

reading here not only illuminates this notoriously slippery novel but also provides the strongest evidence for his broader thesis.

Somewhat less successful is Wollaeger's chapter on Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915), which juxtaposes a survey of the cultural prominence of the picture postcard in circulating ethnographic representations with an intertextual reading of Woolf's novel and Leonard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle* (1926). Though separately quite fascinating, these strands fail to fuse into an effective braid—possibly due to lack of compelling evidence of the centrality of the postcard to Woolf's work. Wollaeger employs here, as elsewhere, Jacques Ellul's concept of sociological, or "integration," propaganda, the flow of normative and norm-confirming discourse that emanates from the "diffusely constellated" institutions of culture (9), and clearly establishes Woolf as resisting these acculturative pressures, "the propaganda of everyday life" (71). Yet the absence in this chapter of explicit state-sponsored artifacts of coercion means that its link to the overall argument—unlike the Joyce chapter—remains tenuous.

Yet it is Woolf, with her concern for the creative, engaged reader, who seems to bubble up beneath Wollaeger's conclusion, which reaches beyond his fascinating evocation of the strained negotiations between modernism and propaganda to reassert their essential difference. The difficulty of modernism works to train the active reader—to evoke modes of attention more conducive to critical thought than the consolations of coherence. As such it may be, Wollaeger suggests, precisely because of its imbrication with the structures of propaganda, the best mechanism for resisting it.

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**The Counter-Revolution of the Word: The Conservative Attack on Modern Poetry, 1945–1960.** By Alan Filreis. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. xxiii + 422 pages.

Based on the proliferation of recent articles and books with titles like *After the Death of Poetry*, "Can Poetry Matter?" or "Who Killed Poetry?," it would seem that poetry is in somewhat of a crisis mode. Enrollment in poetry courses is down; academic publications have been curtailed; small presses have folded; federal funding for poets has been cut; and discussion of poetics in

cultural theory is almost nonexistent. The reasons for this crisis are many, but one certain thing is that today's poetry crisis does not hold a candle to the one described by Alan Filreis that occurred in the 1950s. As Filreis points out in his splendid *Counter-Revolution of the Word*, poetry during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations was the focal point of a massive struggle over Cold War political goals. The difference between the poetic crisis then and now is that for most critics today, poetry is irrelevant as a cultural force, whereas during the 1950s it was often the aesthetic barricade over which an anticommunist crusade was fought.

Filreis tells several overlapping stories in this book. He retells the well-known story about how former political radicals repented of their activism during the 1930s by becoming fervent anticommunists during the Cold War; he tells the lesser known story about how their recantations often took the form of attacks on the modernist avant-garde, seeing its excesses as a symptom of moral decay on the cultural front and communist subversion on the political front; he tells how Cold War anticommunists of the 1950s reinvented a more authentic modernism of the 1920s by stripping it of its most formally exploratory features; and finally he tells how critics and poets on both sides of the poetic fence—anti- and promodernists—were united against communism and, in the most extreme cases, engaged in McCarthyite witch hunts and compiled publishing blacklists. Filreis tells these multiple stories by drawing on a vast archive of documents: journal articles, editorials, private correspondence, personal interviews, marginalia, and books long since (and rightly) forgotten. It is testimony to Filreis's extraordinary scholarship that he reads the good, the bad, and the ugly (and there is some extremely ugly stuff here) in creating a thick description of, as he subtitles his book, "the Conservative Attack on Modern Poetry, 1945–1960." Filreis's previous books on Wallace Stevens and modernism in the 1930s have been justly praised for their extensive archival research, and *Counter-Revolution of the Word* is no exception, but there is a special relevance to his use of such documents here. As he points out in his preface, 1930s archival research must move beyond recognizable names and documents into materials listed as "*miscellaneous, unidentified, anonymous, uncatalogued, misindexed*" (xiii), because it is in the ephemera of the library catalogue that former communists and fellow travelers can be found, often under pseudonyms. Filreis's salvage operation brings these materials and identities to the surface in ways that will be a revelation to many readers.

