisiana into the national consciousness in a way that most other single events in recent Louisiana history did not. After that moment, Louisiana would not be the same, and our understanding of Louisiana would change, also. Through moving forward and recovering from that moment, it’s clear after reading *Louisiana Culture From the Colonial Era to Katrina* that moving forward must also include a vigilant commitment to preserve and understand the past. So simple and at the same time complicated; looking forward and being rooted in the past; having an understanding of, and trajectory from, place: very Louisiana. ✱

Heidi Kaufman. *English Origins, Jewish Discourse, and the Nineteenth-Century British Novel: Reflections On A Nested Nation*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009. 243p.

WHITNEY HELMS
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN

Heidi Kaufman's *English Origins, Jewish Discourse, and the Nineteenth-Century British Novel* takes as its starting point the ways race and religion became increasingly important markers in the construct of English identity in the nineteenth century. As the British worked to redefine themselves along such delicate lines, they were inevitably forced to confront the paradox of constructing themselves as racially distinct from Jews, the very people with whom they shared a "filial past" (10). Kaufman posits that many nineteenth-century novelists attempted to "[rework] this filial connection" (10) by inventing a racially homogenous nation through the use of Jewish discourse, "a system of representations or appropriations of Jewish history, culture, and people" (2). Kaufman's book thus explores the ways writers sought to envision an English identity whose origins were rooted in Jewish history, but whose current state was defined along the lines of supremacy, purity, and "chosen-ness" (5).

Because *English Origins* takes as its subject a relationship fraught with ambivalence, contradiction, and paradox, Kaufman uses the introductory chapter to explore the concerns that confronted nineteenth-century writers. For instance, Kaufman asks, what are the defining boundaries of Jewishness and Englishness? How can English identity be divorced from its Jewish affiliations if it defines itself through a Jewish discourse? Who is defined as "other" and who is a "legitimate insider" (20)? Following this first chapter is a close reading of seven Romantic and Victorian novels that reveals the ways novelists engaged in what Kaufman calls nesting, the "act of absorbing, enshrining, and embedding ... Jewish traditions and histories ... in the nineteenth-century novel's construction of English national and racial identity" (10). While scholarly interest in the relationship between novels, race, and nation has been prevalent, to say the least, Kaufman notes that much of this work has "left little room for examining varieties within any single grouping [of race/identity], nor have they created opportunities for addressing points of overlap among these categories or groups" (4). *English Origins* addresses this oversight by pointing directly to the sundry versions of nested identities that were produced in novels at this time. Kaufman's book, then, broadens the way Jewish and Anglican relations can be configured and understood, and the heuristic of nesting enables her to question, if not undermine, the common readings of the novels that she treats in this work, such as the familiar assertion that the vague

ending between a Christian and his Jewish lover in Disraeli's *Tancred* is a marker of Victorian anxiety over miscegenation. Less concerned with how Judaism explicitly figures into literature at this time, Kaufman explores the more interesting and nuanced ways in which British authors manipulated Jewish discourse to create "a racial nation with a Jewish past" (5). In this regard it makes sense that Kaufman examines *Middlemarch* (a novel with no Jewish characters) and not *Daniel Deronda* (a novel appealing to Zionist and Jewish sympathies), and allows *Barnaby Rudge* (an historical novel based on the Gordon Riots) to occupy a more prominent space in her study than its predecessor, *Oliver Twist*—the novel that introduced readers to Dickens' most famous Jewish character, Fagin.

The chronological structure of Kaufman's study strengthens the evidence that the manipulation of Jewish discourse in novel writing was not exclusive to a particular author or timeframe, but rather a common and durable device that easily adapted to what was most relevant and current at the time. Beginning her analysis with Maria Edgeworth's 1817 novel *Harrington*, she spans the century with the mid to late nineteenth-century novels, *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), *Judah's Lion* (1843), *Tancred* (1847), *Jane Eyre* (1847), and *Middlemarch* (1871-72), and concludes with H. Rider Haggard's 1885 novel *King Solomon's Mines*. Though Kaufman explains that she chose "novels that best elucidate the power of Jewish discourse to help produce English identity" (25), it is noteworthy that she offers a fair balance of male and female-authored texts. That female authors were equally engaged in utilizing this discourse to invent a racially homogenous nation and to serve various socio-political interests is unfortunately not explicitly addressed by Kaufman, though it is a discussion that would raise the stakes of her subject even further.

Because Kaufman's selections form somewhat of a survey of nineteenth-century novels, *English Origins* is comprised of a wide range of distinct examples to support its thesis. Kaufman highlights the unique ways in which authors integrated Jewish discourse into various narrative strands, a strategy that renders her claims all the more convincing. For instance, in part of her analysis on *Barnaby Rudge*, Kaufman aligns strained father-son relationships (which are associated in the novel with markers of the Old Testament, such as Abraham and his son Isaac) with England's "troubling" Jewish past, and argues that the growing tension between fathers and sons in the novel is Dickens' way of questioning how "a new nation emerge[s] from and break[s] with its past" (52). And in Kaufman's most compelling argument, *Jane Eyre*'s progress and journey from Lowood to marriage is interpreted as less instigated by her desire to liberate herself from patriarchal restraints than to divorce herself from her Jewish otherness and fully develop into a Christian who can move beyond her "unclean" origins.

