Reviews

JONATHAN ARAC, *The Emergence of American Literary Narrative, 1820-1860* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005), 288 pp.

The *literary* is usually taken for granted in a project of literary history. However, as Jonathan Arac's study shows, the category itself was new and anomalous in nineteenth-century America. The relationship between literary culture and the national culture in the United States was tense and complex. What we now recognize as the masterworks of mid-nineteenth-century American literature enjoyed only a brief moment before evanescing amid the crises that shook the nation during that era. Arac's account explores the internal history of literature, a history of the institution of literature in the United States, somewhat apart from the economic or social analysis of the period. As such, *The Emergence of American Literary Narrative, 1820-1860,* offers insight into not only the historicity of literary forms, but also the practice of literary history itself.

Originally published as "Narrative Forms," part of *The Cambridge History of American Literature* (1995), Arac's study has already contributed much to the field of American literary studies. It is a great boon to teachers, students, and scholars of American literature that this guide has now been reprinted and published as a handy, stand-alone paperback. This edition also includes a new bibliography and a brief, but informative, bibliographic essay that supplies the reader with a critical groundwork of American literary studies, from classics (such as those by F. O. Matthiessen and Perry Miller) to the recent work of "New Americanist" critics (such as Sacvan Bercovitch, Walter Benn Michaels, and Donald Pease).

Arac begins by stating that the "central event in the literary history of mid-nineteenth-century American prose narrative is the emergence, around 1850, of works, preeminently *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick*, that still count as 'literature' for many readers in the late twentieth century" (1-2). Prior to the nineteenth century, the term *literature* referred to any "culturally valued" writing, including history, philosophy, and science; the specialized use of the term, understood as creative or imaginative fiction somewhat removed from the quotidian concerns of public culture, emerged in the United States, in part through the development of prose narratives. Self-consciously establishing a special place for the imagination, writers of literary narrative hoped to produce an art that valued originality, innovation, and creativity. But these values were not always those most highly prized in nineteenth-century letters. While scholars have focused on *literary narratives*, other genres often dominated that scene at the time. Arac labels these competitor genres *national*, *local*, and *personal narratives*.

In the early and mid-nineteenth century, what Arac calls *national narrative* flourished. National narrative told the story of America's colonial beginnings and projected an image of America as a model for the world: "National narrative was part of the process by which the nation was forming itself and not merely a reflection of an accomplished fact, yet it defined the ground against which the other major narrative types would stand out" (3). Developed in both fiction and nonfiction, in novels of James Fenimore Cooper and histories of George Bancroft, national narrative began to take its recognizable form during the Jacksonian Era (1829-37). Many of the most salient images produced in the national narratives of Cooper and Bancroft still prevail in popular culture and political discourse today. The heroic individual (like Natty Bumppo of *The Pioneers* or *The Last of the Mohicans*), who is crucial in establishing the national community, even if he cannot be a part of it, is a key component of the Hollywood western (5); Bancroft's notion of America as a unified ensemble of small, democratic communities, whose destiny is to lead the world by its example of liberty, sounds a note still audible in political speeches today.

Despite these efforts, regional differences offered pesky reminders that a national culture was still an ideal, not a fait accompli. Washington Irving established the defining features of *local narrative*. Irving's Dutch New Yorkers of "Rip Van Winkle" or "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" are not figures of the new, national "people." Indeed, Ichabod Crane is the most likely candidate for a national representative, and he is lampooned and run out of town. The

backwoods folks who populate the tales of Southwestern humorists like Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, or George Washington Harris are even less likely candidates for representative Americans. The "tall tales" of these writers helped to establish a popular subgenre in which a rustic scene, populated with uneducated rubes, offers readers for a good chuckle, usually accompanied by a feeling of superiority. Nor are the democratic ideals of "America" particularly well represented by the haunted Puritans of Nathaniel Hawthorne's New England. By selecting the region's colonial past as his setting and by employing the Puritan technique of allegory (often to devastating critical effect), Hawthorne presents a picture that is not neatly incorporated into the national panorama; his tortured New Englanders are a stiff antidote to "the bringers of light" that Bancroft's English colonists represented. Hawthorne also developed in his characters a psychological inwardness or isolation that stood at odds with the communitarian image of national narratives by Cooper and Bancroft. This psychological characterization is taken to extremes by Poe, whose work cannot be incorporated into a national narrative. As Arac points out, the persistence of these local differences in the United States ensured that "the story of America was not the only story" (30).

Whereas local narratives are situated in particular places, *personal narratives*, which came to prominence in the 1840s, arose from "displacement: Pacific voyages, overland journeys to the frontier, slaves' escapes, or even a displacement as small as Thoreau's within Concord" (76). Arac adds that, contrary to both Puritan tradition and modern expectations, they usually did not describe a spiritual or psychological transformation. Rather, they tended to be narratives with a straightforward setting forth of facts, typically employing a descent-and-return formula, in which a privileged narrator descends into a "low" place (e.g., a lower class status, savage lands, the wilderness) only to return to the safety and status of home. An exception is the slave narrative, in which the movement tends to be one of ascent, from bondage to freedom. Examples of personal narratives include Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*, Frederick Douglass's *Narrative*, Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail*, Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, and Melville's *Typee*. In bringing reports from the periphery into the metropolitan center, personal narratives might be said to serve the aims of national narrative by colonizing distant places and experiences (77). A chief characteristic of personal narratives is that they be *true*. In the case of slave narratives like Douglass's, which were also political documents specifically intended to confirm real atrocities and alter the hearts and minds of otherwise indifferent readers, this authenticity was crucial. Their authority depended on it, as did their marketability, so much so that Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, a manifestly fantastic piece, includes a preface and a final note vouching for its authenticity; indeed, years later, *Pym*'s publisher would still advertize it among its works of travel. Arac notes that the same publisher turned down the manuscript for Melville's *Typee* (which *was*, at least, based on its author's personal experiences) on the grounds that "it was impossible that it could be true and therefore was without real value" (qtd. on 100). Melville nevertheless went on to enjoy much success with this and other personal narratives (*Omoo*, *Redburn*, and *White-Jacket*), but he felt constrained by the form. Another narrative form would provide more latitude.

