

Spring 2012, Volume 45, Number 1

Consensus and Contest: The Public Humanities and Unsettling Reception

Kathleen Diffley

Some versions of the past are well received, some arouse dismay, and some have produced sparks, as several colleagues on book tours or in public forums have recently discovered. What happens when citizen mistrust outstrips mutual understanding, when disquieting encounters trump scholarly journals?

Discovering the African-American Civil War through Mary Chesnut

Julia A. Stern

I had stopped believing that we could ever learn more about the onetime slave maid who literally rescued the Chesnut finances after the war with her shared dairy business. But thanks to this extraordinary photograph, in the published annotation of which I had the good fortune to participate, that inquiry is just beginning.

Confederate Rock and Roll: Civil War Commemoration and Lived History

LeeAnn Whites

No one seems to have much respect for the facts when they fly in the face of deep convictions about all that is holy and noble and true. This is what the Civil War is to us, a test of who was noble and true, who gave us something to identify with in our own time. Suggesting that all those border-state loyalty oaths reflected the extent of disloyalty in Missouri meant suggesting to the state archivists that they themselves were descended from traitors.

Recreating a Tour, Recreating a Sense of Scholarly Engagement

Susanna Ashton

The more talks I gave and the more often I heard this question, the surer I was that I could be a better citizen, a better parent, and a better teacher if I truly listened to how people in the past tried to shape their testimony, particularly about what it was to be at once a South Carolinian and an American in the antebellum South.

Response: The Gravity of Consensus, the Case for Contest

Kathleen Diffley

Against the merits of discomfort, however, participants worried about lasting damage—their second preoccupation. Not all contests are benign, and not all disagreements take place in radio interviews or public meetings. After November, Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman collided fatally in Florida, their conflicting beliefs still intact. In the United States today, plenty of people wear hoodies and plenty of people carry guns. As a political mode, contest encourages wider constituencies, less-familiar voices, alternate narratives—and true fear.

Fate and Discipline: A Comparative Study of The Tale of the Heike and Chaucer's 'The Knight's Tale'

Asaad Al-Saleh

Whether they believe they are fated to encounter the vicissitudes of life or whether their faith in impermanence requires them to believe that everything in life is transient, the Chaucerian knights and the Heike samurai are under the thrall of a system of belief that shapes their identity.

Sympathy and Science: Representing Girls in Abolitionist Children's Literature

Sara Lindey

Antislavery children's literature provides a forum for women writers to speak to girls of their era in children's literature, imagining their younger sisters' and daughters' roles and responsibilities. With titles that indicate an imagined girls' readership, John P. Jewett's series of antislavery toy books provide a rich archive to examine how women writers imagined the rising generation of girls.

Some Assembly Required: Intertextuality, Marginalization, and The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao

Sean P. O'Brien

Readers of Oscar Wao, in being forced to decide so frequently what knowledge they will marginalize through the decisions they make about researching or simplifying each intertextual reference, are encouraged to consider to what degree their choices reflect or differ from those that have led to the kinds of personal and political situations depicted in the novel.

Book Reviews

Beyond Political Correctness: Remapping German Sensibilities in the 21st Century

Edited by Christine Anton and Frank Pilipp (Jeffrey Luppés)

Even in the mainstream, some representations have contained self-pitying, even revisionist sentiments that relativize Nazi crimes. Warts and all, according to this logic, consumers of these cultural products must refrain from pointing out "suspicious" elements in order for Germans to move forward less burdened by the past.

Broadcasting Modernism

Edited by Debra Rae Cohen, Michael Coyle, and Jane Lewty (Lisa Tyler)

Anyone interested in modernism—literary and otherwise—should be able to find something of interest in this wide-ranging series of unusually well written and theoretically sophisticated essays.

Fitzgerald's Mentors: Edmund Wilson, H. L. Mencken, and Gerald Murphy

By Ronald Berman (Kelsey Squire)

Ultimately, Berman's investigation of Fitzgerald's mentors finds its purpose in considering the "power of

reconsideration," that is, the ability of an author like Fitzgerald to use fiction as a means of reevaluating the ideas and philosophies of his close contemporaries.

Imaginary Citizens: Child Readers and the Limits of American Independence, 1640-1868

By Courtney Weikle-Mills (Jacqueline H. Harris)

Thus, part of the strength of *Imagining Childhood* lies in its contribution not only to early American children's literary, political, and religious scholarship but also to twenty-first-century legal discourse and the modern classroom.

Liberal Arts at the Brink

By Victor E. Ferrall, Jr. (Ginger G. Rodriguez)

Ultimately, Ferrall is much better at convincing readers that the liberal arts are indeed at the brink than he is at offering solutions; the options he proposes do not seem to offer much hope.

Why Victorian Literature Still Matters

By Philip Davis (Kevin Swafford)

The sometimes impressionistic, but always fluid, elaboration of ideas and responses concerning the Victorians may very well frustrate some readers (especially those who prefer standard forms of academic discourse); but Davis's style and modes of thematic/interpretive development re-enforce and exemplify his primary premise: namely, that individual response and expressiveness is at the core of what makes Victorian literature still relevant.