Kaufman's strengths lie in her ability to articulate her points with clear and thoughtful prose, as well as her refusal to assume that her readers are acquainted with the various historical events that played a role in the formation of nineteenth-century British identity. Indeed, in every chapter, Kaufman does a fine job outlining theological, biblical, and historical issues upon which her analyses hinge, and she makes a point to explain the rationale guiding both the choices she makes and the terms she uses throughout the book. *English Origins* is certainly an important and promising critical contribution to scholars preoccupied with Jewish and Anglican studies, the novel, race relations, empire, imperialism, nationalism, Otherness, identity, and religion, precisely because Kaufman identifies a dynamic between these subjects that has largely been neglected. ✱

Maria DiBattista. *Imagining Virginia Woolf: An Experiment in Critical Biography*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009. 193p.

SUSAN NYIKOS
UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY

Imagining Virginia Woolf is a collection of lively and exciting essays on the author's reading of Virginia Woolf, but it also offers a study in reading an author on a more intimate level. A prominent Princeton scholar, Maria DiBattista clarifies early on what she means by the kind of "critical biography" she sets out to write on Woolf: she experiments with drawing "verbal portraits" of this elusive and complex author's "writerly personality" (35) as opposed to tracing her "animal life" (9) in a biological biography—in reference to Terry Eagleton's explanation of the biography paradox (9). The resulting intimate portrait is based solely in Woolf's most self-revealing yet self-concealing medium: her words. Because the writer and the self are never the same, the book attempts to do what the writer admits is impossible: to understand the writer through the text. This task, therefore, is inherently flawed, and yet makes for fascinating and enlightening reading in the attempt.

DiBattista assigns five writerly personalities to Woolf: The Sybil of the Drawing Room, The Author, The Critic, The World Writer, and The Adventurer. She maintains that these personalities do not exist or manifest as separate figments of the author, but they intertwine and overlap to create a complex whole that intrigues and invites the reader to patiently peel off the layers and find each personality in the process. Woolf is an excellent choice for such an approach. After all, she is decidedly intimate in both her fictional prose and her critical writing. When reading, Woolf herself acknowledges "a demon in us who whispers, 'I hate, I love,' and we cannot silence him" (7) but bow to the urge to read the *author*

and not just the words. As Hermione Lee, author of *Virginia Woolf* puts it (on the book's jacket), "It is clever and illuminating to approach Woolf through the idea of the writerly personae, rather than biographically or in more conventionally critical ways." This secession from conventional criticism, chronology, and other conventions of biographical writing makes for an intriguing read. DiBattista passes on a similarly engaging feeling to her own readers.

Though "reading" is the key method and process to the construction of this slender book, it also puts forth the argument that Woolf's writerly personality *is* comprised of at least the five complementary portraits whose names DiBattista gleans from Woolf's own vocabulary and unfolds their substance in their corresponding chapters. As the intrinsic humor of the epithet itself suggests, in her personality of "The Sibyl of the Drawing Room," Woolf exposes the emptiness of the fantasy world typically associated with the early 20th-century English drawing room: "untroubled happiness, unfailing wit, and fathomless profundity" (62) are all vain hopes. In the chapter "The Author," DiBattista argues that it is Woolf's brilliant manipulation of language that makes her the writer we are privileged to get to know—or often the lack of language, as in how cleverly she employs silence to imply far more than can be said in a scene. Next, the author argues that "the demon of reading" reveals the most about Woolf's literary personality as critic, what's more, she "might be said to have pioneered reader response criticism" (109). The last two personalities, "The World Writer" and "The Adventurer" bring the book to a poignant end: "Woolf is the Columbus of the Human Inside" (165) begins the final exuberant paragraph.

The indelible merit of this slender book is that on the one hand, it invites other readers to challenge the "demon of reading" and compare the author's notes with their own perspectives on Woolf's writing, while on the other hand, it also encourages us to engage in scholarly inquiry that does not shy away from establishing a more intimate relationship between author and reader. Just like the speaker in Billy Collins' poem, by peeling off Virginia Woolf's layers and layers of clothes, or her words, as it were, we discover an inventory of writerly riches.

Every reader eventually faces the problem of trying to understand a writer through the inherently flawed lens of the writer's work. While this book suggests several possible personas for Woolf as the writer, the very difficulty expressed by the writer in understanding those personas is the downfall of this book. Though the writer aims high, the aim is made unreachable by the very attempt. Yet, this book should not be read as a final word, rather, as a route to further possibilities. ✱

Matthew Dickerson and David O'Hara. *Narnia and the Fields of Arbol: The Environmental Vision of C.S. Lewis*. Culture of the Land: A Series in the New Agrarianism. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009. 320p.

DÉBORA MALDONADO-DEOLIVEIRA
MEREDITH COLLEGE.

When humans affect nature without considering the consequences—for example, the disastrous 2010 explosion of a BP offshore drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico that caused a marine oil spill polluting the waters and severely affecting the US Southeast economy—activists advocate more than ever the importance of better stewardship and care for our home planet. This point is ubiquitously stressed by the media, from grassroots eco-movements to popular fantasy films such as James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009). An example of this activism appears in *Narnia and the Fields of Arbol: The Environmental Vision of C.S. Lewis*, by Matthew Dickerson and Davis O'Hara. The book is a literary and critical analysis of the relationship between ecology and Christian ethics and philosophy as expressed in the writings of Irish-born English writer Clive Staple Lewis (1898-1963). Dickerson and O'Hara focus on C.S. Lewis' two fantasy books series: *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956) and *The Space Trilogy* (1938-1945). The authors use a multidisciplinary combination of literature, ecology, philosophy, and religion to explain Lewis' ecological views on nature and the effect of human actions on the environment. Obviously Lewis was not a scientist, but a literary writer and professor of Medieval English and Classics, as well as a Christian apologist. However, his love for the outdoors and his criticism of the modern industrial changes affecting the English landscape in the name of progress during the first half of the twentieth century drove him to write in favor of a more agrarian (and perhaps even romantic) Christian view of the environment via his characters' adventures in the fantastic realm of Narnia and the outlandish, futuristic communities on Mars, Venus, and Earth.

