

John Funchion, *Novel Nostalgias: The Aesthetics of Antagonism in Nineteenth-Century U.S. Literature* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2015), 252 pp.

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Near the end of the fourth chapter of John Funchion's *Novel Nostalgias*, Rudolph Schnaubelt throws a bomb into a crowd of policemen. The explosion in Haymarket Square galvanizes the international labor movement, transforming 1886 into a "never forget" moment for generations of May Day protestors. Schnaubelt later flees to Europe, where he longs for Chicago and wrestles with the ethical requirements of revolutionary violence. Funchion explains all of this in his reading of Frank Harris's 1908 fictionalization of the Haymarket riots, which finds that what authorizes public violence includes a nostalgic attachment to a usable past. Timed to the plot of a novel, the bomb rekindles a Jeffersonian dream betrayed by the republic but recovered in fiction.

The great strength of Funchion's approach to nostalgic longing in US writing lies in his pursuit of this volatile linking of affect, plot, and politics. *Novel Nostalgias* offers a scrupulously researched and consistently provocative discussion of the "aesthetically disruptive qualities" that make nostalgia a key ingredient for "antagonistic politics" in a striking range of discursive contexts—"from fantasies about the Confederacy rising again to dreams of bringing a socialist international to Middle America" (21).

In Funchion's reading of Harris's novel, for instance, the moral exigency of righteous violence correlates the demand for an eight-hour workday to an origin story in which inalienable rights were defended at any cost. *The Bomb* thus retrofits the May Day violence to make it resonate with that protean myth of "founding" to which American cultural discourse perpetually returns—a technique for "recasting" a political argument "as an effort to rehabilitate the revolution of the past" (137). Part of what makes this reading so intriguing is that just two chapters earlier Funchion describes an eerily similar logic underpinning the generic idiosyncrasy of Augusta Evans's 1866 romance of Confederate homecoming. When *St. Elmo* weds its homesick protagonist to the South at last, subverting the normative "reconciliation" plot that Reconstruction-era novelists hoped would ease sectional discord, Evans too mobilizes a "shared sense of dispossession" that recalls a shared revolutionary foundation (83).

*Novel Nostalgias* assembles an impressive selection of such moments, from *Clotel* to *The Jungle*, in which homesick characters, diasporic communities, and alienated radicals become the affective engines of unfinished political projects. Often as unsettling as they are revealing, Funchion's readings locate "nostalgic historiography" in a diverse range of competing "antagonisms" (136). Thanks to its versatility as affective instrument,

nostalgia animates both abolitionism and sectionalism, populism and anarchism, socialism and cosmopolitanism. In the long nineteenth century this book surveys, as in the political present to which it speaks, the coming battles for our wasted homelands and our basic rights are the sorts of contests in which each side refers to the lost promise of an earlier revolution.

The emphasis on antagonism distinguishes Funchion's approach from classic descriptions of this period's fiction as a method for generating consensus, which Amy Kaplan and Alan Trachtenberg, for instance, suggest makes realism complicit in the disciplinary "incorporations" of the Gilded Age. *Novel Nostalgias* consciously selects works that suture wistful affect to contested states of the nation, following Nancy Glazener's proposal that we see literary realism first as a reflection of varied reading practices that only gradually lead to the generic consolidations of prestige and privilege responsible for literary canons. Funchion foregrounds writing that explicitly upends formal conventions and outright resists assumptions about the novel's democratizing properties. Evans, he argues, plots a reinforcement of the divisions fiction was presumed to mollify; Hamlin Garland mobilizes nostalgia to redraw regional antagonisms as class antagonisms; Pauline Hopkins instructs readers in the racialized boundaries of Garland's populism; Upton Sinclair sees homesickness as an antidote to industrialization; and Henry James recoils, in Funchion's reading of *The American Scene*, from the discovery that nostalgia sustains a banal cosmopolitanism.

