

shatters her illusion by abruptly announcing that they will never move back. Yet Manish's seeming indifference to his wife's sadness is complicated by his observation that Anu creates her own loneliness by holding onto the past, rather than building a new life in America. In these stories Lakshmi ponders the relationship between the isolation imposed by cultural alienation and the personal responsibility of the immigrant to adapt to her new surroundings.

"Greenwich Line," the most heartrending story in the collection, chronicles the extramarital affair between Gauri and Jeevan. For seven years the two subsist on stolen weekends and trips abroad, explained to their respective spouses as conferences or library research. Yet on one such trip to London, Gauri, the narrator, realizes that she can no longer straddle the two worlds of her lackluster marriage and her fulfilling affair. She pushes Jeevan to choose between her and his wife and children, and feels betrayed when he says he cannot leave his family. Yet when pressed, Gauri admits that she would not be able to live with the guilt if Jeevan left his wife. Gauri accepts the bitter irony that she and Jeevan cannot abandon their moral code of duty and responsibility to family.

Lakshmi's book makes a significant contribution to the literature of the South Asian diaspora. It explores the nuances in the experiences of Indian women residing in the United States. Similar to Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Jhumpa Lahiri, Lakshmi chronicles the tumult of acculturation; yet Lakshmi delves deeper into the psyches of her protagonists, raising timely questions about the importance of cultural identity and personal agency within immigrant communities.

Daylanne K. English

Unnatural Selections: Eugenics in American Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance

Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. Pp. 146. \$22.95

Reviewed by Axel Knoenagel

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the population of the northeastern United States underwent drastic changes. Large numbers of immigrants came from Europe, and numerous former slaves and their offspring left the southern states for the economic opportunities of the North.

These first forebodings of modernity shook the established society of the American Northeast to the core. It became clear that this society was very unsure of its own structure and of how to go about shaping its future. The perceived means to a better society was the creation of an elite capable of ordering the future. In an age fascinated by the concepts of evolution and social Darwinism, the idea of solving this problem with biological means was almost logical.

Eugenics, the pseudoscience of breeding human beings, came to be viewed as a possible pragmatic solution. As critic Daylanne K. English suggests in her study *Unnatural Selections*, eugenics “saturated U.S. culture during the 1920s. It seeped into politics. It permeated social science and medicine. It shaped public policy and aesthetic theory. It influenced the nation’s literature. It affected popular culture” (1).

After a very good and informed introduction to the philosophical and social origins of eugenics in the U.S., English concentrates on texts written largely between 1910 and 1930. Her book combines literary and social histories to show the literary consequences of the eugenics debate. The term *literary* comprises a wide variety of genres. In addition to fiction and journalism by W. E. B. Du Bois, a variety of texts by T. S. Eliot, and Gertrude Stein’s *Three Lives*, English bases her study on antilynching plays by Afro-American women and on the case studies written by field workers for the U.S. Eugenics Record Office.

The range of results presented in the five chapters is as wide as the range of texts. W. E. B. Du Bois’s attempts to create an Afro-American elite—not just literarily in his fiction and editorials in the journal *The Crisis*, but also practically, namely, through the example of his daughter’s marriage to poet Countee Cullen—is the most obvious and most easily understood example of the intellectual approach to eugenics. The chapter, in particular the discussion of Du Bois’s novel *Dark Princess* as “eugenic fantasy” (42), helps to put the whole issue into perspective.

English’s discussion of T. S. Eliot’s demonstrates the problematic nature of her project. She has to concede that Eliot was very clearly interested in the creation of an elite, but one that is defined in cultural/intellectual terms and is “carefully disengaged from matters of sexuality” (67). Eliot, English analyzes, “wishes to encourage mingling and figurative propagation among the culturally superior” (84). The only common element is the interest in an elite.

The chapter on Gertrude Stein’s *Three Lives* also suggests that the literary material is not quite fulfilling the prerequisites of the study. Focusing on the relevance and consequences of childbirth in the book’s biographies, English suggests that *Three Lives* “emerges less as a progressive feminist text and more as an anxiously eugenic one” (106–107). Altogether, however, English can only conclude that, regardless of her eccentricities, Stein did not write in complete isolation from the intellectual tendencies of her age.

Eugenics was a relatively short-lived fashion. The concept of improvement that lay behind it gave way to other concerns after the Wall Street crash of 1929, and the excesses of Nazi Germany discredited the idea of biological selection altogether. Daylanne K. English’s study shows the circumstances that led to this

fashion, but it also suggests that the idea of eugenics played a rather negligible role in American literature.

Amin Malak

Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English

New York: State University of New York Press, 2005. Pp. 81. US \$24.95

Reviewed by Günseli Sönmez İşçi

Although the belief in the superiority of the dominant group has been under attack for quite a long time, a great deal of ambiguity still remains. The values of Islam, for example, are still overlooked and not considered as constitutive elements of historical and cultural development. Amin Malak's comprehensive study of Islam in its literary embodiment is an apt response to this kind of ambiguity and to shallow generalizations about Islam and its people. It is also a response to indifferent academics who relegate Muslim-English texts to the margin of the canon in English studies. What mainly emerges from Malak's valid arguments in this book is the need to acknowledge "the refreshing diversity of voices and visions" (151) expressed creatively by Muslim writers.

Amin Malak's exploration of Muslim authors who write in English and derive their inspirational and narrative material from Islam provides the reader with a challenging and thought-provoking resource for investigation and appreciation. The book begins with an analysis of Muslim identity and language politics adopted by Muslim writers. Malak argues that those Muslim writers who appropriate "a language with a perceived hostile history toward Islam" not only render it "a site of encounter for cultures and peoples on equal terms," and thus shift from "resistance to reconciliation" (11), but also fertilize, muslimize, and enrich it. The same enrichment is located in the narratives of Muslim women writers, which for Malak reveal a clear sense of pride in their Islamic cultural heritage. Most intriguing perhaps is Malak's assessment of Muslim feminists. Malak sheds light on the eloquent, assertive, and distinct voices of women writers who, while rejecting the abusive patriarchal practices in both Western and Islamic societies, retain a distanced attitude toward the reductionism of Euro-American feminism(s), and who, essentially, speak for themselves and in their own voices, rather than reproducing the views of Western feminist theorists.

Malak also attracts attention to a condescending Euro-American posture that shapes the parameters of poststructuralism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism, all of which marginalize Islam. While acknowledging the positive impact of the three "posts" in the field of critical inquiry in transforming the way we read texts, Malak distances himself from their exercise of "obfuscation to the detriment of concrete, meaningful values" (16), and he disapproves of the abstract speculations—so common in these approaches—that