

reviews

victorians abed

PURITY CRUSADE: Sexual Morality and Social Control, 1868-1900. By David J. Pivar. Westport, Conn. Greenwood Press. 1973. \$10.95.

PRIMERS FOR PRUDERY: Sexual Advice to Victorian America. Edited by Ronald G. Walters. Englewood Cliffs, N.J. Prentice-Hall. 1974. \$6.95.

“The gentleman essayed the experiment on several different occasions without success, and was then compelled to the ludicrous necessity of searching for the place with a candle” (*Primers for Prudery*, 27). Our first impulse is to laugh at the ignorance of this unfortunate Victorian, eager to consummate his marriage but unaware of quite where to begin. And yet our knowledge of nineteenth-century American sexuality is almost as skimpy as our Victorian friend’s knowledge of female anatomy. Several pioneer studies of American sexuality have begun to shed at least candlelight on this often ignored or abhorred topic.

Despite their limitations, David J. Pivar’s *Purity Crusade* and Ronald G. Walters’ *Primers for Prudery* are welcome additions to these recent studies. Both authors realize that most popular concepts of Victorian sexuality arise from descriptions of attitudes and behavior presented in a vacuum: accounts of repressive advice or humorous episodes removed from their historical and cultural contexts. Using different approaches, Pivar and Walters attempt to offset these caricatures by examining several important Victorian sexual attitudes within the rapidly-changing world of late nineteenth-century America.

Pivar examines the interrelated purity reforms advocated from 1868 to 1900. He provides a detailed account of three distinct stages: anti-regulation (local battles against attempts to legalize or to regulate prostitution), new abolitionism (an all-out effort to eliminate prostitution) and social purity (a broadening of objectives focusing on child rearing and moral education as well as prostitution and a desire to purify and control the urban environment). Although the purity reformers failed to eliminate prostitution, Pivar reveals some impressive accomplishments: changing medical opinion from a pro-regulation to a pro-abolition viewpoint; increasing the “age of consent” in almost every state; and providing an issue and a temperament that helped to unify such diverse groups as female reformers (especially the WCTU), social hygienists, moral educators and municipal reformers. Their successes suggest that they were not fanatic eccentrics; they expressed certain fears about chaotic urban

environments and hopes about man's perfectability that many Americans could understand and support.

Pivar also offers insights into the nature of American reform movements and the functions of Victorian sexual attitudes. Like many reform activities, the purity crusade began as a pragmatic, local movement that gradually gained a philosophy and a national audience. Ironically, however, when it reached its peak during the early 1890's, the movement was already losing its vitality. As purity reformers merged with the progressives and as professional hygienists and political bureaucrats took over positions of leadership, the movement became distant from its local roots. Idealistic enthusiasm bowed to professional specialization. The story of the purity crusade also reveals important functions of Victorian sexual attitudes. The attack on prostitution provided both a sense of stability in a changing world and a bridge from the religious world view of the early nineteenth century to the more secular world view of the twentieth.

Despite the value of *Purity Crusade* as a thorough history of a movement and as an index to American reform activities and the functions of Victorian sexual attitudes, Pivar's overly detailed and fragmented presentation often obscures important objectives and conclusions, which become clear only when he steps back from his material in sections such as the "Introduction," "The Meaning of Social Purity for an Urban Society," and "Purity Reform in Perspective."

Walters' *Primers for Prudery* has both a narrower and a broader scope than Pivar's *Purity Crusade*. His conclusions are based primarily on a survey of "advice books," especially a dozen manuals published between 1830 and 1900. Despite this limitation (which is discussed in the "Introduction"), Walters' selections from advice books illuminate a much wider variety of sexual attitudes than Pivar examines in *Purity Crusade*. For example, Walters discusses several "corrupting influences" such as prostitution, alcohol, immigrant servants, schools, and lecherous peers and parents, a variety of "deviant" activities such as masturbation, premarital sex and excessive marital sex; and various attitudes about women, marriage, child rearing, sexual cures and eugenics.

