

Jane Campbell, *Mythic Black Fiction: The Transformation of History*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986) xv, 180 pp., \$16.95.

Jane Campbell's timely study—a revision of her 1977 Ph.D. dissertation—appears as an early and sustained response to Afro-American mythmaking, one of the central concerns of current black scholarship. Campbell posits that, to counter the dehumanized experience of blacks in America, Afro-American writers from 1853 to the present have utilized the romance genre to infuse history “with a mythic dimension,” thereby transforming their characters from victims into actors who can change history. Beginning with William Wells Brown's *Clotel* (1853) and ending with David Bradley's *The Chaneyville Incident* (1981), Campbell's exploration of the transcendent nature of black writing covers the eras of slavery, post-Reconstruction and the decades leading to the present. In the eighties, black writers are utilizing the myth-making process by emphasizing their common Afro-American heritage, frequently incorporating elements of both Judeo-Christian and African mythology.

Generally, Campbell presents her thesis cogently and convincingly. Grounding her argument in Northrop Frye's definition of the romance, she asserts that this “potentially radical” genre can actively “reinvent reality,” transforming white perceptions into black possibilities, even actualities. Further, Campbell argues that rather than imitating white literary models, black writers “co-opted” and “revitalized” the romance genre.

Although Campbell's historical framework is well supported by her selection of and sequential presentation of black texts, a few shortcomings detract from the overall impact of the book. Campbell's early chapters contain some remarkably insightful readings of individual novels, but they are weakened by a lack of integration and focus. Particularly in the chapter entitled “Female Paradigms,” Campbell's commentary lacks coherence and is marred by interruptions, backtracking and repetition as she somewhat haphazardly inserts definitions of the nineteenth-century Genteel Tradition, its Sentimental Heroines, its stereotypes and its other characteristics. This chapter and others would benefit from an orderly catalogue of literary terms essential to her discussion. Elsewhere she fails to provide adequate definitions of her terms, indicating an assumption that her readers will have substantial knowledge of the subject.

A word about Campbell's index: it is general and seemingly randomly conceived; a number of writers cited in the text are ignored in the index (e.g., Dostoevsky, Joel Chandler Harris) or incompletely cited (e.g., Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright). The index would benefit from a complete subject listing; e.g., the “tragic mulatto motif” and “assimilationism” are frequently alluded to in the text but are not included in the index.

Feminists will be disappointed at the relative dearth of discussions of female writers. Since Zora Neal Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* perfectly fits Campbell's paradigm of myth-making black fiction, it deserves as much discussion as any of the works in chapters 1-5. Hurston powerfully evokes in Nanny, an image of the up-rooted African; in Janie, a personal history and quest for self-definition reflecting the black American past and ethnic identity; and in brutish and ordinary characters, the capacity to achieve heroic stature through Hurston's transforming of personal confession beyond romance to myth.

These weaknesses aside, each chapter contains a carefully articulated, frequently illuminating blend of historical and literary interpretation which underpins the mythologizing process she demonstrates in the works of each era. An original contribution to Afro-American scholarship, Jane Campbell's thoughtful perspective realigns and reinterprets black fiction of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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Sarah Blacher Cohen, ed. *From Hester Street to Hollywood: The Jewish-American Stage and Screen*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983) 278 pp., \$10.95 paper.

The considerable Jewish American presence on the stage and screen (and now television), has long been marveled at and discussed. Jewish "dominance" in mass media has been a source of pride to Jews and anguish to anti-semites. Nevertheless, it has only been since the 1960s that numbers have been translated into content. *From Hester Street to Hollywood* attempts to analyze the Jewish presence and experience in areas as varied as serious drama and stand-up comedy.

There is an old saw that a camel is a horse designed by a committee. A similar difficulty presents itself to an editor of a diverse group of essays of varying quality. Despite the valiant efforts of Sarah Blacher Cohen in her introductory essay, "Yiddish Origins and American-Jewish Transformations," the reader is left puzzled about what this book is telling us about the Jewish-American role in theater and film. Was Elmer Rice ethnically "bland"? Was Lillian Hellman fleeing "her own Jewishness"? Is Arthur Miller a lesser playwright because Willy Loman, who "seemed to be Jewish," is "purposely" not identified as such? Was Paddy Chayevsky more outstanding because he produced "forthright" Jewish drama? Is Neil Simon popular because he doesn't inject Jewish "middle seriousness" into his plays? (And, if that is so, what would Daniel