

BEYOND THE MELTING POT: MEDIATION, MIGRATION, AND CULTURAL CRITICISM

CADLE, NATHANIEL. *The Mediating Nation: Late American Realism, Globalization, and the Progressive State*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014. xii + 253 pp. \$32.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1469618456.

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In his smart and engaging book, literary scholar Nathaniel Cadle draws on Woodrow Wilson's vision of the United States as a "compounded" nation of nations as a lens through which to view how some Progressive Era Americans understood globalization (2, 4, 7). The concept of national linkage to world cultures, according to Cadle, shaped how Americans in the realist tradition expressed competing visions of the United States and its role in the world. It helped them to cultivate new networks of transmission and circulation (finance, diplomacy, ideas, peoples, goods), to articulate the relationship between immigration and culture, and to develop and deploy new terms regarding the rise of laissez faire capitalism, imperialism, and migration. In attending to these different discoveries, this ambitious book aims to provide "a more adequate account of the multiple and sometime contradictory tendencies of globalization" and thereby relocate lost and alternative answers to the problems and possibilities of globalization (26).

Mediating Nation aims to "supplement and qualify existing accounts of the age of realism and Progressivism" (3, 24, 36–38). The Wilsonian "mediating nation" concept, which underlies much of the book was not so much about the nation's diplomatic role or potential for meditation, but had literary critical resonances as well. In this telling, the United States mediated the blood, the traditions, the sentiments, the tastes, the passions, and thereby was able to "understand all nations ... unitedly, as knowing and comprehending and embodying them all." (2). The United States was polyvocal, a "globalizing force of representation" that could speak for all the nations and peoples of the world (3). Moving beyond a facile notion of melting pot assimilationism, the notion of mediation focuses Cadle's exploration because of its multiple meanings and its engagement with some of the most vital issues of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. In short, the mediating nation concept carried within it its own antithesis; critics and writers quickly turned its attendant concepts and characteristics against it.

The book is comprised of five main chapters "polysemantically" exploring, with a rough chronological movement, those who tried to "articulate dynamic narratives of the role of U.S. economic, political, and cultural power in the world" from the mid-1880s onward. These wide-ranging figures, including Henry James, William Dean Howells, Abraham Cahan, Jack London, W. E. B. Du Bois, Jane Addams, Lafcadio Hearn, Louis Brandeis, Knut Hamsun, and Randolph Bourne, often did not articulate the same vision as Wilson. Many were arch critics of Wilson's "mediating nation" concept. However "even in their critiques, they acknowledged and sought to direct (or redirect) the growing authority the United States exercised over other nations" (4).

Cadle grapples with the shifting connotations of key terms such as "cosmopolitanism," "internationalism," "world-salvation," and "world power." The section on America as "world-salvation" (47) shows how this concept is secularized to fit various contexts, from the works of Josiah Strong and Edward Bellamy to Du Bois' "problem of the color line."

Cadle situates realism as a transnational project. William Dean Howells, with his anti-imperialist views (and world literary orientation), comes to stand in for the broader intersection of new literary modes and new political positions in light of the United States' changing role in the world. As Cadle

explicates Howells's views of the recently deceased Filipino writer José Rizal, whose memory U.S. colonial administrators hoped to capture and reshape (an act Howells hoped to prevent), he reveals realism as a transnational, anti-imperial project. With his emphasis on "Rizal's politics, use of local color, and indebtedness to Spanish novelists," Cadle argues that "Howells anticipates Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of minor literature, wherein seemingly marginal authors carve out a political, often national, identity for themselves and their perceived community through their appropriation of the very same linguistic and geographic conditions that tend to marginalize them" (90).

Tracking the development of the global reach and engagement of American culture, the chapters then pivot on the deepening of literature that was "embedded in and sometimes contributed to broader political and social efforts to negotiate and control those global connections" (4, 27). These developments were part of the increasing U.S. worldwide power through the second decade of the twentieth century and were premised on what Cadle sees as the "interpenetration between the domestic and the international," which often was cast in terms of a transnational "mediating nation" (7). Cadle brings insights on the representation of immigration, particularly in the third chapter; however the reading of Randolph Bourne is too brief, since the 1910s development of cultural pluralism by philosophers, cultural critics, and writers is absolutely central and also very much a product of its moment. And Bourne's "transnational America" was not so much, perhaps, about "dual citizenship" and the positive impacts of the flow of migrants through the United States as about a radical project of multiple overlapping citizenships—the characteristic transnational project, operating beyond the level of the nation state to transcend it (140–41).

The author does not quite fulfill his promise to "reintroduce the state as a vital force in the historical process of globalization" while also looking at the transnational production of culture (24). This book is more about ideas than action: we would need to see a lot more of state actors for that project to be fulfilled. "Bringing the state back in" also is a goal that historians of the U.S. who work on transnational dynamics and the role of culture in international relations will likely find odd given the plethora of work on this important subject.

Realism, according to Cadle, emerged as a literary mode both in response to, and as a way of, reinterpreting the global currents of American society and culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The book thus explores how the modes of transnational circulation central to Wilson's "mediating nation" concept were exploited to redefine the United States' role in the world. Cadle situates the project within the transnational literary turn and addresses historians as well as literary scholars. The book's coda provides a fresh way of understanding the legacy of the "mediating nation" from the modernist era onward. Instead of depicting the notion as antiquated, we see how it remained relevant. The turn against the Wilsonian interpretation of the concept won out. With a fascinating focus on another Wilson—Edmund Wilson—and his memoir *A Prelude* (1967), Cadle neatly explains how Edmund Wilson's depiction of his own First World War experiences was a new act of self-fashioning.¹ Building on the ideas of the thinkers covered in the book, but blending them with 1960s multiculturalism, this later Wilson constructed his alternate account of American internationalism that hinged on a newly accepted narrative of the vitality of immigrants to American society at home as well as of the nation's global reach.

NOTE

¹Edmund Wilson, *A Prelude* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1967).