Admittedly this panoramic collection offers numerous examples of advice that fit the stereotyped image of Victorian prudery: warnings about masturbation causing everything from an appetite for clay to insanity, or "humane" cures such as clitoral amputations for female masturbation. But Walter's objective is to place such warnings and cures within their cultural context so that we can gain a better perspective on them. His attempt yields two important conclusions. First, the "advice" authors were often as progressive as they were retrogressive. Their knowledge of psychology and physiology may have been primitive, but they were pioneers in statistical approaches to studying sexuality, and they were avid and humane opponents of the "conspiracy of silence." They realized that many tragedies could be related to the unwillingness of parents, teachers, and ministers to discuss sex with children. Second, Walters suggests a significant function of Victorian sexual attitudes, a function not unlike Pivar's "stabilizing force": "Sexual advice literature sought a . . . kind of stability, allowing people who followed its prescriptions to believe that, no matter what disorders existed in society, they could control the most intimate aspects of their existence—their bodies and their lusts" (158).

Unfortunately, these significant conclusions, like the conclusions to Pivar's study, are often obscured. The title *Primers for Prudery* is catchy, but perpetuates a stereotype that Walters hopes to modify; the organization is confusing; the structure and format are frustrating.

Still, in spite of the stylistic and structural problems, both books serve a useful purpose. Like James H. Timberlake's and John C. Burnham's reevaluations of prohibition, they help to undermine simplistic assumptions about an important aspect of American culture that is often avoided or ridiculed. Indirectly these studies also pose some fascinating questions for further investigation, research which could transform popular caricatures into humane dramas revealing how public events and attitudes shape one of the most private corners of our identities.

University of Texas, Arlington

Kenneth M. Roemer

THE NEW SEXUALITY. By Hendrik Ruitenbeek. New York. New Viewpoints. 1974. \$10.00.

One need not object to the author's leaning upon a colleague's familiarity with recent studies, nor to his frequent use of impressionistic approaches. Both have their uses. But the discontinuous brief chapters of this book accomplish little more than do "pop sociology" accounts of similar topics. When it deals with the historiography of sex, it reviews material which specialists know. When it deals with contemporary behavior, it focuses, we assume, only on circles of acquaintances—perhaps Ruitenbeek's "saving remnant"—and thus fails to do more than ruminate a little about stuff we already know.

Scattered and unsatisfying essays, in other words: they remind one of McLuhan at his least good.

SGL

RADICAL VISIONS AND AMERICAN DREAMS: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years. By Richard H. Pells. New York. Harper & Row. 1973. \$12.50.

As Walter Rideout observes in *American Literature* (May 1974), "anyone interested in the American 1930's" should read Pells's book. I can offer no improvement on Rideout's succinct summary: "Essentially Mr. Pells argues that the creative radical ferment that marked the first half of the decade contained conservative impulses which emerged more pronouncedly in the second half under the Popular Front's pressure toward conformity."

While I agree that *Radical Visions and American Dreams* is not "a definitive study," I feel obligated to stress with awe the scope and depth of its coverage of the often ponderous polemics of the prolific proponents of change during the depression from once best-selling world-savers like Stuart Chase to obscure oracles like Rebecca Pitts. While the value of their achievement remains debatable, one need not leaf again through the crumbling volumes of *New Masses*, *New Republic*, *Nation* and the more ephemeral productions of a troubled time. Pells has performed this formidable task with an uncommon energy complemented by an affable style rare in a researcher.

Since no one could hope to master all the tracts and fictions Pells consulted, he makes some errors. To those Rideout points out I would add only that Steinbeck's vision in *The Grapes of Wrath* is lost in the film version and that Pells generally fails in his treatment of motion pictures, while correctly calling attention to the conservatism of Hollywood's output during the 1930's, to identify the oppressive role of the Hays office that administered the production code. It was not, for example, the producers of *Blockade*—a film that was supposed to be about the Spanish Civil War—who considered it "unnecessary to mention who was fighting for what," but the religiously controlled censors of the script.

Probably every reader of such a comprehensive book can find things to quibble about in his area of expertise that do not detract from the value of Pells's work in providing a foundation study. My major reservation is, however, that Pells leaves the impression that the radical intellectual community in the 1930's was larger and more influential than those who experienced the decade remember. The circulation of many of the books and magazines discussed was miniscule. Pells admits that "Americans still adhered to an outmoded individualism," that the Lynds found Middletown's residents "tended to regard the depression as a momentary interruption in the normal flow of progress and prosperity," and that "unable to convince or even reach the average citizen," radical theorists "assaulted one another in lieu of an enemy who

would not respond." Yet I must finally agree with Walter Rideout that "especially in the first half of the book there is too much disjunction between the abstract realm of ideas and the more concrete one of events." Perhaps I'm arguing that Pells should have called his book "Thought in a Thoughtless Era" and made the slight shifts in his text such a title would have required.

