

families. The symbolic buildings of mixed agriculture, such as barns, alleyway corncribs, and granaries — structures without a use — were often neglected or replaced. Large metal grain bins with their augurs and corn drying systems replaced corncribs and granaries. Industrial agriculture came under increasing criticism for its dependence on fertilizers, pesticides, livestock confinement, growth hormones, continuous corn on the same ground, and feedlots containing large numbers of animals producing huge quantities of manure, as urban and rural critics raised environmental, food quality, and moral concerns.

Anderson's book is well worth reading for anyone interested in the agricultural changes of the 1950s and 1960s. The impact of the revolution Anderson recounts affects all Americans and particularly those from midwestern farm states such as Iowa.

Regionalism and the Humanities, edited by Timothy R. Mahoney and Wendy J. Katz. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008. xxvii, 343 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, index. \$30.00 paper.

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Humanist scholars have a renewed interest in the concept of regionalism. In the past the idea implied either an all-powerful physical environment that strongly influenced cultural values or a futile retreat into rural folklore by people reluctant to face modern urban life. With the reality of globalized, postmodern society, however, an increasing number of writers now see regionalism in relational terms. Like race, class, and gender, it is a social construction that plays an important (though poorly understood) role in human identity.

In a way, the papers collected in this book represent official federal recognition of regionalism's new status. They come from a 2003 conference of Regional Humanities Centers, a network established a few years earlier by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The 16 authors and two editors reflect the expected academic backgrounds: mostly literature and history with lesser representation from American studies, architecture, art history, music, philosophy, and independent writers. Their papers are relatively brief — between 12 and 22 pages — and because this meeting was held in Lincoln, Nebraska, the themes are weighted toward midwestern subjects.

Editors Mahoney and Katz provide an excellent interpretive framework in their introductory essay. They explore how interest in the regionalist concept waxed in the 1920s and 1930s as a reaction to

consumerism and standardization, waned in the 1950s when modernist homogeneity was in vogue, and now grows again amid evidence of vanishing diversity. They also offer a nuanced critique of scholarly theorizations on the subject. Environmental determinism, an idea vilified by the current generation of geographers, gains more acceptance from humanists. Although users of this concept may easily overemphasize climate at the expense of heritage, Mahoney and Katz argue that the importance of, say, aridity to an understanding of the American West "seems just common sense" (xiii). A second approach, called sense of place, seeks regional identity through the values of local residents. This strategy seems sound, but the editors wisely warn practitioners against assumptions about who "naturally" belongs (xvii) in a certain locale and the resulting issues of prejudice and snobbery.

The editors divide the 16 core essays into four sections, each emphasizing an aspect of current regionalist thinking. The first, featuring Annie Proulx, William Slaymaker, Mark Busby, and Maggie Valentine, reexamines environmentalist thinking. In part two essayists Guy Reynolds, Ginette Aley, Barbara Handy-Marchello, and Nicolas Witschi turn the table to emphasize cultural construction of place. The last two parts are decidedly postmodernist: the relational and political aspects of place, respectively. Stephen Behrendt, Edward Watts, Mark A. Robison, and Larry W. Moore are in the former group; Cheryll Glotfelty, Kurt Kinbacher, Patrick L. Lucas, and Michael Saffle are in the latter.

Taken as a whole, the essays are disappointing. It is not so much a matter of poor scholarship as it is reader expectations. Mahoney and Katz demonstrate the importance of the subject and its need for further theorization, but most of the essays can be classified as minor case studies. A few even seem to be self-discovery pieces, with writers thinking about the possibilities of regionalism for the first time. Had the editors been able to solicit essays instead of using preexisting conference papers, the result probably would have been more satisfying.

In my view, six essays are of more than routine interest. Maggie Valentine's look at the Southwest makes a convincing methodological case for vernacular architecture as a useful "intermediary between the physical sciences and the humanities [as] a human expression of what it means to belong to a place" (58). Two others are cautionary tales regarding the cultural construction of place. Barbara Handy-Marchello provides a significant feminist counter to the generally male-oriented boosterism of the West. She shows how Linda Slaughter's letters to Minnesota newspapers about frontier Bismarck, Dakota Territory, stress the courtesy of local residents, the beauty of the land, and the rapid establishment of cultural institutions. One wonders how often

similar themes appear in the tens of thousands of other women's letters from such outposts that have not survived. Nicolas Witschi's "With Powder Smoke and Profanity" ponders the meaning of 1870s gunfights in Palisade, Nevada. These apparently were hoaxes, staged to frighten travelers on the Central Pacific Railroad and to entertain local people. The larger issue is postmodern — what is it like to live in a place where outsider image is both strong and a caricature of real life? How do natives take back a measure of self-control?

Three essays add to regionalist theory. In "Dangerous Ground" Annie Proulx reflects on the decline of American landscape novels since 1950, those where the local environment became almost a character and where the story could not have occurred elsewhere. This loss is serious, she suggests, and evidence of "our growing insensitivity to the complex parts of the natural world" (23). The contributions of Edward Watts and Patrick L. Lucas are more pragmatic. Lucas, a professor of architecture, argues against scholars' tendency to separate study of the nineteenth-century trans-Appalachian frontier into northern and southern components. The widespread adoption of Greek Revival architecture from Alabama to Michigan, he says, suggests that the entire region shared many values in common. Finally, and most originally, Edward Watts demonstrates the applicability of postcolonial theory to the study of American regions. In this view, the Northeast becomes the national culture center and the rest of the country its colonies. Watts admits that the analogy is limited, but suggests that stereotypical colonial confusion over identity, centrality, and inclusion applied to nineteenth-century residents of the Midwest. Life in Iowa, he implies, had (and perhaps still has) much in common with that in Australia and Canada.