lay dormant. There are three notable absences from this collection of personal views of Carver: his first mentor, John Gardner, who died in 1982, his second wife Tess Gallagher, who withdrew from this project at a late stage, and his son Vance. Among many fine contributions those of Carver’s first wife, Maryann, and his daughter Chris, are especially compelling, given the circumstances of that marriage which quickly fell into a pattern of poverty and rootlessness, abetted by Carver’s difficult negotiations with parenthood, though Chris Carver’s last entry in this book records that ‘I would not have wanted any man in the world to be my father but Raymond Carver’. The personal dimensions of these reminiscences by his family and fellow-writers are undeniably fascinating, but what is equally valuable is the way these entries allow us to follow the course of Carver’s career from his days as a student in writing classes to his gradual emergence as a major writer. Dick Day, his writing tutor at Humboldt College, where he studied after his year with John Gardner at Chico State College, was amongst the first to recognize the uniqueness of his voice, long before Carver was much published, a voice he found ‘authentic, personal, and compelling’, and it was Day who encouraged Carver to go on from Humboldt to the Iowa Writer’s Workshop where, in the early 1970s he taught writing, along with John Cheever. It may well be no more than an interviewer’s rhetorical strategy for provoking his subjects, but Halpert repeatedly invites his interviewees to comment on the relationship of individual stories to incidents in Carver’s life, and if these strategies are amiably and dismissively dealt with by and large, it is Tobias Wolff and Richard Ford, Carver’s particular friends from 1978, who decisively repudiate the view that Carver made his stories out of his life experiences, and insist on the ‘primacy of imagination, rather than the importance of prior experience’ as Ford puts it. There is a proper sense of protectiveness about such responses to Halpert that serves to ameliorate the cumulative sense of intrusion in many of these interviews. That said, it is fitting to record that most of these contributors speak of Carver’s gaiety, friendship, and humour, as well as his fierce determination to do his own thing his own way. This is, overall, a fine tribute to a writer who has so enriched the great tradition of the American short story.


When the Paul Auster/Wayne Wang film Smoke won the Silver Bear in Berlin in 1995, there was much collective heart-sinking amongst his readers. Now there would be ‘introductory’ books, series studies, quick-fix profiles, and reader’s guides. It is therefore a special pleasure to discover that Dennis Barone’s volume, the first book to appear on Auster, operates at a very high level of critical sophistication and interest. Without exception the twelve essays offer informed and often intensely thought-provoking readings of Auster’s work; no mean achievement with an author who is generally construed as setting more puzzles than he solves.

This is not to imply that the collection is dry, over-erudite, or arcane. As the editor remarks in the introduction, essayists may talk about postmodern shifting subjectivities but they also remember that Auster is fun. Barone’s introduction provides theoretical, historical, and cultural contexts for the fiction (a sharp analysis of ‘Auggie Wren’s Christmas Story’ sets the tone) with due account taken of the relation to Baudrillard, historiographic metafiction, and realism. The essays that follow are wide-ranging, as one might expect from contributors located in Wales,
the Netherlands, France, Japan, and the United States. Pascal Bruckner and Marc Chénetier contribute translations of their afterwords to the French editions of, respectively, The Invention of Solitude and The New York Trilogy, drawing out Auster’s strong connections to European culture. Motoyuki Shibata describes his experience of translating Auster into Japanese, highlighting the extent to which the experience of translation sits at the heart of Auster’s work. William Drenttel’s excellent bibliography lists Auster’s own translations and his writing on translations, together with fiction, prose, poetry, and secondary works. (No pseudonymous work, however; a surprise, given the slipperiness of identity within Auster’s fiction.) Norman Finkelstein makes illuminating connections between the poetry and the work of Oppen and Reznikoff, Derek Rubin considers Auster within the American-Jewish tradition, and Eric Wirth outlines philosophical contexts. Other contributors examine generic questions (Madeleine Sorapure on City of Glass as a ‘meta-anti-detective story’) or formal concerns (Stephen Bernstein on contingency and closure, Arthur Saltzman on realism).

Occasionally the temptation to ‘solve the puzzle’ is insufficiently resisted, and one becomes rather enmeshed in the ifs and buts of the typically convoluted possibilities of the Auster plot. But on the whole the essays demonstrate a profound engagement with the fiction in relation to sociohistorical as well as aesthetic matters. Two essayists are worth singling out, particularly for the broad political implications of their analyses. Steven Weisenburger makes a strong case for Moon Palace as revisionary of 1960s radicalism, drawing upon the work of Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers in the field of scientific thinking. Tim Woods provides two essays, one discussing The Music of Chance as a critique of the ideology of American capitalism as based upon Puritan expansionism, the other arguing that In the Country of Last Things emphasizes Auster’s engagement with spatiality. Woods benefits from an informed awareness of the debates concerning the politics of spatialization (Foucault, Lefebvre, David Harvey) and close attention to the fiction itself, which tends to pivot on questions of place. This is the sort of essay that seems immediately obvious, once it has been written, but nobody else has written it. Given that Auster describes memory as ‘the space in which a thing happens for a second time’ (The Invention of Solitude), Woods’s ideas are likely to prove influential.

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‘More than a million people, and hundreds of distinct tribal cultures were simulated as Indians.’ So, in Crossbloods: Bones Courts, Bingo, and Other Reports (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), runs the observation of Gerald Vizenor, Chippewa-Ojibway mixed-blood from Minnesota, Professor of Ethnic Studies at Berkeley, and quite the most prolific of all contemporary Native American authors. It might readily serve as a gloss for Helen Carr’s excavation of how Euro-America, in almost all its prime literary and anthropological texts, chose to depict Native America, as a shifting gallery of savagism, Diabolic or Noble, America’s own uniquely identifying symbol, or a human order caught out by modernity, and, more recently, as a source for both the iconic-imagist strain in literary modernism and (aided and abetted by D. H. Lawrence) regenerative ‘earth’ values of blood and sex.

As a cultural iconography of this vexed, contrary, sometimes even comic, ‘representation’ of the New World’s indigenous peoples, Inventing The American