Indiana University

Warren French

CHAUTAUQUA: A Center for Education, Religion, and the Arts in America. By Theodore Morrison. Chicago. University of Chicago Press. 1974. \$10.50. Profusely illustrated.

This study emphasizes the continuing influence of Chautauqua on the American cultural and educational scene, and the number of its innovations which have been adopted by other institutions with considerable success. Among these are the quarter system of academic study, university extension and correspondence courses, which were introduced at the University of Chicago by its first president, William Raney Harper, former principal of the Chautauqua System of Education; book clubs, which came into being partly because of the success of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circles and their reading programs; and summer music camps, writers' conferences and art workshops, all of which can trace their beginnings back to Chautauqua. The author touches on the American Lyceum movement, a precursor of Chautauqua, as well as Chautauqua's imitators.

Oklahoma State University

Kenneth Tracy

RADICALS IN URBAN POLITICS: The Alinsky Approach. By Robert Bailey, Jr. Chicago. University of Chicago Press. 1974. \$9.95.

An intensive analysis of a ghetto community program organized by followers of radical Saul Alinsky, this study is based on participant observation and survey research. Bailey identifies the attitudes, methods, and goals underlying the Alinsky community organizations. He finds that the leading activists within the ghetto are generally middle-income persons of better than average education who are frustrated by irresponsible city government and who seek to realize such conventional goals as better schools, cleaner streets and a safer community. Thus Bailey concludes that "the surprising aspect of Alinsky's organization is not its radicalness but its conventionality." On the whole, Bailey's book provides a concise but illuminating view of a vitally important phenomenon, and anyone concerned with the problems of modern urban America should find it enlightening.

Iowa State University

Jon C. Teaford

THE DECLINE OF AMERICAN GENTILITY. By Stow Persons. New York. Columbia University Press. 1973. \$11.95.

This is a depressing book, for it narrates the decline of critical intelligence as embodied in what Persons calls the "gentry" (not to be confused with the merely rich or well-bred), in Jefferson's "natural aristocrat" or in what we call the liberal intellectual. The story is not a new one to students of American culture, for the gentry have been commenting on their own loss of power since Fenimore Cooper returned from France and Tocqueville, as an observer, raised questions about it. Today, indeed, the liberal intellectual is not only the alienated intellectual as Persons identifies him, but is caught between the Silent Majority and the Counterculture.

Persons attempts to tell the story in relation to the development of mass theory. But mass theory, at least in the United States, developed ad hoc among the intellectuals who found themselves more and more displaced. None of their analyses really constitutes a theory; they are merely observations. Perhaps Henry Adams came closest, but we had no Ortega. Persons himself does not develop a theory. The blurb tells us that he says that gentility declined because the gentry evaded the slavery issue. The book fails to support the contention: slavery, abolition and related terms are not indexed and in his brief reference to abolitionism Persons points out that although Charles Sumner was snubbed by his merely aristocratic friends after he adopted the antislavery cause, he was warmly supported by the gentry—the liberal intellectuals. One can only conclude that the gentry was simply swamped by the mass. But surely a closer analysis is possible.

EFG

GEORGE BANCROFT. By Robert H. Canary. New York. Twayne Publishers, Inc. 1974. \$6.50.

Applying the methods of modern literary criticism to history, the author of this study selects his major work on *History of the United States from the Discovery of the Continent* (ten volumes, 1834-1875) for analysis of its structure and the nature of its

narrative. The author argues that "Bancroft's literary success was a result of his ability to produce a narrative of synthesis of events." Identifying himself as an "unreconstructed narrativist" in the current philosophical debate over the nature of historical narrative, he goes on to urge the similarity of the narrative in history and in literature. Attention to the familiar biographical details of Bancroft's political and diplomatic career is intentionally limited to provide more space in this relatively short study for analysis of the use of the narrative by Bancroft, including the role of scene, plot and character. Considerable attention is also devoted to Bancroft's various revisions of the *History* which were later published in subsequent editions, including the six-volume Centenary Edition (1876-79). This well organized and innovative study gives an impetus to the greater recognition of Bancroft as a literary historian, but even more will need to be done if he is to gain the same recognition that has more frequently been assigned to Francis Parkman.