The book focuses on a group of influential antimodernist anticommunist poets and critics, some of whom—like Peter Viereck, Robert Hillyer, Louise Bogan, and David Daiches—are well known but others of whom—Stanton Coblenz (head of the League for Sanity in Poetry); Leigh Hanes, Welford Inge, and Virginia Kent Cummins—have faded from view. We know a good deal about the end-of-ideology rhetoric among anti-Stalinist intellectuals during this period, but Filreis shows how the diagnoses of sociologists and intellectuals like Daniel Bell, Sidney Hook, Irving Howe, Arthur Schlesinger, and others were accompanied and often supported by a fierce debate about the fortunes of poetry. The opening salvo was fired by Hillyer over the award of the Bollingen Prize in 1948 to Ezra Pound. Pound would hardly qualify as a communist, but it was an easy slide, as Hillyer pointed out, from the incomprehensible formal style of *The Cantos* (1924–69) to his treasonous political beliefs, and it was this slippery slope from form to content that encouraged many intellectuals and critics to see nontraditional forms as a sign of insidious politics.

*The Counter-Revolution of the Word* is divided into two large sections. The first, “The Fifties’ Thirties,” chronicles the attempt by Cold War cultural critics to expose the enduring influence of communism from the 1930s into the 1950s. Filreis shows how poets such as Gene Frumkin, Kenneth Fearing, Genevieve Taggard, Carl Rakosi, Walter Lowenfels, Tom McGrath, and Maxwell Bodenheim were tainted by their Communist Party USA (CPUSA) and fellow-traveling pasts. At the same time, the writings of these partisan artists were aligned with modernist formal innovation (such as free verse and collage documentary style) that contained subversive content. Filreis shows how the official poetry community succeeded in blacklisting certain poets, keeping them out of magazines and journals, much as the Hollywood studios and academic senates were keeping communists out of films and teaching jobs. At the same time, the 1950s version of the 1930s required a revision of the modernism of the 1920s as having been hijacked during the partisan Popular Front.

Filreis recognizes that anticommunist cultural critics represented a spectrum of aesthetic and political positions and included figures on the left and the right who were, in some cases, defenders of modernism while maintaining anticommunist views. More conservative cultural critics like Peter Viereck or Dan Smoot (of the infamous *Dan Smoot Report*) insisted that the communist 1930s was alive and well in the 1950s, now posing in the false colors of

incomprehensible avant-garde poetry. Or there were those like Alfred Kazin who felt that 1930s radicalism was only a “blip in literary history and that radical writers of the era died out and did not go on to produce new work” (75). Finally there were defenders of modernism who, in order to combat the simplistic thesis that free verse was inherently subversive, invented an “immaculate modernism” (51) that separated modernism’s critique of philistinism from the cultural critique of the radical left. This is a crucial observation that helps explain the wide purchase that post-ideology thinking could have, even among the most progressive intellectuals. Abstract expressionism, atonal music, or nonnarrative forms could now be palatable when stripped of social relevance and rearticulated through concepts like existential commitment or “heroic” abstraction.

The second section of the book, “Anticommunist Antimodernism,” explores in great depth the close link between the red-baiting spirit of the times and attitudes toward modernism. This section features a chilling account of the mechanisms by which anticommunists utilized the smear and innuendo tactics of McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee to impugn the credentials of modernist writers. Robert Hillyer emerges as the most demonic figure due to his access to mainstream venues like the *Saturday Review*, through which he dismissed modernist poetry’s production of “an illusion of independent thought” (165). He felt that modernist poets utilized trickery, “scarcely exceeded by that of the Communists” (215) and noted that their tactics of infiltration into U.S. colleges were pervasive.

If Hillyer was the official poet of this tendency, there were others using less subtle methods. One significant operative was Stanton Coblentz, head of the League for Sanity in Poetry, who sometimes used the rhetoric of antifascism to describe modernism as cultural “genocide” and who felt that reasonable poets were being “exterminated” and that “there must be a counterrevolution [since] . . . the world has no . . . use for any kind of bigotry and regimentation” (166). A third case (my favorite) is that of W. Cleon Skousen, a former FBI agent and the director of alumni relations at Brigham Young University, who “sought to strip communists of their obfuscatory language” through his book *The Naked Communist* (1958), which provided interpretive methods to teach students how to discover subversive meanings in avant-garde writing (186). Finally Filreis unearths George Dondero, Republican member of Congress from Detroit, who parlayed a McCarthyite

claim to have “documentary proof that modern art was a communist plot” (217). Dondero was aided by Archer Milton Huntington, a poet of small renown, who passed along to Dondero the names of “deep pinks” and “well-known ‘door-openers’” (221)—such as Ben Shahn, Max Weber, Stuart Davis, and Andrew Wyeth—that he could use in his congressional witch hunt. Huntington paid Dondero thousands of dollars to finance the distribution of such information.