Literary narrative is marked by originality, creativity, and imagination, and its exemplary figures can be found in Hawthorne's romances and in Melville's *Moby-Dick*, although Poe may have been the first to delineate the parameters of the form. Influenced by English and German Romanticism, Poe suggests the change in meaning of the term *literature*, when he wrote of Catherine Maria Sedgwick that, although she is the author of "many *books*—absolutely bound volumes," her popularity has "nothing to do with literature proper" (qtd. on 122). Poe's invocation implies that the truly literary must be innovative and will thus require a special type of audience who can recognize the newness and appreciate the genius behind it. Notwithstanding Poe's usage, the term that was used at the time was not *literature* but *romance*, and Hawthorne's prefaces to his "romances" indicate the freedom he associated with the form. In the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables* (subtitled *A Romance*), Hawthorne writes that, "When a writer calls his work a Romance, it hardly needs to be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to fashion and to material" (qtd. on 124). In the "Custom House" introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne demarcates the boundaries of romance around a "neutral territory," outside of the purview of vested

interests in the "real world," and in the preface to *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne writes that he wished "to establish a theatre, a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel," thus avoiding "to close a comparison with actual events of real lives" (qtd. on 123). For Hawthorne, romance afforded the author the freedom to create a world apart, and—as his defensive tone suggests—readers should appreciate that fidelity to everyday reality is not the aim. Indeed, placing itself at a certain distance from the life of the nation was precisely the point of *literary* narrative.

Literary narrative emerged in the United States at a moment of national crisis. Almost immediately after its appearance in the mid-nineteenth century, American literary narrative fades back into the shadows, as national narrative flourished. Around the same time that *Moby-Dick* was enjoying tepid sales, two national narratives emerged that changed the face of the United States: Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Francis Parkman's *The History of the Conspiracy of the Pontiac*. The commitment of these works to national narrative can be viewed in their narrative technique: "They establish no fictional intermediary like Ishmael; rather, they encourage readers to identify the narrating presence with the author, who in each case holds a clear ideological position on issues of major national consequence" (181-82). The influence of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in particular, would be felt not only in the national public sphere, in which it would become a bestseller and the rallying text of abolitionist cause, but also in the Republic of Letters; Stowe's influence was so great that Leo Tolstoy, in his *What Is Art?*, could prefer *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to even *King Lear*, "opposing the century-long tendency to value the 'literary'" (183).

In an epilogue, Arac discusses the changes to national narrative after the Civil War. The grammatically awkward, but conceptually coherent, formulation of the *United States* as a singular noun was established in this era, which is emblematic of the success of national narrative. Yet its triumph would also be its downfall. It "became an object of study for American high culture rather than, as in Bancroft or [Daniel] Webster, being the very substance of that culture" (241). With the advent of modernism, literary narrative would receive far greater authority and prestige than it had in Hawthorne's day, and national narrative would become merely the stuff of popular culture.

By showing how marginal and historically contingent the literary aesthetic was in the nineteenth century, *The Emergence of American Literary Narrative* dramatizes the struggle between formal considerations of the art of writing and the concerns of the culture at large. This, in turn, provides a much more satisfying explanation of the travails of some of the great writers of nineteenth-century America than some hackneyed notion of "being before their time" or the elitist condescension regarding ignorant readers. Arac concludes that "literary narrative could not maintain its separate realm from the crises that from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* through the end of reconstruction again brought to the fore national narrative" (241). Yet, in producing a new kind of narrative in the United States, Hawthorne and Melville helped to develop the literary art that is today valued throughout much of the world.

San Marcos, TX — Robert T. Tally, Jr.

Anja Bandau, *Strategien der Autorisierung: Projektionen der Chicana bei Gloria Anzaldúa und Cherríe Moraga* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2004), 263 pp.

Gloria Anzaldúas autobiographical text *Borderlands/La Frontera* has been discussed extensively in various fields such as Chicano/a Studies, minority studies, women's and gender studies, queer studies, literary studies, and cultural studies ever since its publication in 1987. Cherríe Moraga's two autobiographical book publications, *Loving in the War Years: Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (1983) and *The Last Generation* (1993), have not met with quite the same reception, but they were nevertheless successful. With so much discussion going on about these texts already, can a new dimension really be added to it?

In this study (which is the slightly revised version of her doctoral thesis, which she submitted at the University of Potsdam in 2001) Anja Bandau manages to convince the reader that this is in fact possible. Moraga's and Anzaldúa's texts have mainly been received along two lines: firstly, in Chicana and ethnic minority studies, they were greeted as revolutionary and praised for being "theory in the flesh," which bore relevance far beyond the reaches of academia (17). Secondly, in recent discussions of gender, some central figures developed in the texts have been looked at and taken out