The authors, who come from very different fields, apply their expertise in environmental science, philosophy, and literary analysis in their study of the idea of nature in Lewis' popular fantasy novels. Following their multiple interests—Dickerson is a professor of environmental studies and computer sciences at Middlebury College, VT, and O'Hara an assistant professor of philosophy and classics at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, SD—both authors combine language and literature with religion, philosophy, and science in their interdisciplinary approach to human interaction with the environment as shown in Lewis' work. Dickerson and O'Hara justify their focus on *The Narnia Chronicles* and *The Space Trilogy* not merely because of the popularity of both series (particularly the first one), but also because the notion of “escapism” provides an effective

strategy for criticizing contemporary issues by using fantasy as a metaphor. As they write, “telling stories is sometimes more important than telling facts because of the way it provokes the imagination” (4). Storytelling provokes critical thinking more effectively on willing listeners than droning abstract arguments on deaf ears because it is apparently non-threatening. Throughout the book the authors argue that storytelling, as a pleasant learning experience, enlightens the audience’s imagination and challenges listeners to act and seek creative solutions for a particular cause such as Lewis’ environmental vision combined with that of a healthy Christian lifestyle.

Narnia and the Fields of Arbol: The Environmental Vision of C.S. Lewis is a critical interpretation of Lewis’ ideas about the environment and Christian ethics as expressed in *The Narnia Chronicles* and *The Space Trilogy*. The work analyzes how Lewis, a reconverted Christian apologist, presented in these two literary series an attempt to reconcile two habitually opposed subjects, science and religion. Traditionally, these two fields are at odds: science is considered an objective field that studies facts based on direct observation and analysis, whereas religion is a doctrine based on belief in a divine being and absolute faith in its dogmas. Like Lewis, Dickerson and O’Hara aim to “build bridges” not only between these two usually hostile disciplines. They propose to examine Christian notions of humans’ stewardship of the land and humans’ illusion of superiority over the “others” in other worlds. One example is the Christian idea of creation clashing against science, given the bitter ongoing debate between evolution and creationism in academic and scholar settings. This idea is clarified throughout the book, however, as when the authors demonstrate that Lewis’ ideas on ecology and creation are practical in the novels. For example, the Pevensie children plant trees as part of their legacy in Narnia, whereas Elwin Ransom fights against the evil Professor Weston and his assistant Richard “Dick” Devine to prevent industrial exploitation and colonization in outer space and on Earth. In this way, Lewis’ main characters show great care for the welfare of the land.

The main idea of the book is to analyze how Lewis’ fantasy serves as a metaphor to promote better ecological practices and encourage a healthier view of interaction between nature and humans. Rather than opting for self-serving romantic escapism, throughout his work Lewis criticizes contemporary environmental and even political issues that affected England at a time before and after World War II, using as background the imaginary worlds of Narnia, Macalandra (Mars), Pelelandra (Venus), and Thulcandra (Earth, specifically England in the near future). The major premise of this book is that “Christianity leads to a profound, practical, and powerfully healthy ecology—and it does so in large part because of

its [practical] teachings about nature and destiny, and about relationships” (17). Thus the book reinforces Lewis’ vision of life as one that is “charged with meaning; and that meaning entails ethical relations among all living things” (17). In this case, the word “arbol” (“tree” in Spanish) in both *The Narnia Chronicles* and *The Space Trilogy* refers to the tree that supports life in the fantasy realm and to the sun as the sustaining life force in a cosmos full of meaning instead of merely empty outer space, respectively.

Many scientists and intellectuals, nonetheless, contend that humans use religion, particularly Christianity, as a the main justification to claim human ownership of the earth based on the Judeo-Christian model of creation in Genesis, in which God orders Adam to assume dominion over all creatures as their divine king in nature. This can be observed in the authors’ analysis of *The Magician’s Nephew* and *The Last Battle* from the popular *The Narnia Chronicles*, in which the dwarves debate Aslan’s declaration that humans, though they may rule as royal kings of Narnia, do not possess the right of ownership of the land. The lion’s statement is troublesome because it assumes that Aslan is concerned only with humans and not with the general welfare of the animals and mythical residents of Narnia. Likewise, a similar situation arises when Ransom, the protagonist of *Out of the Silent Planet* and Pelelandra from *The Space Trilogy*, debates against Professor Weston’s justification of human dominion and exploitation in the name of progress: the latter uses Judeo-Christian values of superiority to enslave the “other” local communities of Mars (Macalandra) and Venus (Pelelandra), respectively. Through Ransom—a nature lover, philologist, and university professor of languages and medieval literature like Lewis himself—Lewis had rejected the idea that “nature has no purpose other than utilitarian use for humanity ... because it is not a Christian doctrine [that] would lead to ecological disaster” (15). The title itself of the book also reflects the authors’ use of storytelling to present these debates and ideas at different types of general readers. The first part, “Narnia,” refers to the children’s stories in *The Narnia Chronicles*. The second part, “the fields of Arbol,” recalls the solar system that Lewis used as a framework for his stories in *The Space Trilogy*, which is aimed at a more grown-up audience.

