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internal harmony and cultural persistence, however, this is a readable and sensitive—and, at times, admittedly speculative because of the limits imposed by sources—account of history from the Catawbas' point of view. It is at its strongest in laying out the myriad changes faced by the Catawbas and in depicting how Catawbas may have understood, and how they responded to, those changes.

Thomas Biolsi
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American Women Writing Fiction. Edited by Mickey Pearlman. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989. 236 pages. \$20.00 Cloth. \$10.00 Paper.

Mickey Pearlman's expertise is in the field of writing by and about women, with special attention to Muriel Spark, Tillie Olsen, and the themes of mothers and daughters in contemporary literature. A doctoral graduate of City University of New York, she takes an approach that is strongly political and social, and in *American Women Writing Fiction* she has assembled a collection of original essays by mostly CUNY and other New York City academic critics addressed to a central question: what happens to the standards of American literature when fiction is written by women rather than men? The political and social nature of the question becomes clear when Pearlman reminds us that it has been men who have established the standards. This tension gives her book an immediately militant edge. Not that such an interest disqualifies itself as scholarship—but one must always be careful that pointing out such once unapparent but now obvious conditions in which literature is made does not wind up being the sole contribution.

The best of Pearlman's contributors use her thesis as a starting point rather than a pre-ordained conclusion; and with the helpful addition of primary and secondary bibliographies for each author studied, *American Women Writing Fiction* stands as an important resource for our understanding of how women writers are producing works within the aesthetic (and not just political and social) conditions of our age.

A second question is one more likely to be generated by readers: how do the works of women writers not in the majority culture respond to these same conditions? Among the ten authors chosen for study, Toni Cade Bambara and Louise Erdrich are the representatives of African-American and Native American culture, respectively, and for neither does Pearlman draw a sharp distinction. Each is a woman first, Pearlman implies, with Bambara of interest because the male control of her culture is even more problematic and Erdrich most likely to be compared to Eudora Welty and Tillie Olsen in terms of their common interest in isolation and open space. Do the essays the editor commissioned on these two figures parallel the concerns of those written on women writers within the majority culture, and are comparisons to such women writers more common than to figures within African-American and Native American literature? Considering these questions does much to locate just what this book hopes to accomplish in terms of characterizing how women write fiction today.

For each of the majority authors, Pearlman's contributors direct themselves to that writer's strengths. Frank R. Cunningham finds much of Joyce Carol Oates's early fiction both inspired and shaped by conditions of confinement, especially in the way the dilemmas of young and middle aged men tend to enclose and ultimately stifle the identities of women, cutting adulthood short. Mary Gordon's work takes an opposite tack, according to John W. Mahon, who sees the author faulting families for not providing the sense of shelter often needed. Katherine Usher Henderson discovers Joan Didion breaking free of this dilemma between confinement and shelter, as the heroine of *Democracy* explores a new universe of personal relationships that yields strong loyalties and purposeful lives. Alison Lurie similarly awakens women, but uses a comic art of exaggeration and great emotional distance in order to deflate them, too, says Katharine M. Rogers. For the work of Susan Fromberg Schaeffer, Pearlman finds the author typically feminine in her view of how enclosed space is appreciated, especially in the context of memory's negative power and the tension between family and the outsider. Jayne Anne Phillips employs a more complex definition of space as home; Phyllis Lassner argues convincingly that Phillips exploits the contradiction between needing to escape home yet maintain it as a

locus for identity. In the volume's one weak essay, Jane Gentry Wallace's treatment of Mary Lee Settle, the writer is reduced to a speaker of platitudes, though this fault may be more Settle's than Wallace's. Gail Godwin is the subject of the book's most centrally theoretical essay, Rachel M. Brownstein's study of how such self-reflexive fiction as *The Odd Woman* systematically deconstructs the male dominant myths in women's literature.

Within this larger context, it is particularly interesting to see how Marvin Magalaner interprets Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* and how Martha M. Vertreace handles the notion of identity in Toni Cade Bambara's fiction. Magalaner's argument reflects Brownstein's treatment of Gail Godwin, using thematic elements of the narrative to highlight what are essentially structural concerns.

In *Love Medicine's* long history of two families, the critic finds the basic structure of the Chippewa nation informing Erdrich's understanding of the microcosmic elements within a specific family. The results of both this style of fiction writing and this manner of critical interpretation yield a clear picture of how good writing deconstructs illicit assumptions and clarifies what is really there. It is just the opposite of the homely humanistic approach exploited by both Mary Lee Settle and her critic in this volume. For Settle, the reader is given such meaningless but nice sounding platitudes as "believing in words, in language, in voice," "seeing history and its telling as essential for the health of the community," and "vision that bravely confronts the fundamental ambiguity of the human condition."

Much of Settle's fiction, however, and (even worse) her critic's appreciation of it, derive from history and family as delivered to audiences via the television miniseries, and consist of the very substanceless aphorisms that drive deconstructionists to destructive frenzy. Magalaner not only looks to Erdrich instead of to Settle, but pierces conventional appearances to locate the true structural element of fiction and not just make a quick bow to the marvelous powers of the humanities.

The fiction of Louise Erdrich prompts readers to ask questions rather than to smugly assure themselves of comfortable old truths they already know. As such, it advances the thesis of *American Women Writing Fiction* as surely as the strongest essays in this book.

Although Vertreace's essay on Bambara limits itself to the thematic operations of similar structural elements, it joins Magala-

ner's piece on Erdrich in reminding us that when a fiction writer talks about community, she or he is asking us to consider not just the whole but the system by which its parts cohere. Within such systematics can be found the generative and formative principles behind narrative. The best essays in this collection understand that principle, and in the two selections on non-majority writers we are able to see this essentially aesthetic principle studied in a way that does not allow the political and social to overly distract.

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New Voices from the Longhouse: An Anthology of Contemporary Iroquois Writing. Edited by Joseph Bruchac. Greenfield Center, NY: Greenfield Review Press, 1989. 294 pages. \$12.95 Paper.

As an extremely active writer, publisher, and anthologist, Joe Bruchac has created many fine works of literature, included among which are a number of fine anthologies. This is another one. It seems to me that every couple of years when the number of anthologies becomes overwhelming, I start to think that the anthology is a weak form of literature, too easy to create, too easy for people to ignore, and too insubstantial to allow any one writer the scope to shine. Presently, those of us interested in Native American Literature are being treated to a swell in the variety as well as the number of anthologies, but Bruchac's book is an exciting collection of new and established voices from the Iroquois people, making an important statement about what can only be seen as Iroquois Literature with all the nationalistic implications that such a concept carries.

New Voices from the Longhouse gives implicit and explicit support to the contention that an entity such as Contemporary Iroquois Literature exists with the inclusion of a wide variety of work. The volume is subtitled Contemporary Iroquois Writing, not Contemporary Iroquois Literature, because along with some fine poetry and fiction, the reader will find cultural history, the story of Iroquois iron workers, ghost stories, and articles on health, wampum, and the ceremonies. Contributing editors Maurice Kenny and Alex Jacobs have helped Bruchac compile a