The fulcrum for this red-baiting was the issue of form. Modernism’s use of obscure references, non sequitur, collage techniques of juxtaposition, and free verse was, in the eyes of someone like Huntington, signs of communist infection. Christian anticommunists went one step further by implying that “formlessness is godlessness” (268) and that the loss of the pentameter amounted to a satanic takeover of moral agency. The impact of such mind-numbing criticism seems laughable to us now, but as Filreis points out, it affected the lives and careers of many poets. In his final chapters, Filreis tells of the concerted attack by Coblenz and others on the appointment of William Carlos Williams to be the consultant in poetry for the Library of Congress. Coblenz wrote to Luther Evans, the Librarian of Congress, to complain that Williams stood “against the ideals for which America has fought and bled” (311). Critics who defended Williams against such attacks, such as M. L. Rosenthal, were similarly disparaged.

*Counter-Revolution of the Word* continues an important trend in U.S. literary and cultural studies that has revisited the 1930s and the Long Popular Front. The work of Alan Wald, Cary Nelson, Michael Denning, Michael Thurston, Paula Rabinowitz, Barbara Foley, and others has opened the archive to a wealth of significant cultural producers during this period, many of whose names were lost to the blacklist and the studio purge. Filreis’s book contributes significantly to this tradition by linking the forgotten history of 1930s writers to Cold War consensus and to the cultural work of poetry. The only bone that I would pick with this otherwise brilliant book is that in exposing the antimodernist side of the anticommunist Cold War, Filreis says little about the use of modernism by the CIA and other federal agencies as a cultural front in support of U.S. foreign policy. Frances Stonor Saunders’s *The Cultural Cold War* (2000) documents the seventeen-year period during which the CIA, under Michael Josselson and the Committee for Cultural Freedom, used covert funds, through operatives like Norman Holmes Pearson and James Jesus

Angleton, to develop area studies in universities, international arts symposia, literary and intellectual journals (*Partisan Review* and *Encounter*), tours by U.S. musicians and orchestras, and traveling arts exhibitions. And while not all of these projects could be described as promodernist, there was certainly a healthy bit of boosterism around new movements such as modern music and abstract painting. Against the severe repression of Soviet artists during the Stalinist period, the U.S. endorsement of abstractionists like Jackson Pollock or jazz innovators like Charlie Parker or forums around the state of the avant-garde was pretty good propaganda. What Filreis has added to this is the most in-depth look we have into the role that modern poetry played in the anticommunist culture wars of the 1950s.

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**On the Uses of History in Recent Irish Writing.** By Bernhard Klein. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007. viii + 179 pages.

As Bernhard Klein's nicely plainspoken title suggests, his book is about "how history is conceptualised in [Irish] literature" (7). Or, to be more specific, its aim is "to encompass as convincingly as possible the conceptual spectrum of the historical imagination as it is articulated in recent Irish writing" (7). Many/most Irish writers, apparently, are obsessed with history—or at least with the links between past and present—so it is a central question for those who study them. However, this is no general survey. Instead, Klein focuses on particular genres and periods, and on texts that offer "the most challenging and innovative approaches to the fictional rewriting of the past" (7).

The first chapter deals with recent writing set in the Tudor period. Here, the key texts are a novel (Robert Welch's *The Kilcolman Notebook* [1993]), two plays (Brian Friel's *Making History* [1988] and Frank McGuinness's *Mutabilitie* [1997]), and some 1970s poems (by John Montague and Seamus Heaney). Edmund Spenser is a recurring figure in all of these, but other writers make appearances as well: Sir Walter Raleigh, William Shakespeare, Peter Lombard—even James Joyce, via Leopold Bloom. Klein doesn't make much of this multiplicity, though, and is generally rather