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Book Review

Lighting Out for the Territory: Reflections on Mark Twain and American Culture by Shelley Fisher Fishkin, 1997, 264 pages. Available from: Oxford University Press, 198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016.

Ayşe Lahur Kırtunç

The book is made up of three main chapters, a prologue and an epilogue. In the prologue, Shelley Fisher Fishkin outlines the place Mark Twain has had in her personal and academic life, starting with her mother's initial effort to introduce Fishkin to Twain by driving her to his Hartford, Connecticut home when Fishkin was eleven. This trip of initiation sets the tone of the book: the three chapters that follow are also journeys to places where Twain lived: Hannibal, Missouri; Elmira, New York; and Hartford, Connecticut. Fishkin's narrative is a blend of her personal reactions to American culture and her journeys to find Twain in the past, present and future of that culture.

In chapter 1, titled "The Matter of Hannibal," Fishkin recounts her 1995 trip to Twain's hometown which has become a tourist trap. She sees the town as an amalgamation of contradictory meanings and a microcosm of America itself. Her main emphasis is to unearth traces of guilt in connection with slavery, but she is shocked to find that the official history of the town has been whitewashed to eliminate that part of its past—there are no clues to point out that blacks lived there as slaves, were auctioned off, and remained in segregation for long periods of time. Her interviews with the citizens of Hannibal also point out to the same fact: the painful past is not acknowledged in their educational institutions, public spaces or popular culture. The town is in total denial of truths that its most famous son told the whole world. The annual Tom Sawyer Days celebrations and community activities are centered around an idyllic childhood of Tom, Becky and Huck, an

inane nostalgia for a world that held no evil. The darker shades of Hannibal are not publicly claimed.

The second chapter, “Excavations,” is Fishkin’s journey to Elmira, New York, where Twain and his family spent their summers on Quarry Farm between 1871-1889. Elmira had been a main point of transfer on the Underground Railroad, and Jervis Langdon, Twain’s father-in- law, had been a “conductor,” an active abolitionist and a chief financial supporter of local abolitionist involvement. Fishkin asserts that “Twain must have been struck by the distance between his real father and his chosen surrogate father on the issue of slavery and abolition. While one was sending abolitionists to the state penitentiary, the other was helping to fund their activities” (81).

Doing research in the local public library, Fishkin discovers that Frederick Douglass made a speech in Elmira on 3 August 1880. She points out that the issues raised by Douglass influenced Twain who would soon write *Life on the Mississippi.* A letter written by Twain unearths an interesting fact: he paid for the board of Warner McGuinn, a black student at Yale Law School. Fishkin traces McGuinn’s life and career through his scrapbook, which provides valuable insight into race relations at the end of the 19th century. She questions how America “continue(s) to live, as a nation, in the shadow of racism while being simultaneously committed—on paper—to principles of equality” (122-123).

The third chapter, “Ripples and Reverberations,” outlines Twain’s popularity and pervasiveness in American culture. His name and image have been used in connection with a wide range of products and services: sewing machines, billiard tables, cigars, riverboat travel, dry cleaning, schools, a pizza parlor and even an asteroid in outer space. Twain quotes are used in gardening and grammar books alike. There are many quotes that are attributed to Twain but cannot be tracked down to anything he said or wrote, such as “There is nothing so annoying as to have two people go right on talking when you are interrupting” (136). Twain’s works are constantly reused on stage, television and cinema, and his characters have become a part of the iconography of American popular culture. There are references to him and his work in murder mysteries and historical romances. Many part-time Twain impersonators appear at public events to pose for publicity photos or as stand-up comedians. Twain is as much a part of Virtual Reality Expo as he is of the World Wide Web.

In the epilogue, Fishkin discusses Twain’s national and international impact. She also reflects on the problematic aspects of his work and presents guidelines into the complexity and the conflicting qualities that make Twain the quintessential American.

The book is a personal narrative that incorporates a vast amount of research with issues close to the writer’s heart. It questions the values that underlie much of

American culture and brings together the threads of the popular and the academic. It is history, literary criticism and cultural criticism: Fishkin cautions against the complacency of forgetting America's history of racism, an uneasy history which was the seminal aspect of Twain's work.