The book is very interesting, in part because its bold approach serves as another contribution to the ongoing debate of ecology and religion, such as it is held at the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, whose aim is to explore religious ethics and current environmental concerns (<http://fore.research.yale.edu/>). In their study, Dickerson and O’Hara start with a general biographical review and a summary of Lewis’ main ideas on nature, literature, religion, and philosophy. They continue with a lengthy introduction of their interdisciplinary methodology and end with

a bibliography of recent criticism of his work and readings on environmentalism and Platonism. The first three chapters focus on *The Narnia Chronicles* and the last three examine in detail each of the three books of *The Space Trilogy*. The final chapter reviews Lewis' ideas of creation and nature and its application to today's political and social views of environmentalism and a short list of recommended readings. The authors proceed novel by novel rather than by themes. Thus they treat Lewis' stories as fiction to "minimize the possible violence done to stories that have enchanted countless readers" (45) although this sometimes lead them to repeat the same ideas throughout their analysis. The sources and references in the endnotes are very helpful, as is the short list of recommended readings on Lewis' life, literary works, and ecology as they relate to Christian ethics and literature. Unfortunately, this two-page list of recommended readings excludes many of the critical works noted in the endnotes; the inclusion of these works could have easily aided general readers who wish to further their interest in these topics.

The book's style combines literary and scientific analysis, threaded with storytelling about nature and its portrayal in Lewis' fantasy novels. The use of storytelling as a strategic tool of academic research makes the reading captivating to the point that it is difficult to stop until the whole book is finished. Its storytelling style is very straightforward, which helps a general reader to better understand the philosophical presuppositions that shaped Lewis' ideas on nature, while making the reading more interesting. As Dickerson and O'Hara state in their study, ideas inform imagination and this process consequently provides meaning and understanding of the world that surround us. The authors do this via stories that "make sense of facts and put them into context" (6) thus filtering "everything through lenses tinted by what we wish to believe" (4). Yet, sometimes the style becomes a somewhat moralizing; for example, when it advocates a more "healthy pragmatic ecology" and responsible stewardship of nature and criticizes industrial actions and its effects on nature (247).

In general, the authors show the integrity and comprehensiveness of Lewis' thought between environmentalism and Christian views on nature, as well as "to help illustrate some of the reasons and philosophical presuppositions behind his views of nature" (7) that other critics may have either missed or overlooked. According to them, Lewis' work has been exhaustively studied under the lenses of philosophy, literary criticism, and even theology. Under the lens of scientific philosophy, this book offers an innovative view of Lewis' agrarian views of nature from the standpoint of his Christian ethics. In a way, many of Lewis' ideas remain fresh today reminding the readers of many organizations' missions, such as PETA on animal rights and the organics movement.

Although the authors manage to juxtapose these seemingly disparate fields in a thoughtful and balanced analysis, this exploration between ecology and Christian philosophy and ethics in Lewis' works seems to tread further the deep murky waters of debate between science and religion. At times, when the authors examine Lewis' somewhat forced blend of Christian ethics with an appreciation of nature and environmentalism, one cannot stop thinking that many of these ideas have had previously been expressed centuries before by St. Francis of Assisi, the Italian patron saint of animals and the environment, in his famous "Canticle of the Creatures" and some of his sermons. In fact, on October 4, the saint's feast day, the Catholic Church traditionally holds ceremonies dedicated to the blessing of animals. This issue could be related to the fact that Lewis was an Anglican Christian apologist whose views sometimes differed from those of his close Catholic friend and literary colleague J.R.R. Tolkien. Also, it would have been interesting to mention, at least in the endnotes, other religions' viewpoints on nature and the environment.

Overall, this book is certainly valuable for general readers interested in Lewis' work, but its approach offers a refreshing view of Lewis' idea of nature for the academic community. This study is also an enjoyable literary initiation for science students who wish to expand their horizons beyond the sciences, particularly combining the philosophy of science with a humanist analysis. The book's style invites general readers who know Lewis' work, particularly *The Narnia Chronicles* which have been popularized in radio, television, and film. It is also a good introduction to the lesser-known *The Space Trilogy*. It is a very good book, especially for undergraduate and interdisciplinary courses involving science, literature, and religion.*

John Lowe, ed. *Approaches to Teaching Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God and Other Works*. New York: MLA, 2009. 207p.

CYNTHIA A. CAVANAUGH
KEAN UNIVERSITY

This Modern Language Association volume, *Approaches to Teaching Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God and Other Works* provides insights for teaching the works of Zora Neale Hurston, an "iconic figure on a par with Ernest Hemingway, Virginia Woolf, and F. Scott Fitzgerald" (1) according to the volume's editor, John Lowe. Hurston's works—including novels, nonfiction, plays, and short stories—occupy the attention of Lowe and fifteen other Hurston scholars in this volume

with a central focus on *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. This volume, within the *Approaches to Teaching World Literature* Series, is presented in two main parts. "Part One: Materials" follows the volume's preface. Here the volume's editor presents the editions and anthologies where Hurston's published work may be found. "The Instructor's Library" includes a list of books and critical articles that almost any instructor who teaches Hurston would desire to consult as useful information for research and teaching.