The emphasis on affect places *Novel Nostalgias* alongside recent work by Sianne Ngai, Chris Castiglia, Justine Murison, Jane Thrailkill, and Glenn Hendler, to name a few. In his Introduction and first chapter, Funchion paints a convincing picture of nostalgia's "vexed career" as both a modern affliction and a touchy subject for academic inquiry. "We are constantly encouraged to keep it at arm's length," he notes, citing nostalgia's long history as both personalized *hypomnesia* and depersonalized indicator of ideological false-consciousness (13). Rather than subordinate the feeling to a diagnosis of its symptoms, this book maps the tangled history in which an eighteenth-century malady insinuates itself into late nineteenth-century political discourse. Funchion thus retains what he calls nostalgia's "pathological attributes"—including the "overstimulation of the imagination, amplification of nationalist feelings, and capacity to afflict everyone irrespective of rank or race"—while describing its aesthetic transmutations in American writing (13).

Although the works of fiction surveyed in this book are characterized by their political antagonisms, Funchion also adopts an agonistic structure. *Novel Nostalgias* examines ten writers presented in five pairs. Typically, the first text in each pairing adapts nostalgia to its political ends, while the second text undermines the veracity and the efficacy of

such adaptations. In Chapter 1, for instance, William Wells Brown envisions a diasporic nostalgia “capable of forging national affiliation from a place of estrangement” (39), but then Melville’s *Israel Potter* reminds that nationalized affects always reproduce the systemic inequalities Brown hopes to ameliorate. Evans frustrates the intersectional marriage plot to shore up Southern identity in chapter 2, but then María Amparo Ruiz de Burton confounds such efforts by demonstrating that regional nostalgias merely illuminate the exclusionary logic that haunts fictions of identic belonging. A discussion of Garland’s ecumenical populism, in chapter 3, gives way to a brilliant reading of Hopkins’s *Contending Forces* (1900), which argues that any genuine populism describes a more radically diasporic community than white writers like Garland seem willing to acknowledge. Perhaps the fourth chapter presents an exception to this rule, since Sinclair’s search for an anticapitalist past is radicalized but not directly undermined by Harris’s *The Bomb*. But the dialogic pattern recurs in the final chapter, when L. Frank Baum normalizes nostalgia to authorize an imperialist fantasy of cosmopolitan virtue and then James responds with characteristic disdain for such fantasies.

I tend to find the latter readings more compelling—especially those of Melville, Ruiz de Burton, Hopkins, and James. Perhaps that’s because I’ve been trained, as Funchion notes, to be suspicious of politicized nostalgia. But I also suspect I’m drawn to the novelists of doubt because Funchion so ably depicts them working both *within* and *against* the affective paradigm their contemporaries instrumentalize in less nuanced ways. At times I wished *Novel Nostalgias* were more explicit about what underlies these diptychs. Is there one method here or several? Funchion adopts and then broadens the scope of Jacques Rancière’s “aesthetic regime,” for instance, to describe disparate techniques for destabilizing conventional “distributions” of sensory experience and cultural affiliation. And yet one wonders whether the mode of criticism found in texts that tend to trouble nostalgia’s political etiology also troubles the relativist thesis about nostalgia’s versatility. When a brief epilogue pairs the nostalgic pastiche of *Mad Men* with the reductive hermeneutics of Antonin Scalia, this book’s tacit distinction between stronger and weaker forms of nostalgic reflection seems only more poignant.

This is not to say that Funchion’s accounts of nakedly politicized nostalgia are unpersuasive. The final chapter, for instance, unfolds an ingenious reading of Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) as a narrative driven by the counterintuitive logic of what Funchion calls “cosmopolitan nostalgia.” Dorothy’s longing for Kansas, which drives the plot of an imperial romance cited throughout the twentieth century as an allegory for US interventionism, underwrites an assumption “that the United States can expand ceaselessly outward so long as the journey always remains homeward” (194). The introduction of “cosmopolitan nostalgia” exemplified by the historiography of Baum’s parable would itself amount to a valuable chapter. But Funchion helpfully

complicates his own insight by turning to James's querulous treatment of similar phenomena in "The Jolly Corner" and *The American Scene*. Discomfited by hotels and tourism generally, James glimpses a central feature of nostalgia's cosmopolitan future, the one that "redirects its democratic accessibility to serve the needs of consumption" (210).

*Novel Nostalgias* presents an expertly researched selection of US authors who variously absorb and explode nostalgia's peculiar power. At the same time, it recovers the ambivalence with which both novelists and readers assess the dizzying array of nostalgic antagonisms shaping our political conversations. For these reasons alone, Funchion's contribution to our intellectual history of the nineteenth century cannot be ignored.