The book would appeal to a wide range of scholars and students interested in American history, popular culture, literature and racial issues. It offers rare insight into Twain's life and work, as well as into pervasive issues such as racism that continue to disturb and ripple personal and public affairs in the US. A particularly fascinating aspect of culture that Fishkin comments on is the selectivity with which the dominant culture chooses to retain or blot out ideological issues that disturb or placate that particular culture. The problematic issues surrounding historiography are only one aspect of this seemingly random (but actually deliberate) process of selection. The more pervasive repercussions arise in what the popular culture chooses to echo, revive or let die. The book is a valuable guide to both of these areas of interest.

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Book Review

Der Pelz meiner Tante Rachel by Raymond Federman. Translated from French* to German by Thomas Hartl, 1997. Available from: Faber and Faber, Leipzig, Germany.

Michael Oppermann

Raymond Federman's last novel *To Whom it May Concern* was published in 1990. Since then Federman has written poems, short stories and a play called *The Precipice*. He has also recorded a CD called*Surfiction Jazz* which presents itself as a fabulous blend of avantgarde jazz and surfictional poetry. However, "Federmaniacs" had to wait six years for a new novel which finally appeared in France under the title of *La Fourrure de ma Tante Rachel* (Aunt Rachel's Fur Coat). A German translation was provided by Thomas Hartl; it was published early in 1997.

At the outset, the title attracts attention. Federman experts know that aunt Rachel has not appeared in any of Federman's previous novels. So, does the text confront us with a totally new chapter of Federman's striking life story which has already been turned into a whole series of metafictional texts? Yes and no. A postscript called "Addenda" shows that aunt Rachel is a fictitious person. However, as we all know, the borderline between fiction and reality is highly problematic. The postscript even mentions Federman himself as a fictional character; the sole difference is that the author's alter ego is called "Féderman." A tiny little accent carries the difference between the author and his fictitious counterpart. On the other hand, the list of "*wirkliche Namen wirklicher Personen*" (real names of real people) closes with Nixon, Reagan and Bush. There is probably no reader who would claim that these people belong to the world of fiction only. Federman turns the distinction between fiction and reality into a highly ironic game which points to one of the basic concepts of metafiction, namely that *all* texts *are* fictional. That does not mean, however, that fiction cannot evolve around an autobiographical or historical

nucleus. This nucleus is transformed into fiction, and is simultaneously questioned and reinterpreted in the very process of writing. Thus, Federman creates “versions” of an autobiography which has grown more familiar over the years. This autobiography relates the story of a Jewish boy in France who escapes the Holocaust due to a spontaneous gesture of his mother. The boy manages to survive the remaining years of the war on a farm in the unoccupied parts of France, and later emigrates to America. Living in the shadow of the American Dream, the immigrant finally escapes oblivion thanks to a brilliant dissertation on Samuel Beckett.

So now it’s aunt Rachel. The fact that she is a “fictitious person” does not mean that she did not exist. Aunt Rachel serves as a narrative gap; the narrator’s memories rely entirely on a single photo, and on stories that were related to him by his parents (who died in a concentration camp). To paraphrase Federman, the critic: You have to invent if memory proves to be insufficient. And this is exactly what the novel does. It invents life in the name of a truth that not even Federman’s own texts have mentioned so far. However, the novel is not so much a radical criticism of America, as the German cover text pretends, as it is a stunning “critique” of the narrator’s country of origin, France.

After ten years of struggle in America, the narrator returns to Paris. There, he wants to finish his novel *Die Zeit der Nudeln* which “Federmaniacs” easily recognize as Federman’s first novel *Double or Nothing* (1971). The narrator makes contacts with the *Amour Fou* (Crazy Love) press company which, as its name suggests, is not really the right recipient for Federman’s radical prose. The reader understands very quickly that, in spite of all the allusions to America as an anti-intellectual country, the writer would have been “Lost in Oblivion” in France (to quote a film by Don DeCillio). In a highly humorous and clever manner, Federman dismantles the myth of France as an intellectual country, so that France, for the second time in the narrator's life, turns into a point of departure. This second farewell to his home country becomes even clearer when the narrator visits the house of his deceased parents where he finds his rich uncles and aunts. An empty room on the first floor (where the narrator grew up) turns into a second narrative gap into which the narrator withdraws in order to hold a mirror to the Holocaust survivors of his family.

