

the work force, is cause for celebration. Such acceptance on the basis of a shared humanity is necessary and valuable. But to see this process as fair representation may well mask major disparities in the exercise of power. Multiculturalism as a form of ethnotourism is not merely wrong-headed; it is potentially destructive. This collection of essays repeatedly emphasizes the need for a holistic and interdisciplinary approach towards multiculturalism. The extensive and annotated bibliography constitutes yet another reason to purchase the book, which succeeds in providing a balanced, informative and persuasive discussion of multiculturalism.

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Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds. *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998. Pp. xi, 526. \$65.00; \$29.95 pb.

For those academics desiring to introduce the diverse field of women's autobiography to the "perplexed, the skeptical, the uninitiated, the jaded" (Smith and Watson 4), *Women, Autobiography, Theory* will serve as an effective guide to the "unruly heterogeneity" of the subject (110). Indeed, the very subtitle, which labels this text a *Reader*, lends an air of critical legitimacy, for, as a recent article on ecocriticism in Canada remarks, there is a "contemporary code in humanities publishing that measures the viability of a new critical area by the production of a reader" (O'Brien 17). According to Smith and Watson, the study and theorization of women's autobiography gained recognition as a field as recently as 1980 (5). Even so, the need to assert the field's official "coming-of-age" (O'Brien 17) through the publication of a single reader seems to ignore the considerable "viability" already achieved by the production, in the last twenty years, of a plethora of full-length studies, anthologies, and individual articles. Surely a critical field initiated by (primarily) female academics who sought to focus attention on texts and theoretical issues often relegated to the margins of academic consideration, should resist the temptation to adhere to a "contemporary code" in anything. There is a terrible finality in the assumption of "viability," as though all who participate in the field can now relax, settle back with a collective sigh of relief, and enjoy the pretense of unquestioned self-knowledge.

This latest collection by Smith and Watson (who have previously collaborated on two other texts)¹ is, however, anything but complacent. The editors seek to provide more than simply "an overview of" the "ferment of activity" (3) which has characterized the field in the past two decades; indeed, they eschew the very notion of a historical, or "settled," narrative, preferring instead to create "a book necessarily

without a conclusion" (4). The editors define their overriding goal as the construction of a "guide for mapping the field of women's autobiography," both in terms of its theoretical "emergence" and "reformulation" within the time frame (from 1980 to 1996) exhibited by the forty essays chosen for inclusion,² and in terms of theoretical "prospects" for the future. In their highly accessible introductory essay, Smith and Watson, while certainly providing some sense of "order" in "surveying the 'stages' of critical activity in women's autobiography" (4) and locating each individual essay's importance in the advancement of that "critical activity," insist nonetheless on the dynamic nature of their subject, as when they suggest that "the real legacy of the last twenty years in women's autobiographical theorizing has been the emergence of a heterogeneous welter of conflicting positions about subjectivity and the autobiographical" (37).

Accordingly, in their discussion of the "organizational rubric" which determined their separation of the essays into eight topical parts, the editors alert their readers to the ultimate impossibility of consigning any one essay to a single critical category. They suggest that the various parts of the collection should be seen as "conversations on shared topics from diverse perspectives" (42). For example, Rita Felski's 1989 article "On Confession" is included in Part I: "Experience and Agency" because it focuses on the confessional text as a "pursuit of the truth of subjective experience" (83). It could just as easily have been included, however, in Part II: "Subjectivities," with other essays, such as Hertha D. Sweet Wong's "First-Person Plural" (1996), which, like Felski's, participate in the theoretical "shift toward a conception of communal identity" and the "modification of the notion of individualism as it is exemplified in the male bourgeois autobiography" (84). Felski's essay, which locates the ground of "communal identity" in a monologic entity, "the women's movement" (83), can also be discussed in relation to the ongoing theoretical concern with a politics and "proliferation of categories of difference" (Smith and Watson 27). Thus does this provocative collection highlight the field's own continuous commitment to an ethos of self-questioning which interrogates ideological complacency.

