

IS HEATHCLIFF A MURDERER? PUZZLES IN 19TH-CENTURY FICTION

by John Sutherland
Oxford University Press, 1996; 258 pages



VISIONS OF THE PAST: THE CHALLENGE OF FILM TO OUR IDEA OF HISTORY

by Robert A. Rosenstone
Harvard University Press, 1995; 271 pages

When Professor of History Robert Rosenstone first introduced movies in his Caltech classes in the 1970s, and then in 1977 taught a course entitled "History on Film," class enrollments soared. But ultimately this innovation made an even more profound impact on his own studies, luring the self-acknowledged "Dragnet" historian (just the facts, ma'am) into the theoretical issues of how film works to create or "re-create" history. "History does not exist until it is created," writes Rosenstone. Film, he found, offers a new relationship to the past and a new concept of what we mean by "history." His latest book, comprising a collection of essays exploring what happens when words are translated into images, suggests

that film is an even more appropriate medium for showing us the past than are words on a page. There are, however, different and more complex rules for history on film than for history on the page, and in his book Rosenstone discusses how these "rules" are observed in the various forms of historical film: for example, documentaries, films that mix fictional and historical characters, films from other cultures, and experimental films with deliberate anachronisms and inventions that "re-vision" history. He discusses five films in depth, including *Reds* and *The Good Fight*. Rosenstone, who served as historical consultant on the former and narration writer on the latter, also practices what he preaches.

So, *does* Heathcliff murder Cathy's brother in *Wuthering Heights*? Reasonable doubt. And how about Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair*? Does she kill Jos Sedley in the end? Of course not, says John Sutherland, but Thackeray wants his readers to suspect her anyway. Victorian authors, not stupid by any means or even simply careless, had various reasons for slipping such red herrings and other enigmas and anomalies into their novels, and Sutherland plays detective in teasing out these reasons and suggesting imaginative interpretations of 37 literary "puzzles." Sutherland, the Lord Northcliffe Professor of Modern English Literature at University College London, as well as a visiting (annually) professor of literature at Caltech, where he taught from 1983 to 1992, is a closer reader than most people, perhaps not wholly unrelated

to the fact that he has edited a number of these works for the World's Classics series. Most of the readers of this paperback, which made *The Times* bestseller list in London, probably never lost any sleep over these puzzles in the original texts. But even if you didn't notice that Jane Austen lets apple trees blossom in June in *Emma* and that Dickens gets sloppy with his seasons in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, this remarkably unstuffy book, with evocations of such nineties phenomena (1990s, that is) as date rape and the movie spoof *Frankenbooker*, not to mention reasonable doubt, is fun to read and might even lure you into the novels themselves. So why *did* Henry James rewrite the ending of *The Portrait of a Lady*? And why doesn't H. G. Wells's invisible man make himself an invisible suit and some invisible food?

THE CHEERFULNESS OF DUTCH ART: A RESCUE OPERATION

by Oscar Mandel
Davaco Publishers (Netherlands), 1996; 128 pages

English novelists in the 19th century may have planted puzzles in their work, but 17th-century Dutch painters most assuredly did not, according to Professor of Literature Oscar Mandel. In this short book Mandel takes on the current intellectual fashion of imposing 20th-century interpretations of "semi-veiled meanings" on these paintings, interpretations that invariably see gloomy, moralistic lessons

beneath the surface of the most riotous peasant feasts, merry companies, and even innocent still lifes and landscapes. Mandel chalks this up to our own century's "assault on euphoria" and sets out to liberate the "self-evidently happy works" of the 17th-century Dutch painters "from the excesses of academic earnestness." The Dutch painted their hedonistic displays of food and flowers and depictions of the human

**PREHISTORIES OF THE FUTURE:
THE PRIMITIVIST PROJECT AND THE CULTURE OF MODERNISM**

Edited by Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush, Stanford University Press, 1995; 449 pages

drama of daily domestic life, he writes, to create images for pleasure and joy—and as a relief from the incessant moralizing of the past. He also argues that the heroic, allegorical paintings of the time, which appear to be loaded with obvious high-minded meaning, are really using Biblical and classical themes as a front to indulge in painting nudes—and some quite erotic ones at that. Mandel grants that a tradition of *vanitas* paintings did exist, with unambiguous, and legitimate, symbols—skulls, skeletons—of the transitoriness of life. But, he claims, not every snail nibbling a tulip petal connotes mortality, not every bird is a lewd proposition, and sometimes an empty shoe is only an empty shoe.

Most of the 16 essays in this book exploring the influence of ethnography on what has become popularly known as modernism were originally presented at a 1991 conference jointly sponsored by Caltech and the Claremont Graduate School Humanities Center. In the late 19th century various technologies (for example, railroads, telegraphy, photography) brought Western culture into closer encounter with primitive cultures, ushering in a profound alteration in how Westerners perceived others—and themselves. This

new fascination with the primitive pervades much of the literature, art, and music of the early 20th century. The book's editors, who also organized the original conference, Elazar Barkan, associate professor of history at Claremont Graduate School (as well as director of its Humanities Center and previously instructor in history at Caltech), and Ronald Bush, professor of literature at Caltech, don't follow the easier, more heavily traveled routes through the familiar modernism terrain. Rather, they and the other

contributors shift backward and dig deeper into the political, social, and racial antecedents and complexities of encounters with primitive societies. Some of the essays deal with academic anthropology, but topics also encompass vampires and violence, Gauguin in Tahiti, Josephine Baker in Paris, the influence of African American music on Irving Berlin, T. S. Eliot's fascination with primitive peoples, and the effect of ethnographic photography's erotic images on Victorian morality.



**TO HEAR OURSELVES AS OTHERS HEAR US:
TAPE RECORDING AS A TOOL IN MUSIC PRACTICING AND TEACHING**

by James Boyk, MMB Music, Inc., 1996, 78 pages

James Boyk, Caltech lecturer in electrical engineering and music, explains his own coaching techniques "for music students, teachers, performers, and those who enjoy a peek behind the scenes." Not just a technical how-to manual, the book teaches how to listen to oneself, and it is richly illustrated with anecdotes from the author's own career

as pianist and teacher and with reflections on making music. Among other things, it advises us to "squint our ears" when listening to tape playbacks, and to dance and sing along. But the technical side is not overlooked: Boyk also includes a chapter on audio systems and components, giving readers the inside scoop from his many years testing recording

equipment in his Caltech lab. Yehudi Menuhin has called the book "valuable to both teacher and student," and André Watts contributes that it's "a treasure-trove of information, advice and entertaining musical insights for both amateur and professional musicians. . . . [which] should be required reading for all lovers of music."

TECHNICALLY SOUND

Caltech-Occidental
Concert Band
compact disk

The Caltech-Occidental Concert Band, directed by Bill Bing, director of Caltech's instrumental music program, has recorded its first CD. It's loaded with such Caltechiana as the "Centennial Suite," written by alumnus Les Deutsch (BS '76, PhD '80) for Caltech's 100th birthday; "Throop March," written in 1900 and "unearthed" in 1987; and a medley of unforgettable songs from the 1920s including "Lead Us On, Our Fighting Beavers," "Fight, Men of California Tech," and the "Gnome Sweetheart Song" (all sans lyrics, unfortunately). There are pieces by two other local composers with a Caltech connection (but no beavers or Gnomes) and, oh yes, some Ives, Sousa, and Mozart too. The CD can be ordered from the Caltech Bookstore (818-395-6161) for \$12.95 plus shipping and handling.

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