The autobiographical nucleus is presented in a series of conversations, for example with a publisher or a taxi driver. The narrator "talks" with two different voices; the vulgar diction belongs to the young Frenchman who dreams of sexual encounters, whereas the elevated style anticipates the writer and literary critic who is on the point of establishing himself. Thus, past, present and future turn into a narrative continuum that spans from the birth of the narrator’s mother (in 1910) to the year 1996, so that even Federman’s new publisher Michael Faber and his translator Thomas Hartl become fictionalized. The overall impression is that of an improvisation in language, or of a solo on a saxophone (an instrument Federman

plays with considerable virtuosity). At the end, however, a quiet listener gets up at a café in Montparnasse: Federman's fictional alter ego who has recorded his "last tape" by telling yet another version of his autobiography to himself. This most recent version carries a totally stunning truth. It becomes obvious that, to a certain extent, the death of the narrator's parents can be attributed to the stinginess of the rich family members, who, warned in time of the initial deportations in France, only thought of saving themselves. They did not warn the narrator's parents for fear of having to look after the poorer family members. In short, the nucleus of Federman's novel carries a truth that goes far beyond the autobiographical level.

* *La Fourrure de ma Tante Rachel*. Paris: Circé, 1996.

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Book Review

Ben'den Önce Tufan: Sylvia Plath ve Şiiri (The Deluge Before I : Sylvia Plath and Her Poetry) by Yusuf Eradam, 1997, 180 pages. Available from: İmge Kitabevi Yayınları, Konur Sokak, No. 3, Kızılay, 06550 Ankara, Turkey.

Barış Gümüşbaş

Yusuf Eradam's monograph on Sylvia Plath is a contribution to the very thin stack of books in Turkish on American literary figures. Book-length studies on novelists, poets, and playwrights hardly ever get beyond the dusty dissertation shelves of university libraries.

In his introduction, Eradam makes clear his critical method of reading. He rejects the validity of what he calls “being a literary detective”* who tries to reconstruct the inner world and psychology of the artist by unveiling the “mystery” of the text (10). In this respect, Eradam believes in the relative autonomy and independence of the work of art from the artist.

The book consists of three main chapters: “The Making of Sylvia Plath,” “Themes in Plath's Poetry,” and “Plath's Poetic Technique.” In addition, there is a helpful section of notes, and also a selected bibliography on Plath.

The first chapter focuses on, as it investigates how Plath became a poet, what Eradam believes to be the underlying dynamic and problematic of Plath's art: confronting the self. After this initial stage, this problematic takes various shapes, at various times, as re-defining the self, oscillating between multiple selves, attempting to unify this multiplicity, and transcending the limits of the self. In the second part of the chapter, Eradam discusses the influence of the modernist tradition on Plath's art through common images, symbols, and themes.

The second chapter elaborates on symbols and images already mentioned in the previous chapter, and traces them to Plath's various poems. Eradam also analyzes how those images come to relate to Plath's three themes, namely time, death and oddities of nature.

In the third and final chapter, Eradam convincingly argues that not only the contents of Plath's individual poems but also their forms and techniques reflect the changes in her inner world.