University of Kansas

W. Stitt Robinson

IN HIS IMAGE, BUT . . . : Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910. By H. Shelton Smith. Durham. Duke University Press. 1972. \$8.50.

This book is an engrossing and disturbing study of the role of southern churches in supporting the institution of slavery and in formulating and perpetuating the racial ideology of the post-Civil War South. The author drew upon the minutes of church bodies, published sermons, a rich collection of doctoral dissertations and relevant secondary works to produce a significant scholarly study of racism in southern churches. The primary focus of the book, however, is on the Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian churches, with some attention to the Society of Friends and the Catholic and Protestant Episcopal churches.

Professor Smith concludes that from the beginning American churches supported slavery and the belief in the inferiority of black people. The period of the American Revolution produced a mild interest in antislavery, but only the Quakers cut their "ties with the system of Negro bondage." The other denominations made accommodations to slavery, and, consequently, antislavery was a "lost cause" in the South long before the rise of radical abolitionism in the North. When slavery ended, the major denominations championed the "racial orthodoxy" of the South and pushed their black communicants into separate churches. The author raises a great number of significant questions about the church in American society that await exploration by other social and intellectual historians.

University of Missouri, Columbia

Arvarh E. Strickland

MARYLAND'S REVOLUTION OF GOVERNMENT, 1689-1692. By Lois Green Carr and David William Jordan. Ithaca. Cornell University Press. 1974. \$15.00.

A meticulously researched study of the Glorious Revolution in Maryland. The authors are at their best when discussing the period after the actual revolt (which was bloodless), and emphasize the crucial role of local leaders and institutions in the maintenance of political stability during a period when the colonists' anxieties about their ultimate fate were maximized by uncertainties about the legitimacy of their government. Chapter 5 contains an excellent discussion of British colonial administration in microcosm, focusing on the British government's attempts to revoke Lord Baltimore's proprietary charter and appoint officials to govern Maryland for the crown. Also useful is the lengthy series of biographies of those who served in the "Associators Convention" which offered a measure of provincial leadership in the period between the revolt against Lord Baltimore and the arrival of royal officials in 1692.

Washington University, St. Louis

Aaron Schatzman

SIXTEEN MODERN AMERICAN AUTHORS. Ed. by Jackson R. Bryer. Durham. Duke University Press. 1974. \$10.00.

Students of modern American literature have for some years turned to *Fifteen Modern American Authors* (1969) as an indispensable guide to significant scholarship and criticism about twentieth-century American writers. Its particular usefulness lay not only in that it was a compendious guide through a vast body of material but that the various distinguished editors had winnowed the chaff and commented critically on the grain that remained. In its new form—*Sixteen Modern American Authors*—it will continue to be indispensable. It is not only brought as nearly up to date as the processes of editing and publishing permit, through 1972, but it has also added the sixteenth author, William Carlos Williams, who, known only to the cognoscenti in the late '60's, is now in danger of becoming the victim of an Industry—an ironic fate considering Williams' opinion of Academe. The full roll is now Anderson, Cather, Hart Crane, Dreiser, Eliot, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Frost, Hemingway, O'Neill, Pound, Robin-

son, Steinbeck, Stevens, Williams, Wolfe. It should be recognized that the editors do not pretend that these are the Major Authors, though the list is probably not far from the final canon, otherwise known as The Judgement of Time, but simply those who have been given the most scholarly and critical attention. The arrangement of the material is traditional: Bibliography, Editions, Manuscripts and letters, Biography, Criticism. Thus the Americanist in other fields will not find the cross-disciplinary listings that might be useful to him. When the author has been studied in connection with non-literary matters the various editors have duly commented on it, but one doubts that the state of study would yield much just now. Yet, if it is not a desk-book for all Americanists, it is a book to be kept in the forefront of the bibliographical compartment of their brains. It is also available in paperback from W. W. Norton, New York.

EFG

POPULAR ARCHITECTURE. Edited by Marshall Fishwick and J. Meredith Neil. Bowling Green, Ohio. Popular Press. 1974.