Appearing after "Part One: Materials" comes "Part Two: Approaches." An introduction at the beginning of the "Approaches" section describes the salient aspects of each article in adequate detail, and those descriptions will not be repeated here. Instead, the value of a few that offer interesting or novel approaches to the literature will be examined. The articles in the volume discuss the following works by Hurston: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; *Jonah's Gourd Vine*; *Moses, Man of the Mountain*; *Seraph on the Suwane*; *Mules and Men*; *Tell My Horse*; *Dust Tracks on a Road*; "The Gilded Six-Bits"; *The First One*; *Color Struck*; and *Mule Bone*. Many of the articles do provide detailed teaching approaches, and a notable effort has commenced to encourage the teaching of Hurston's other works particularly in connection to *Their Eyes*.

Scholarly articles about *Their Eyes* have appeared over the years in journals and other publications, yet not many have focused on its presentation in the undergraduate classroom. The well-structured article, "Teaching *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and the Process of Canon Formation," by Genevieve West describes an interesting and broad approach to this novel. Her approach to teaching *Their Eyes* "uses book reviews to trace the ways in which cultural changes have influenced responses to the novel and Hurston's place in the canon" (21). She asks her students to read reviews that concern *Their Eyes* and some of Hurston's other works from before she wrote this novel in order to introduce students to the politics of popular and scholarly interest (22-24). Her approach is too detailed to describe in a review, but West enables the students to understand and follow the fall of Hurston's reputation with the literary critics as the nation moved toward the social crisis of the Depression and toward an interest in the literature of social protest. As a supplement to the reviews, some lectures and articles regarding the rise of protest literature, the Black Arts movement, the feminist movement, and the rise of black studies programs may help students to appreciate Hurston's literary marginalization and her eventual recovery away from the margins and into the center of the canon. Such an approach would appear to require a great amount of effort to assemble the materials and to coordinate the lectures and discussions. However, West maintains that most of the reviews may be taken from

a single volume: Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K.A. Appiah's *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (22). Conducting an analysis of the reviews and recognizing the values held by the critics could give the students an excellent understanding of how literature serves the needs and desires of special interest groups in our society.

Their Eyes is reputed to be a masterwork, and most of the articles in this volume focus upon giving instructors insights to this novel. However, the editor, John Lowe, states in his introduction that other works by Hurston "need to be better known and more often taught" (15). Kimberly D. Blockett and Nellie Y. McKay, the authors of the article "Telling Tales in *Dust Tracks on a Road*: Hurston's Portrait of an Artist," offer an interesting procedure to teach Hurston's autobiography. They suggest having students read *Their Eyes* before they read *Dust Tracks on a Road*. Experience has taught these instructors that having students read the autobiography after reading one of Hurston's novels offers a more productive experience than teaching the autobiography by itself. According to Blockett and McKay, "Reading *Dust Tracks* guarantees many questions and lively discussion about veracity, perspective, and the influence of race, class, and gender in autobiography" (157). This pairing of *Their Eyes* and *Dust Tracks* could have been made even more interesting if the instructors had included a short story such as Hurston's "Drenched in Light" in the readings. The child Isis from "Drenched in Light" hails travelers and sits on top of the gatepost at her Eatonville home. Valerie Boyd explains, in chapter eleven of her biography *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston*, that the child Isis is Hurston's tribute to herself as the indiscreet, uncultivated child that she once had been. When Blockett and McKay discuss the rhetoric of location applicable to *Their Eyes*, they mention that "Hurston uses the tropes of gates and roads to indicate discontent and desire" (161-162). As Janie leans over the gate near the beginning of *Their Eyes*, she sees "a glorious being coming up the road" (qtd. in Blockett and McKay 162). Zora Neale Hurston writes about sitting on her gate post as a child watching the road to Orlando in chapter four of *Dust Tracks*. If such interesting relationships concerning gates and roads exist among "Drenched in Light" and Hurston's other works, they should be examined together.

The authors of this volume make an admirable attempt to cover the scope of Hurston's major works and to give advice and examples about how to approach them in the classroom. However, only one short story, "The Gilded Six-Bits," is discussed in detail. A teaching approach detailed in an article by Margaret D. Bauer compares the couple in the story named Joe and Missie May to Adam and Eve in Eden. A brief mention of Hurston's "Sweat" is given as an example of a

short story that “prefigures so many of the larger themes in *Their Eyes*” (143) in the article “Polyvocality and Performance in *Mules and Men*” by Kimberly J. Banks and Cheryl A. Wall. A future effort by instructors might be to write articles that focus more attention on short stories to be taught separately or with other works by Hurston.*

Welford Dunaway Taylor, ed. *Sherwood Anderson Remembered*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2009. 305p.

AMBER A. LAPIANA
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Sherwood Anderson Remembered is in effect a bibliography of narrative accounts about the notoriously indefinable author of the title. Welford Dunaway Taylor has compiled almost fifty excerpts, several from the same sources, of first-hand accounts about Anderson as written or told by former wives, copy-writing colleagues, university professors, Virginia mountain-folk, publishers, and members of the American literati. These diverse accounts are meant to supplement existing biographies of Anderson as well as the subject’s own characteristically ambiguous autobiographical works.