A professor of American literature (at Ankara University), a translator (whose works include the translation of Plath's *Ariel*), and a poet himself, Eradam brings a lively interplay of these three perspectives into his book. The poet's voice takes over the other two facets of his personality in the open letter addressed to long-gone Plath, on the occasion of the would-have-been-60th birthday of "Sivvy." Opening with the words "I'M GLAD YOU WERE BORN," Eradam's letter testifies to the intensity of his feelings for a poet so far away in space and time. Such a relationship becomes so burdensome that Eradam cannot but close his letter as follows:

> I'm tired of your dark shadow. Being with you is constant death. That is why I'm leaving you Sivvy; I have things to do.
>
> Rest in peace honey. I'M GLAD YOU ARE DEAD!
>
> Yusuf (175, 179)

If the book is, however, no easy read, this has a lot to do with the nature of Plath's poetry. But her dedicated readers and/or those who pursue an academic interest in poetry in general, and in Plath's poetry in particular, will enjoy Eradam's book.

* All translations of Eradam's text are mine.

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Book Review

Crossing the Boundaries: Cultural Studies in the UK and US, edited by Laurence Raw, Gülriz Büken, and Günseli Sönmez İşçi with an introduction by Pete Remington, 1997, 163 pages. Available from the British Council, 9 Kırlangıç Sokak, Gaziosmanpaşa 06700, Ankara, Turkey, and from the American Studies Association, Cinnah Caddesi 20, TAD Binası Kat 4 Oda 48, Kavaklıdere, Ankara, Turkey.

Günseli Sönmez İşçi

Crossing The Boundaries: Cultural Studies in the UK and US is a collection of some of the papers delivered at the Cultural Studies Seminar held at Ege University in May 1996. The volume provides a map of the status of cultural studies within Turkey, as practiced by scholars from English and American departments. In order to give a conceptual structure to the collection, the papers are grouped under four headings: Literary into Cultural Studies, Popular Cultures, Postcolonial Cultures, Culture and Gender. The groupings of the articles suggests a common focus.

The debate concerning the nature and the function of the canon and the place of high culture in British Studies is the underlying argument that links the three articles in the first part. Himmet Umunç, in his paper entitled "Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach': A Cultural Polysemy" (9-15), draws attention to the problematical relationship between the canon and the practice of cultural criticism, and argues that a full cultural analysis needs to push beyond the boundaries of the text and raise questions concerning cultural paradigms, in order to reveal the latent intertexts within and around the literary work. Umunç then offers an example of cultural reading by demonstrating the political and social intertexts of Arnold's "Dover Beach." The following article, "Shakespeare Transformed" (17-25) by Günseli Sönmez İşçi, aims to demonstrate how canonical texts are re-read and reconstructed

in non-canonical ways. She argues that liberal, humanist, formalist, and essentialist readings of *Othello* are challenged by the anti-essentialist reading practiced by cultural materialists in the UK and new historicists in the US. The third article in this part, "British Studies and High Culture" (27-36) by Piotr Kuhiwczak, takes up a crucial problematic issue in British Studies, viz. the definition and place of high culture within the discipline. Kuhiwczak is concerned with the conspicuous absence of high culture in the framework of British Studies at an either practical or theoretical level. Kuhiwczak's implicit critique of the agenda of British Studies invokes a central question concerning untested ideological convictions on behalf of popular forms of culture.

The following part of the volume brings together three articles which, in different ways, address the question of the politics of the popular. Süheyla Kırca in her article "Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture" (39-47) draws attention to the troubled intersection of feminism and popular culture, and recalls the distinction between them, the first term designating political space, the other an object of study. In order to investigate feminist subtexts in women's magazines, Kırca deconstructs a soap advertisement from *Cosmopolitan*, a top-selling magazine which, she notes, has promoted the concept of postfeminism and the new woman. The following article by Can Abanazır, "The Voices of the Streets: Rap and Punk" (49-55), moves into another direction within popular culture, by surveying and comparing a subculture. Abanazır aims to illuminate the socio-cultural backgrounds of New York and London that have created marginal groups, such as Rap and Punk, to voice their rebellious, anarchic, and aggressive reactions through their music. Gülriz Büken in her article entitled "The MacDonaldization of Britain" (59-65) takes yet another direction, seeking to illustrate the politics of American consumerism and pursue its impact in Britain. With an illuminating overview of "consumer religion" in contemporary global culture, Büken draws attention to the undesirable consequences of the globalization of consumption, especially with reference to the dissolution of moral and social values that defined identities in the past.

