

Tracy Mishkin. *The Harlem and Irish Renaissances: Language, Identity, and Representation*. (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1998). xv, 127 pp. \$49.95.

The very title of Tracy Mishkin's *The Harlem and Irish Renaissances: Language, Identity, and Representation* would fill any scholar of either movement with skepticism. To draw parallels among turn of the century Anglo-Irish writers' efforts to represent and revitalize the identity and language of Irish culture (which must take into account the often divergent political and social interests of myriad groups: Gaelic nationalists and Catholic-Irish peasantry, just to name two) with early twentieth-century African American and black immigrant intellectuals' self-conscious construction of a race capital and cultural movement in the midst of Jim Crow legislation and renewed vehemence of nativist groups — and all of this in 130 pages — seems overly ambitious at best. Mishkin works to preempt this reaction in the introduction when she asserts, "Despite the problematic aspects of these comparisons, it is good, in this age of self-segregation, to see marginalized groups reaching out to each other" (20). Without weighing in on the relative moral value of her project, I question the extent to and the means through which Mishkin herself can "see" these two so-called marginalized groups "reaching out" to each other.

Her introductory chapter, "How Black Sees Green and Red: Renaissance Eclecticism," is the most complex and interesting section of her project. Here, she suggests several different models for recognizing "outreach" primarily in a subsection entitled "The Jews: A Model for Black-Irish Comparisons." Mishkin briefly examines the mutually influential work of African American and Jewish American writers and the actual collaborations among African American writers and Jewish philanthropists during the twentieth century as useful, albeit complicated, catalysts for cultural production and, indeed, social change. Her introduction of Irish writers and their uses of Jewish figures in their own work, however preview the problems inherent in the rest of the book. Because she does not develop the intricate differences between the ways in which black writers and Irish writers use Jewish figures (or stand in relation to American and Irish Jewish communities), and because she gathers, in

her term, such an “eclectic” (and anachronistic) smattering of examples in her attempts to draw trans-Atlantic relationships, she leads her readers to the brink of tautology. Finally, what Harlem and Irish renaissance artists and intellectuals seem to have in common was their ability “to fruitfully compare themselves to other peoples who faced discrimination” (9).

Consequently, the rest of the project abandons the effort to locate actual alliances or collaborations and devotes itself to constructing parallels between the two renaissancing groups. (We never, by the way, find out if “renaissance” means the same thing to both groups.) Caught between the English who wanted to disidentify culturally with colonial subjects and native-born Irish Catholics who were suspicious of their Protestant English roots, Anglo-Irish writers and intellectuals, Mishkin wants to claim, were marginalized in ways that resemble the situation of African American intellectuals who fell under the suspicion of both white intellectuals and working class blacks. The parallel that Mishkin serves up here could work as a very useful problem to raise in a course on race, ethnicity, and nationality, but she does not take us through the necessary process of perpetually interrogating and exposing the ways in which historical and geographical context inflects these terms differently. To assume equivalencies among nationality and race, religion and class is not to combat tendencies toward “self-segregation” but to elide important historical, cultural, and structural differences simply for the sake of a common metaphor: renaissance.

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Toyotomi Morimoto. *Japanese Americans and Cultural Continuity: Maintaining Language and Heritage.* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1997). xix,169 pp., \$44.

Japanese language schools in California are chronicled from the early twentieth century until the eve of World War II