Taylor has divided the excerpts according to how he defines the various stages of Anderson’s life, beginning with a brief chapter pertaining to his childhood and ending with “reminiscences” by mostly those who interacted with the author around the time of his peculiar death. What makes this work different from other Anderson scholarship, according to Taylor, is that “a direct connection to the subject conveys an immediacy and an empirical authority that traditional biographers lacking a personal knowledge can never replicate” (3). It is strange, then, that Taylor chooses to conclude with someone who does not seem as intimate with Anderson as others in the collection.

Described briefly by Taylor as “one of the last living Marion [Virginia] residents who knew Anderson well,” Virginia Greear was acquainted with Anderson through her husband David, whom the author had befriended while staying at the Greear homestead during a self-imposed exile from the New Orleans literary scene. In a comment concerning the nervousness she felt at speaking at the “Sherwood Anderson after Fifty Years” Conference, Greear admits that “if Sherwood was here I could be a little more relaxed. Because I was able to be myself when I was with them” (272). As the last statement of the collection, Taylor was undoubtedly trying to leave readers, with whom he laid the onus of discovering the “real” Anderson for themselves, with a particular sense of Anderson as a comforting figure, one

who was gracious and embracing of all. Of course, as we learn from several of the narratives, Anderson was less kind to his spouses or other women with whom he was romantically linked.

According to Taylor, a sense of Anderson is to be fashioned “from the reader’s proactive role in engaging, weighing, analyzing, comparing, and ultimately reconciling the varied assertions of the testifiers ... the likenesses produced by *Sherwood Anderson Remembered* will be reader-wrought, deriving from an investment in the process of epistemological exploration” (4). But the fact that Greear wasn’t talking specifically about Anderson but about the Anderson couple lessens any impact her statement may have had. It is at such a moment that the reader wishes Taylor had interjected a bit of scholarly expertise or his own perspective concerning Anderson rather than leave us to grapple with the insecurities of a woman with whom Anderson may have had a connection, but with whom the reader has none—unlike, say, Caroline Greear, Virginia’s mother-in-law. The elder Mrs. Greear is given room for one of the lengthier excerpts at almost twenty pages, thus allowing the reader not only a greater insight into Anderson’s character, but also an attachment to this particular narrator. It is indeed one of the more satisfying entries, and because of the helpful bibliographic material Taylor provides, one can search for it easily.

In addition to providing the bibliographic material, Taylor provides brief, one might say minimal, contextual information concerning the individuals behind the narrative accounts, though without explaining why he included the excerpts he did. He does state in the introduction his criteria for choosing the excerpts: “Achieving variety in both views and viewpoints”; “unique or ... revealing information”; “Objectivity and truthfulness” (5). The notion of “objectivity,” however, in a collection of first-hand accounts by those who knew Anderson seems to undermine Taylor’s agenda. Otherwise, why compile a text that illuminates the connections between Anderson and those who knew him rather than offer a more typical biography?

Taylor does correct misinformation presented by the narrators by inserting the corrections in brackets, and endnotes provide modest clarifications and explanations. Taylor also includes a brief list of additional sources for those interested in Anderson’s body of work rather than his biography. While the scholarly apparatus is all there, it is moderate, keeping with Taylor’s desire that the reader do the work to form her own opinion concerning Anderson’s complex nature.

One shouldn’t come to *Sherwood Anderson Remembered* expecting Taylor to make an explicit argument concerning Anderson’s character; of course, that these particular narratives have been selected, excerpted, and organized in such a fashion

is an argument in and of itself. The cacophony of voices Taylor has selected leaves readers with an impression of a complicated man, and the book makes manifest one narrator's apparently apt sense of Anderson: "He was there to be seen, but not always found" (95).*

Amy Hungerford. *Postmodern Belief: American Literature and Religion since 1960*. Princeton University Press, 2010. 194p.

BEN S. BUNTING, JR.
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

In her book *Postmodern Belief: American Literature and Religion since 1960*, Amy Hungerford provocatively investigates the interaction between postmodernity and religion in America, primarily relying on close readings of well-known literary texts to illustrate intersections between belief and how we value the written word. Hungerford argues that "belief without meaning becomes both a way to maintain religious belief rather than critique its institutions and a way to buttress the authority of the literature that seeks to imagine such belief" (xiii), and her argument for the continued relevance of both belief and literature reads like a post-postmodern version of Heidegger's writings on the inherent spirituality of poetics. *Postmodern Belief's* ambitious project is occasionally bogged down by a lack of clarity when Hungerford refers to the "American literary culture"; and at times the connections she implies between religion, culture, and literature are in need of more historical context than she provides. For the most part, though, Hungerford's book succeeds in tackling very ambitious subject matter in its brief 140 pages, thanks in large part to its introduction and opening chapter.

Hungerford does an excellent job of setting up the stakes of her argument, differentiating her project from a number of similar works, such as John McClure's *Partial Faiths*, while simultaneously telegraphing and justifying her close reading approach, which traces postmodern belief via literature chronologically from Eisenhower in the 1950s up until the recent release of Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road*. What makes *Postmodern Belief* so intriguing is that Hungerford isn't interested so much in how religion inflects particular works of literature, but instead in how non-doctrinal belief inflects the study of literature, and supports the continued validity of literary culture. It is a credit to her work that this subtle but important distinction is clear throughout the text.