The third part contains four articles, each reflecting a central issue in postcolonial discourse. Oya Batum Menteşe in her paper "An Analysis of Otherness in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Lawrence Durell's *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus* " (69-81) presents the strategies of "othering," especially with respect to gender and nation, and traces the discourse of such strategies in two disparate works. Her analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea* reveals how Jean Rhys has created the myth of otherness in terms of gender, race, geographical and social distance, even political exclusion. Menteşe then discloses how in *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus* the Turkish Cypriots are "othered" in relation to Greek norms, and hence, how Durell's so called objectivity is undercut by his orientalist discourse. In the following article, entitled "The Empire Writes Back Bilingually: Taner Baybars's 'Gülten'" (83-90), Gönül Pultar draws attention to the implications of biculturalism by analyzing the vocabulary used in the poem "Gülten" by Taner Baybars, a Turkish Cypriot and a

British poet. The poem penned in English contains various words in other languages, the majority of which are in Turkish. Since Turkish Cypriots are poised culturally in an uneasy alliance between British and Turkish cultures, Pultar maintains that "Baybars's insertion of Turkish words is a means of insurgence against the spiritual subjugation, a backlash against the cultural subjugation" (86). The third article, "Ethnic Writing: Writing Ethnicity" (91-103) by Dean Franco, aims to pursue the way in which Chicano ethnic identity receives its definition. Franco seeks the defining point not in literature itself but in the discourse of Chicano literary criticism where he maintains Chicano cultural identity implicitly reveals itself. In the last article in this part entitled "The Socio-cultural Conflicts of the Colonial Individual: V.S. Naipaul and his Protagonists (105-113), Rüçhan Kayalar examines the feelings of displacement and rootlessness as reflected in the novels of Naipaul. Kayalar argues that the themes of isolation and dislocation that Naipaul develops in his novels are reflections of personal experiences resulting from his own colonial background.

The articles in the last part of the collection consider feminist inquiries into gender roles in different contexts. Burçin Erol in her article "The Impact of the Two World Wars on the Roles and Rights of Women in Britain and the United States" (117-123) offers a comparative and informative study illustrating the socio-economic conditions of women and traditional gender roles during and after two world wars in the UK and the US. Gülsen Canlı in her article "Prescribed Representations of Women and Feminist Dynamics in the Theatre" (125-137) traces the same problem, the traditional gender roles, in a different arena, in the theatre. By analyzing representations of women in various plays, she discloses how the power relations of male-oriented culture have operated in the theatre during the 1950s and 1960s, and how after the women's movement the feminist playwrights have challenged patriarchal ideology by constructing an alternative woman's culture with altered gender roles. The same issue, representation of woman, is taken up from a slightly different standpoint in the last two articles. Ünal Norman, in her article "An Abortive Attempt: Tess" (139-149), discusses the innovative representation of Tess by Thomas Hardy who, she notes, helped break the constraints on woman's sexuality in the mid-Victorian period. After examining the discourse in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, however, Norman concludes that male-oriented culture is at work in Hardy's novel, and that his so-called new woman is still an object for male manipulation. The representation of women in literature is further developed in the final paper, "The Fallen Woman: Hester Prynne" (151-159) by Sevda Çalışkan. Employing the discourse of poststructuralists, Çalışkan reveals how Hester in *The Scarlet Letter* is positioned as the Other. She finally suggests an intimate connection between the representation of Hester in that novel and Hamlet's well-known conviction, "Frailty, thy name is woman."

Crossing the Boundaries does not, of course, cross all the boundaries. The collection provides merely an overview of the developments in Turkish universities, with scholars trying to shift their emphasis, in teaching and in

research, from a purely literary basis to the field of cultural studies. In this sense, at least, the volume moves some borders. It is therefore important that proceedings of the seminars such as this should be published. As Laurence Raw remarks in the Preface, “the more people in Turkey, or elsewhere, become aware of ‘Cultural Studies,’ as practiced in different academic contexts, the more they can develop their own versions of the discipline.”