

Such a conventional, even hackneyed, story line, with its “things-may-look-tough-but-there’s-always-hope” thematic overlay, belies the strength of Veramu’s work. In an earlier publication, a collection of short stories and a novella entitled *Black Messiah* (1989), his most memorable characters were those who were manipulated by the forces of their immediate physical and social environments. In *Moving Through the Streets* it is these forces which dominate the consciousness of key characters and readers alike. Here, for example, is Veramu’s view of Raiwaqa’s slums: “a stinking place. . . the seemingly endless blocks of flats in this prideless area stood silent and morose, as if waiting for some enlightened person to brighten and repaint them and to transform the tenants into responsible people filled with some measure of pride. By each high rise block stood grey painted rubbish enclosures where garbage bins were supposed to be neatly placed for the collectors. But now they had become stinking dumps. . . . Years ago the Raiwaqa Housing Authority had made a plea to the tenants to be more hygienic. People had not listened. . . . Sakaraia walked up one of the dirty stairs littered with rubbish to the topmost fourth storey. . . . The faint smell of urine and excreta hung in the air. He felt like vomiting” (149). Caught in such a world and with no prospect of changing it, Sakaraia sees himself as “a failure: without a job, without a future. A nobody” (1). Even Onisi, the gang leader, “had a low opinion of himself, was often depressed and needed drinks and sniffers to face the trials and tribulations of daily life” (19). And Merenia, who had left school early and worked in a garment factory at slave wages and then as a housemaid for little more, becomes “disillusioned by life in the slums” (21) and becomes a whore. She knows that eventually, like thousands of other slum women, “she would be married to a labourer and would bear children in rapid succession. She would, of course, be beaten periodically” (21), because of her husband’s frustration at his own lot in life. With Sakaraia, things might be marginally better.

While there is little to temper Veramu’s bleak vision—the hopeful ending is tentative at best—this third-world novel underscores the ubiquity of social inequality and discontent, and reinforces the need for reform.

Thomas Strychacz

*Modernism, Mass Culture, and Professionalism*

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Reviewed by Axel Knoenagel

Literary modernism coincided temporally with various other cultural and social modernizations of which mass culture and mass media are—from a cultural point of view—the most significant ones. In his study, Thomas Strychacz argues that modernist literature can only be properly assessed in conjunction with the practical consequences of these modernizations: “the kind of text we

usually call modernist was shaped profoundly by a convergence of professional discourse and the rise of mass culture. In this respect, modernist texts are historically related to the processes governing the establishment of authoritative discourses in American mass society" (5). To argue his case, Strychacz discusses texts by Henry James, Theodore Dreiser, John Dos Passos, and Nathanael West which were selected to "confront the widest cultural divide of the twentieth century as both a structuring principle and a problematic, and [to] bring into the open the crucial acts of reading and the legitimating [sic] practices whereby literary significances are fashioned, refashioned, disputed, and affirmed" (9).

Two chapters are devoted to Henry James, one of the first modernists and one of the first authors to pay any critical attention to the mass media. Strychacz reads *The Reverberator* as an attempt "to reinvest the printed word with significance within a print culture increasingly hostile to the stability and authority of its own productions" (47) and as foreshadowing "critical discourse in an age of mass culture" (55), while *The Sacred Fount* is presented as revealing "that questions of linguistic and literary competence concern, at root, power relationships among reader, text, interpretive community, and culture" (81).

Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* is debated as raising the question of authenticity so central to the critical perception of modernist culture: "a main premise of literary originality in the twentieth century is not just difference but *difference from mass culture*" (90). Through his conscious use of newspaper excerpts in the novel, Dreiser violated that traditional distance and, as Strychacz aptly argues, created a novel that "posits a network of relationships within which writing, culture, and self are constituted" (100). Through close analysis of the text, Strychacz demonstrates how not only the plot but also the character of Clyde Griffith are strongly indebted to models provided by the mass media.

John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.*, with its use of mass media material in the Newsreel sections, is a logical element of such a study. Strychacz goes further than analyzing Dos Passos's quotes from and arrangements of newspaper material, however, when he suggests that "Dos Passos is an engrossing and complex writer whose engagement with mass culture becomes an issue for critical debate only because that engagement is not complete" (142). To underscore his point, Strychacz analyzes various essays that Dos Passos published in the 1920s and 1930s to describe his perception of the professional writer in an age of mass communications. *U.S.A.* thus emerges for Strychacz as implying centrally "a complicity between modernist writer and professional reader, the one producing work that presupposes an elite readership, the other intent on consolidating professional authority by way of a complex, multileveled engagement with the texts best able to support it" (160).

The two chapters on Nathanael West's "Miss Lonelyhearts" and *The Day of the Locust* demonstrate Strychacz's claim that "new pressures demanded the

invention of new writing strategies, to be forged out of a vacuous culture of aestheticism, a new modernist idiom, and out of the limited expressive possibilities of mass culture" (163). West becomes Strychacz's ideal author since he "negotiates in complex ways between satirizing a powerful mass culture and acknowledging an allegiance to its possibilities for formal innovation" (164).

Strychacz concludes his study of *The Day of the Locust* by relating the novel's use of the media world to recent theories of postmodernism which argue for the collapse of the barriers between various cultural modes. Referring to the authors discussed in the book, Strychacz claims justifiably that they "anticipate the radical interweaving of media, narrative modes, and voices supposedly characteristic of postmodernism, and in many cases make problematic the kind of simple high/mass culture dichotomy accepted by both adherents and detractors of the usual perspective on modernist writing" (203). Strychacz arrives at this conclusion after a very informed and informing debate that, in its implications, goes far beyond the frame set by the book's title and provides stimulus for further discussion.

Maurice Cranston

*The Romantic Movement*

London: Blackwell Publishers, 1994. Pp. vi + 169. US \$39.95

Reviewed by Evelio Echevarría

The novel "is almost by definition, romantic," states Maurice Cranston (151), and, indeed, the majority of the writers he presents were famous novelists. The point of departure for his portrait of Romanticism is Rousseau's *La nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), which inaugurated in France a series of controversies (which also involved musicians) that would soon give renown to the Romantic movement. Since such controversies traveled abroad, after Chapter 1, "The First Romantics," the author moves on to briefly survey the emergence and development of the new literary school in the major Western nations: in Germany ("a reaction rather against rationality," 21), England, France, Italy, and Spain (a "uniquely rich pre-romantic literature," 135). The all-too-brief Chapter 7, "Late Romanticism," covers Russian, Polish, Scandinavian, Latin American, and American romantic manifestations. As for the United States, Cranston dismisses its Romanticism in less than three pages on the grounds that the country "was too much the creature of the Enlightenment . . . for Romanticism to be readily appreciated there" (145). This intense chapter comes to an end with observations on the relationship between Romanticism and music (a favorite topic in this book), the positivistic reaction against Romanticism, and the recurring traits of the latter that still persist in Western art today. The book closes with a Selected Bibliography of Critical Works (there are ninety-seven entries) and an Index.