One thing that isn't clear, as mentioned above, is who exactly Hungerford believes to be represented by "America's literary culture," a term she uses frequently. While *Postmodern Belief's* audience is clearly meant to be academics and literary

theorists, Hungerford comes across as uncertain as to whether the conclusions she's drawing regarding belief and literature apply to American culture at large, or only to the studies of intellectuals. At one point in the text, Hungerford bestows an egalitarian inflection on the idea of "American literary culture," suggesting that it is *not* simply the province of ivory-tower intellectuals; however, her choice of texts to close-read belies this sentiment. While DeLillo, Morrison, and McCarthy are not obscure authors by any means, you might well not expect to find them on the average American's reading list, either. Lack of clarification on this point makes it difficult to appreciate the stakes of Hungerford's overall argument throughout the rest of the book.

Hungerford's first chapter takes the grand scope of the book's title and addresses it directly in an equally grand (and effective) summary of postmodern literature and cultural history unified by what Hungerford calls "faith in faith." This chapter focuses on the nationalization of faith during the Eisenhower years, arguing persuasively for this era of American history as the starting point of the titular postmodern belief, or belief that is doctrine unspecific.

The next chapter, on the work of Allen Ginsberg, is the most effective chapter in the book, as it successfully ties together all of the threads that Hungerford has already introduced in a way that's never again quite as clear in later chapters. The choice of author and subject matter fits the book's overall argument precisely: Ginsberg, as an author who was both an intellectual and a pop-culture icon, both a believer and a heretic, both a poet and a mystic, embodies the intersections that Hungerford is trying to illustrate. Hungerford's investigation of Ginsberg's play both with the materiality of language and spirituality in his poetry provides the reader with a practical example of how belief in literature can infuse poesy with transcendental meaning.

In a somewhat awkward transition after a glowing second chapter, Hungerford simultaneously moves backward *and* forward temporally to discuss the significance of the Second Vatican Council and the ways in which Don DeLillo's '80s-era work "recuperates pre-Vatican II Catholicism" (52). Catholicism's break (of sorts) into the vernacular provides an excellent extension of Hungerford's discussion on the materiality of language, and while the idea of investigating the relationship between Catholicism and DeLillo's work may be nothing new, within the context of this book that relationship is given a new and interesting inflection.

In chapter four, Hungerford looks at "the Bible as Literature." It seems as if the first half of this chapter might have been a better fit earlier on in the book, as some of the argumentative moves Hungerford makes while using the Bible as her evidence can already be inferred from having read the book's earlier chapters. The

second half of the chapter, “Literature as Bible,” is a different matter. This section close-reads works from Cormac McCarthy and Toni Morrison to illustrate how some late twentieth-century fiction emulates Biblical language structures. One moment of dissonance results when Hungerford takes Harold Bloom’s reading of McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* to task, simply because the critique seems suddenly out-of-place in the context of the rest of the book. Why attack Bloom’s critique specifically? Otherwise, “Literature as Bible” turns out to be an engaging discussion with some of the book’s best close reading work.

In the fifth and final chapter, Hungerford attempts to show how writing “becomes both the articulation of belief and a form of religious practice” (108). In this chapter she addresses the work of Marilynne Robinson and the popular fiction series *Left Behind*. This juxtaposition further muddles Hungerford’s use of “American literary culture,” and it is difficult to see throughout the chapter how either of these texts is very relevant to Hungerford’s work in the rest of the book. Fortunately, *Postmodern Beliefs* conclusion provides the plainest statement of Hungerford’s argument in the entire book, and the idea of “American literary culture” here again gains an egalitarian inflection. The book’s conclusion paves over the confusion of chapter five to present a convincing case for belief in meaninglessness via literature as a replacement for religious doctrine in a world where canonical meaning has become less important than imaginative meaninglessness.

At times it is difficult to understand whether Hungerford is making an argument primarily about the view of literature in academia or in American culture at large, and only rarely throughout the book does she connect her literary analysis overtly to larger cultural and/or historical movements. Ultimately, though, these complaints are minor when taken in the scope of her book’s overall argument. *Postmodern Belief* presents a unique thesis supported throughout by provocative new readings of a number of canonical and non-canonical texts, and it will be fascinating to see Hungerford’s groundwork extended in the future by others using her work on belief in meaninglessness as a foundation for further study.*

Michael Wutz. *Enduring Words: Literary Narrative in a Changing Media Ecology*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2009. 279p.

JACOB HUGHES
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Michael Wutz’s *Enduring Words* ambitiously sets out to explore the reasons and significance behind literary print narrative’s survival in a technological age that

at times threatens to supersede it. Though Wutz's text advertises itself as being "An interdisciplinary study of the conditions of narrative fiction in the age of its supposed obsolescence," his sources are primarily modernist literature and commentaries filtered through a postmodernist theoretical lens. This organization makes sense in that Wutz is concerned with the notion of the "posthuman," as explained by Katherine Hayles and Donna Haraway's evolutionary cyborg in "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," and how these states relate to human cognitive forces in both interpreting and constructing literary narrative. In this sense, Wutz does occupy a locus of conversation that intersects with topics in new media, print culture, literary studies, film studies, and even neurology. The text is organized into eight chapters including an introduction, in general each addressing a different narratological aspect illustrated by an accompanying modern author and/or director with related antecedents, both literary and filmic. While this combination of perspectives is at several junctures enlightening—especially the early modernist literary connections Wutz draws between the representation of mangled hands and mechanized mediation in Frank Norris' *McTeague*—his overall conclusions at times seem defensive and/or unwilling to engage specific literary products of new media.