As a result of this ethos, the theorization of women's autobiographical texts has had implications beyond its own limited scope, a fact reflected in the *Reader's* full title. Indeed, the commas between each of the three keywords — *Women, Autobiography, Theory* — are deliberately placed to indicate an ongoing critical dialectic; that is, the title refers not merely to the theorization of autobiographical texts by women, but also to how this work has contributed to important theoretical developments in the humanities and social sciences as a whole. As Smith and Watson (partially) state the case, "women's autobiography is now a privileged site for thinking about issues of writing at the inter-

section of feminist, postcolonial, and postmodern critical theories" (5). In addition to the field's implications for discussions of the nature and formation of the self, the question of individual agency, the "importance of multiple marginalities," and the "inextricable linkage" of these marginalities to one another" (25, 27), consideration of women's autobiographical texts has inspired critical renegotiations, for example, in the reading of history (see "A Feminist Revision of New Historicism to Give Fuller Readings of Women's Private Writing" by Helen M. Buss and "Stories" by Carolyn Kay Steedman); in the ethnographic production of "other" subjects (see "Autobiography, Ethnography, and History" by Anne E. Goldman and "Immigrant Autobiography" by Sau-ling Cynthia Wong); and in the sociolinguistics of the female body (see "The Recovery of Memory, Fantasy, and Desire in Women's Trauma Stories" by Janice Haaken and "Mystical Bodies and the Dialogics of Vision" by Laurie A. Finke).

The only disappointment I experienced with regard to this comprehensive anthology is that many of the texts do not appear in their entirety. By editing their selections, however, Smith and Watson were able to include a more diverse range of texts, which they hope will inspire continuing theoretical re-visions. To that (inconclusive) end, the editors also provide "A Selected [not "select," as in "exclusive"] List of Women's Autobiographies" which reflects a variety of time periods, generic modes, geographic locations, and cultural concerns, and which supplements this collection's already provocative achievements.

S. LEIGH MATTHEWS

NOTES

- ¹ Smith and Watson have demonstrated their commitment to a dialogical approach to the subject of autobiography in *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1992) and in *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996).
- ² Only one of the forty essays — Hertha D. Sweet Wong's "First-Person Plural: Subjectivity and Community in Native American Women's Autobiography" — is previously unpublished. It should be noted, however, that Smith and Watson have been deliberately innovative in selecting essays which "were not necessarily the most influential ones at the time of their publication" (3-4).

WORKS CITED

- Felski, Rita. "On Confession." Smith and Watson 83-95.
- O'Brien, Susie. "Nature's Nation, National Natures? Reading Ecocriticism in a Canadian Context." *Canadian Poetry: Studies/Documents/Reviews* 42 (Spring/Summer 1998): 17-41.
- Smith, Sidonie. "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance." Smith and Watson 108-115.
- Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. "Introduction: Situating Subjectivity in Women's Autobiographical Practices." Smith and Watson 3-52.

Christian Riegel, Herb Wylie, Karen Overbye and Don Perkins, eds. *A Sense of Place: Re-Evaluating Regionalism in Canadian and American Writing*. Edmonton: U of Alberta P, 1998. 133pp. \$24.95.

This unassuming volume, first published as an issue of *Textual Studies in Canada* (vol. 9, spring 1997), provides an important re-evaluation of regionalism, one that clarifies why it is important and necessary to re-tool this hoary analytical construct. As the editors point out in their Introduction, "current global trends are investing the term with new significance, necessitating a new look at the way [it] has been and can be used to examine social, cultural and political relationships" (ix).

The "trends" they have in mind include decentralization, regionalization (in terms of sensibilities), and globalization, all of which have undercut the power of the nation state, while at the same time pressuring "local economies and cultures . . . and forcing a redefinition of community." Also important, they point out, are developments in critical theory, particularly post-structuralism, itself "part of a larger critique of cultural hegemony and a recognition and celebration of diversity" (xii). In short, it is high time for literary critics to take a fresh look at regionalism, and to define it clearly in relation to postmodern culture.

This collection largely succeeds at the task — particularly in regard to Canada. The first article, "Toward the Ends of Regionalism" by Frank Davey, provides a substantive point of departure. Appropriately wide-ranging and interdisciplinary, Davey's analysis sees region and regionalism "not as locations but as ideologies" (1). His article highlights the ambiguity that surrounds regionalism, which is seen at times as integrative and authentic, at other times as disintegrative and atavistic. Davey also scrutinizes Canadian literary scholarship on regionalism, indicating its major deficiencies (2) and offering a corrective analysis. He identifies three processes/phenomena against which regionalism must be understood: the nation state, colonialism, and the global economy. For Davey, as for most of the analysts whose work appears in *A Sense of Place*, regionalism is ultimately a complex social construct. Able to foster both diversity and homogenization, it is "a strategy" that "operates within a large interplay of power relations" (7), a discourse that can resist "meanings generated by others in a nation state" (4). Thus it becomes one of several available "discourses of dissent" (7). At the same time, a sense of regionalism is potentially advantageous to the nation state, as when "the myth of geographic determinism allows a national government to avoid responsibility for regional downturns" (5). Davey also points to the influence of global capitalism, which fosters the commodification of regions as a "technique for cultural competition and survival" (14).