

American novel can represent and serve all the people without losing its sense of history and identity” (85).

Rody asserts that Gish Jen’s *Mona* is the first “purely comic” (90) second-generation Asian American story in its crossing of two ethnic traditions: Jewish and Asian American. She describes *Mona* as “a bildungsroman that comically modifies the traditional bourgeois Euro-American along ethnic, feminist, and postmodern critical lines to portray the contested dialogic, intersubjective development of a girl who questions the meaning of all the ‘matrices’ that frame her own and others’ possibilities” (92). Having included the novel in a course on Jewish American fiction, Rody discovers, to her surprise, that her students thought that Gish Jen’s Jewishness was “cool” (103). She notes that Jewishness marks the “intersection of home and homelessness” and outlines the ways the novel’s Camp Gugelstein, “a cross-race experiment,” is remarkably similar to her own classroom with its spirited “multicultural collaboration” and “multiethnic engagement” (109).

Aside from lucid, extended readings of these three novels, Rody writes four other chapters and “interchapters” which provide overviews of the interethnic paradigm, black presences in Asian American fiction, Jewishness in Asian American and other contemporary fiction, and mixed-raced children. These chapters discuss a wide range of novels that engage with a “spatial, horizontal axis of encounter ... taking the novel beyond its traditional interest in and association with a single people or nation, and including not just ethnic or racial binaries but multiple differences of ethnicity, language, national origin, class and citizenship status” (5–6). For me, these were the most inspiring chapters, as they made me want to read and learn more about works such as Japanese Hungarian American Jiro Adachi’s *The Island of Bicycle Dancers* (2004), Patricia Chao’s Latino-influenced *Mambo Peligroso* (2005), and Zadie Smith’s *The Autograph Man* (2002). Rody’s positive attitude about the “promise of a thriving and increasingly open-ended ethnic literature” brought about by these recent interethnic works is optimistic and appealing, and her keen observations tremendously satisfying.

Wilfrid Laurier University

ELEANOR TY

Journal of American Studies, 44 (2010), 4. doi:10.1017/S0021875810001970

John Beck, *Dirty Wars: Landscape, Power, and Waste in Western American Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010, £37.00). Pp. 440. ISBN 978 0 8032 2631 9.

William Carlos Williams once wrote, “History, history! We fools, what do we know or care? History begins for us with murder and enslavement, not with discovery ... the ghost of the land moves in the blood, moves the blood.” Although John Beck never refers to this comment it constantly came to mind as I read his dazzling analysis of the “permanent war” hidden in plain sight in the American West. The growth of the region was “coterminous” (15) with the political and economic rise of the USA and for this reason *Dirty Wars* rereads American western literature as a counterhistory revealing, if we look closely enough, uncanny stories from within the western landscape. Since Pearl Harbor, the USA has been in a

permanent state of emergency, argues Beck, protecting itself from a series of apparent threats and responding to them through internment, nuclear preparation, the war on drugs, and the war on terror, spun together into a dreadful economy of fear. Drawing on threads of theory from Hardt and Negri, Baumann, Virilio and Agamben, this book looks to trace patterns through a range of texts defined as “adversarial literature” (14) – some well-known (Silko, McCarthy, DeLillo, Momaday), some hardly known at all (Page, Carr, Miyake, Meloy), but always unearthing ‘the honeycombed crypts beneath the surface plane of the map’ (183) to create a new political archaeology of the West. Analysing what he terms this “purloined landscape,” Beck’s style weaves detailed, reiterated arguments, patterns, and ironies that persuade us of the “lines of convergence” which have constructed this “permanent state of emergency” and demonstrates that, at its best, literature can perform a vital and necessary “critical unveiling” (20). The association of the West with liberty and openness is exposed here as a screen behind which lurks a dark, “gothic” truth about how these myths have been used to shield and hide a terrible, uncanny secret. It is literature’s role, he argues, to become counter-surveillance, presenting “modes of cognitive and representational disturbance that might warp, fold, or rend the military–industrial desert screen” (44).

At times, the book does strain to remain within its literary boundaries, and showed in its brief discussions of Robert Smithson or Richard Misrach (one of whose photographs adorns the cover) the potential to widen its scope into multi-disciplinary connections and lines of enquiry. I thought, too, that criticizing Charles Bowden’s *A Shadow in the City* for its use of “narrative conventions” was to overlook his more experimental work in *Blood Orchid*, for example, a book which would have worked so well here.

However, these are minor criticisms of an important book which, through convincing and nuanced literary studies, suggests persuasively that in a culture of crazy politics, fantasy fears, and deliberately maintained insecurity, with “everywhere subjected to the obfuscatory concealments and erasures of power” (4), perhaps it is ultimately only through imaginative writing that we come anywhere close to grasping “the ghost of the land [that] moves in the blood” of American history.

University of Derby

NEIL CAMPBELL

Journal of American Studies, 44 (2010), 4. doi:10.1017/S0021875810001982

Susan Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009, \$49.95). Pp. 344. ISBN 978 0 8078 3274 5.

Susan Nance’s *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream* is a well-researched and engaging study of a wide variety of people – dancers, magicians, acrobats, lecturers – both native and foreign, who “played Eastern” for over a century before the Great Depression. Nance argues that playing Eastern had little to do with questions of empire and race but rather with capitalism, because the East promised an abundance and leisure similar to that of consumer capitalism. The book begins by examining the popularity of *The Thousand and One Nights* and American Oriental tales