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Bodies of Reform: The Rhetoric of Character in Gilded Age America [Review]

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impulse, in combination with southerners' fears that Britain was promoting antislavery sentiment and policies in the Caribbean, fueled the rise of the ideology of manifest destiny. Haynes reads the battle over Texas annexation, the election of James K. Polk, and Polk's expansionist war against Mexico in light of persistent fear of British intervention. Far from regarding manifest destiny as a product of American confident exceptionalism, Haynes argues, "the aggressive policies of the Tyler and Polk years owed much of their urgency to the belief that John Bull threatened more than just the republic's future prosperity" (p. 280).

Haynes's book is a testament to the power of combining cultural and political history and of a careful application of a transnational context to even some of the most familiar questions in U.S. history. When discussing national identity, Haynes carefully differentiates between sectors of the American public, allowing him to show how groups as diverse as Irish immigrants to the urban Northeast and southern slaveholders shared aspects of an anti-British identity with deep political consequences. The impressive bibliography runs through seemingly every genre of manuscript and printed source, from government documents to newspapers to letter collections, and the inclusion of cartoons as evidence introduces an element of visual analysis. *Unfinished Revolution* proves definitively that Americans had not put their relationship with Great Britain to rest after the War of 1812, nor was national bravado built entirely on solid ground. Perceptions of the former colonial ruler were certainly not the only important factor in American national identity and politics between 1815 and 1850, but Haynes convinces his reader that they were a powerful component. By viewing the period through this lens, Haynes is able to demonstrate how fragile the efforts to build up the United States must have felt at times.

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Bodies of Reform: The Rhetoric of Character in Gilded Age America.

By James B. Salazar. (New York: New York University Press, 2011.

Pp. x, 300. \$75.00 cloth; \$25.00 paper.)

What is the nature of human character? Is it innate or the product of socialization? Is it fixed or fungible, whether for good or for ill? The multiple theories regarding the origins of character that percolated throughout the 1800s have become a mainstay of nineteenth-century U.S. studies over the last twenty years, receiving particular attention in analyses of late-century responses to the anxiety sparked by immigration, labor agitation, and unstable financial markets as well as by the Race Question and the Woman Question. Societal reform during this time was actively fueled by debates about the nature and origin of character, as civic crusaders and social theorists offered competing ideas about how to shape and regulate individual dispositions for the greater national good. Scholars of U.S. literature have contributed actively to this area of study, amply documenting the ways in which nineteenth-century literary texts instructed readers in prevailing standards of character and encouraged them to emulate the habits of personal improvement that prove so successful in novels.

It is to this already rich field that James B. Salazar offers *Bodies of Reform*. Whereas other studies only examine character implicitly and in passing, Salazar contends, this work differentiates itself by bringing nineteenth-century discussions of character to the fore as an explicit topic of sustained inquiry. *Bodies of Reform* focuses less on providing a broad survey of late-century philosophies of character than on analyzing the ways in which prominent writers of the Gilded Age engaged contemporary discourses of character in canonical works. Salazar's book is thus chiefly a series of literary readings enlivened by explorations of sundry concurrent social contexts, such as the body-building fad and Lamarckian genetics. These chosen readings, Salazar maintains, evince the era's "rhetoric of character": the discursive ways in which the self was understood to be reformed, presented publicly, and interpreted by others. In a reassertion of long-standing historicist dogma, Salazar argues that these texts instructed Americans in the legibility of character. Central to his study is an attention to the "broader cultural politics of embodiment" (p. 3), the ways in which the body was believed both to make visible the inner nature secreted in the private recesses of the self and to register the effortful pursuit of individual reform, as expressed through physical culture and sumptuary restraint.

Bodies of Reform is composed of five chapters on such works as Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man* (1857); Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889); Charlotte Perkins

Gilman's writings in support of physical culture; Pauline Hopkins's *Contending Forces* (1900); and Jane Addams's *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902). In each section, Salazar positions detailed, sophisticated explications of the literary works against the backdrop of contemporary philosophies of character. On the whole, the texts and subjects are well chosen, though the chapter on Melville's 1857 novel, which was published decades before the Gilded Age, is never sufficiently accounted for—despite Salazar's claim that the book "anticipates" the rhetoric of character that would emerge years later. The striking omission of Horatio Alger's boys' books also merits some explanation, for his corpus figures among the most important literary contributions to this rhetoric. The chapters on Gilman and Hopkins constitute the strongest discussions in the book; the analysis of Hopkins's *Contending Forces* is particularly fine, as Salazar offers a compelling, lucid, and adroit reading of the novel's mediation of racialized and classed theories of character as inscribed on the black female body. The final chapter focuses on Jane Addams, whose opinions about assimilation and advocacy of intercultural notions of character diverged from turn-of-the-century mainline thought. *Bodies of Reform* concludes by invoking the centrality of character to early-twentieth-century progressivism.

Salazar's discussions would benefit in places from clearer framing, phrasing, and transitions, as the occasional convoluted syntax and organization undermine the larger argument. Likewise, the early chapters launch into detailed, nuanced readings without the help of any orienting introduction to the texts; the analyses are thus intelligible only to readers with the most detailed familiarity with these works. A few truncated assertions merit further elaboration. *Bodies of Reform* makes numerous declarations of critical consensus without providing support in the endnotes; and a few passing claims require explanation, for example, the abbreviated comparison of *The Confidence-Man* to Lorenzo Dow's *Cosmopolite Interrogated*, the significance of which goes unstated.

Otherwise, Salazar ably integrates an impressive array of materials into his readings, and his analysis of Pauline Hopkins's *Contending Forces*, in particular, constitutes an important contribution to the field.

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