One of the editors (Fishwick) of *Popular Architecture* calls the book an "exploratory trip through Popular Architecture-land" (120) and notes that the effort ends with questions rather than conclusions. At this stage of our study, a book on this theme cannot be expected to state many answers but one could expect some more penetrating questions. This "deficiency" is no doubt traceable to the fact that the book is a reprint of an "In-Depth" section of the *Journal of Popular Culture* (Fall, 1973), and the twelve articles of varying length and merit do not really "speak to one another" (to paraphrase the editor of *American Studies*). This is not to put down the concept of reprinting issues or sections of journals, for the practice has considerable value as demonstrated by past achievements of *American Studies*. Rather, the subject of popular architecture is still rather vague, and the series of essays lacks the focus and overall quality to make the group work as a single publication. Only with focus, direction and penetration could this theme translate a series of short articles into a reader for classroom adoption, the goal I assume was intended here.

One could criticize the individual essays, some of which are quite convincing, but this would divert us from the principal question of whether the concept of *popular architecture* is sufficiently well defined to encourage the development of a methodology and esthetic to deal with it. Until we resolve whether pop architecture functions as does pop art in being "icons of our age," or whether an architecture designed to serve the perceptions of the automobile-rider can be meaningful to the pedestrian-occupant, we are dealing with impressions rather than meaningful classifications. This is the weakness of the "book"; fundamental questions have not been sufficiently examined to permit the reader to ponder possible answers. On the other hand, the "book" does alert the reader to the range of possible questions and themes, from the role of the mobile home to the quest for new principles, and from Las Vegas to squatter villages. In this it is thought provoking. But then, that is what scholarly journals are supposed to do, and did do in 1973.

University of Missouri, Kansas City

George Ehrlich

HUMBUG: The Art of P. T. Barnum. By Neil Harris. Boston. Little, Brown and Company. 1973. \$10.00.

The author argues that the exhibitor of Tom Thumb, Jenny Lind, and "The Greatest Show on Earth" was no mere energetic hypocrite, but rather a shrewd Yankee and Jacksonian Democrat whose career reflects the profound changes in nineteenth-century American attitudes towards entertainment and "culture." Barnum, he maintains, recognized and exploited "the operational aesthetic," the American fascination with how things (including humbugs) work. The study is generously and ably documented, though some of the attempts to draw parallels between Barnum's attitudes and those of writers such as Melville, Hawthorne and Mark Twain seem more ingenious than convincing.

University of Kansas

James B. Carothers

BLACK WRITERS OF THE THIRTIES. By James O. Young. Baton Rouge. Louisiana State University Press. 1973. \$10.00.

This is an interesting and valuable account of Black writers formulating their artistic and intellectual positions during a difficult period in America. The author traces conflicts between the older "race" men and the younger radicals and intellectuals, while examining their writing within its diverse political and social ideology. Influential journals, movements and coteries are given good account, and the book is competently documented throughout. The text is excellent in its discussion of well-known writers, such as Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, Richard Wright;

but is most valuable for the substantive treatment given to many important but less prominent writers of the period. A fine bibliographical essay is included.
University of Kansas Alan Lichter

MUSIC OF THE OLD SOUTH: Colony to Confederacy. By Robert Stoutamire. Rutherford, Madison, Teaneck, N.J. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press. 1972. \$15.00.

A more honest title would have been "Music in Williamsburg and Richmond." The book is derived from a 1960 Ed.D. dissertation, and apparently no attempt was made to update the bibliography. It consists largely of quotations from newspapers, providing names of many local musicians, with an extensive appendix of concert programs.

SONGS FROM THE WILLIAMSBURG THEATRE: * A Selection of Fifty Songs Performed on the Stage in Williamsburg in the Eighteenth Century. Arranged for voice and keyboard with introduction and commentaries by John W. Molnar. Williamsburg. Colonial Williamsburg. 1972. \$15.00.

David Garrick believed a song in a play was like horseradish with roast beef. This selection is taken from songs by English composers performed in plays and operas in colonial America, and is indispensable for an understanding of early American theater and music.
University of Kansas J. Bunker Clark

LIFE IN THE IRON MILLS. By Rebecca Harding Davis. Old Westbury, N.Y. The Feminist Press. 1972. \$2.25 (paper).

DAUGHTER OF EARTH. By Agnes Smedley. Old Westbury, N.Y. The Feminist Press. 1972. \$8.00 (cloth); \$3.00 (paper).

Two novels from a series which might be useful in classes—long out-of-print, now out in print at a pretty reasonable cost.

SGL