

Phyllis Mauch Messenger, ed. *The Ethics of Collecting Cultural Property: Whose Culture? Whose Property?* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989) xxv, 266 pp., \$32.50.

"That should be in a museum!" Brave words from Indiana Jones, undoubtedly the world's most famous (real or fictional) archaeologist, as he confronts low-life site plunderers, venal middlemen, corrupt politicians and wealthy private collectors. Life for the redoubtable Dr. Jones is simple (as it seems to have been for Lord Elgin); for those of us in the real world unfortunately not. What should be in a museum, and when, and how it should get there are questions underlying this collection of essays that grew out of a 1986 conference in Minneapolis on the ethics of collecting. Papers and symposia transcripts from that conference and other articles specially commissioned for the volume are included. Contributors include archaeologists and anthropologists, museum curators, art dealers, a USIA advisor and an attorney. Of special note is an appendix outlining some domestic and international laws relating to the sale and importation of works of art; each section of the book also ends with a "Commentary" statement that sums up the discussions and relates it to other issues, a very helpful device.

Despite the wide variety of disciplines represented, one general theme emerges from the book and it is not a happy one. Nations that are poor in monetary and technological wealth but rich in history, art and material remains are losing their people's treasures to what can only be described as cultural strip-mining. ("Nations" is used in its broadest sense: several articles detail the irremediable damage being done in the U.S. to ancient living and burial sites of indigenous peoples.) Priceless objects most often do not even end up in public museums where they could conceivably serve to educate a public, but are left quietly to appreciate in bank vaults and the homes and offices of the wealthy. Even worse than the theft and sequestration of individual objects, according to several contributors, is the loss of knowledge that might have been gained from careful excavation techniques and well-documented site study. There is so much we will never be able to know about agriculture, religion, health, even social relations, in ancient societies as a result of bulldozing, trenching, raking and general mayhem.

Unregulated, laissez-faire free-market capitalism too often prevails over historical or educational concerns in even the most well-regulated situations. Wealthy "collector" nations (Japan, North America, Western Europe) have insufficient personnel to police all the relevant transactions; countries who cannot (or refuse to) afford minimal police protection for ordinary citizens are faced with an overwhelming problem in regulating commerce in art objects. Although the collectors' point of view is presented, the arguments for it ring extremely hollow in light of the descriptions of damage to the remains of remarkable and unique civilizations.

What can be done? is a question that occurs as the reader turns from one essay to the next. There are no well-known, world-wide organizations devoted to rescuing cultural resources, comparable to the World Wildlife Fund or Greenpeace. In any case, such organizations will not suffice alone--either for natural or cultural resources. Unfortunately, discussion of solutions to the problem is the least satisfactory aspect of this book, primarily because--according to this reviewer--the subject has been conceived in too narrow a way. Only one author, Jaime Litvak King, addresses the problem in perspective as but one aspect of a general global disaster: the egregious, immoral and increasing imbalance between the world's wealthy and its poor. Only with an analysis that sees the plunder of a civilization's historic and prehistoric heritage as but one part of the general issue of the on-going transfer of wealth from poor to rich can a solution to the particular problem begin to be envisioned.

In the meantime, this book is essential reading for any person who buys, sells, owns, looks at, or cares about the human record of the past and what is happening to it.

—Helen Jaskoski  
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**Thurman B. O'Daniel ed. *Jean Toomer: A Critical Evaluation*. (Howard University Press, Washington, D.C., 1988) xxi, 557 pp., \$21.95.**

This volume of biographical and critical essays on the life and work of Jean Toomer is, as its Preface suggests, a "comprehensive study." Its forty-six essays by thirty-nine scholars attest to its wide scope, and the extensive bibliography by the chief editor will prove most useful for present and future researchers.

O'Daniel died before its publication, but he had been compiling this collection for the College Language Association. Fortunately, fine scholars such as Ann Venture Young and Cason L. Hill (editor of the *CLA Journal*) completed the work for publication. The volume stands as a permanent monument to the main editor's research, scholarship and selection.

Nellie McKay's perceptive introduction serves well as an excellent prologue to the volume. Significantly, she points out early that Toomer had a vision of an "American race." Having many blood lines from different nations and cultures, he dreamed of being the prototype of a "true American" who transcended racial divisions. His quest for a harmony of his spiritual, physical, and emotional selves constitutes a search for identity throughout his public life. These themes continually reappear in this volume in essays dealing with his life, his apprentice-