Immediately, Wutz somewhat contentiously opens his text by invoking Marinetti and his Futurist movement, marking their call for the death of print and all things old, especially books. The battleground for the survival of print texts and their narratives, then, is at the *fin de siècle*, both a cultural and temporal turning-point where mechanical mediums threaten to overtake unmediated artistic expression. Wutz explains, "Once the gramophone and film had emerged as the new bullies on the media block, there to absorb the acoustic and visual data streams hitherto confined to print, writing lost its erstwhile centrality and was forced into the margins of discourse, a demotion that the advent of the binary code has accelerated further" (2). While Marinetti's Futurist perspective can hardly be considered the norm, Wutz considers more reasonable voices, generally contrary to Marinetti, on the issue of mechanical reproducibility and mediation. Significantly, he consults Walter Benjamin on art and modern shock, who was wary of mechanizing art. Also, in consulting E.L. Doctorow, Wutz points to "the capaciousness of narrative to accommodate and reflect on all other discourses, including that of the (mass) media, on the threshold of the postmodern," a formidable opponent of Futurism (16).

Cognition is at the heart of and what's at stake in this somewhat binary "push-me-pull-you" relationship between print and visual media. Focusing on Doctorow's assessment that "visual media remain vastly inferior to print because

they subordinate complexities of thought to an uncontroled void,” Wutz displays visual media pitted against print narrative throughout the discourses through which he’s moving, posing (again, via Doctorow), “literary discourse, by contrast, lays bare the processes of cognition, conception, and the self through verbal elaboration and development” (16). But Wutz soon carries the comparison over to digital media, warping ahead in time: “Digital technologies carry the promise of such cognitive and substantive flattening as well, given that such technologies are often controlled by global software players managing the information streams of the World Wide Web” (16), continuing on to say, “If representation as one of the quintessential modes of artistic work switches from the alphabet to digits, Doctorow urges, humans are in danger of surrendering the complexities of their self and thought to corporate software engineers controlling the (surface) codes within which the work of the imagination and the writing of history will take place” (17). The survivability of literary narrative, according to Wutz, can be attributed to its multi-modal transference into digital interfaces—ways of reading and organizing print are often maintained in digital spaces. That, and he also accounts for corporate incentives to sell print materials (27).

With cognition at stake and the battle lines between print literary narratives drawn, Wutz continues on to discuss the early modernist media ecology and narratological agency; narrative technologies, notably including film and its relationship to print; modern information culture; and concluding with cognition’s relationship to information storage, language, and posthuman embodiment. His discussion of hand-mutilation in Frank Norris’ *McTeague*—reflective of “Norris’s abiding concern with incapacitation,” revealing “a compulsive fear of mangling or losing the organ elemental to his craft ... lay[ing] bare the return to a primal scene involving the loss of agency and authority”—sheds considerable insight on the uncertain mediated relationship between humans and machines at the turn of the century (47). Really, this commentary is the text’s insightful *tour de force* and frames much of Wutz’s ensuing discussion. Given the period’s anxiety over changing technology and mediums, it is difficult to shrug off Wutz’s conclusions of Norris’ underlying fear.

Wutz appropriately concludes his argument with a discussion of cognition. Here he initially relies heavily on Doctorow’s *City of God* and *Waterworks* to illustrate his points on the intellectual pervasiveness of narrative: “Unlike film and sound storage, which record physiological effects of the real, narrative can enact a form of more conventionally mimetic memorization by sorting through, and distilling, real history into a verbal account cognizant of its symbolic artifice; unlike a futuristic electroencephalograph, which registers cerebral tremors in generalized graphic

form, the novel is a more effective brain-wave recorder” (172). The materiality of print then is tantamount to its pervasiveness. Wutz closes the gap with a discussion of Richard Powers’ *Galatea 2.2*, emphasizing the narrator’s understanding that “like the human body, the book is a form of information transmission and storage, and like the human body, the book incorporates its encodings in a durable material substance” (qtd. in Wutz 198), arguing, “Embodiment and print, and the link between signal and heft, are part of a large synergy that allows the narrator to secure his own materiality against dissolution into data patterns” (198). Thus, “no body is in vain” (203), says Wutz at the text’s close.

Though Wutz’s commentary—especially regarding literary narrative and cognition—is fascinating, at some junctures he seems rather disparaging of new media’s potential to offer a creative palate, insisting the survival of print and its narrative structure based on the limitations of digital media. For example, he posits Michael Joyce’s concern that “The Web is a pretty difficult space in which to create an expressive surface for text” (qtd. in Wutz 27), highlighting this concern with Joyce’s own hypertext work *Twelve Blue*. *Twelve Blue*, however, is a relatively outdated example, composed long before the numerous software and hardware developments that ushered in Web 2.0. The “present limits of hyperfiction,” therefore, aren’t necessarily so present anymore. Furthermore, Wutz does not specifically engage the prevalence of reader-mediation technology (such as the Kindle) in particular. One is also apt to wonder how far we can carry the notion of remediation without considering that the pen, regardless of how flexible a writing instrument it is, is still a form of mediation. So is the question of degree rather than kind? Regardless, modernist and postmodernist literary scholars will likely find Wutz’s commentary valuable, if occasionally bogged down by “old media” examples without much consideration of what Web 2.0 has to offer. ✱