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Allen W. BATTEAU, *The Invention of Appalachia* (Tucson, University Press of Arizona, 1990. Pp. viii, 239, $29.95 (clothbound), ISBN 0-8165-1172-1)

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Isern's study appeared shortly after Sandford Rikoon's book, *Threshing in the Midwest, 1820-1940* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1988). Both books, as Isern points out, indicate that threshing was one of the more attractive elements in the farm life of central North America. However, Isern's study sheds a different light on threshing culture. While Rikoon argues that threshing technology frequently led to an irreconcilable tension with regard to change by farmers who were believed to be basically conservative, Isern argues quite the opposite. Instead, he claims that farmers were comfortable with technological change, and often adapted inventions in new ways to facilitate harvesting practices. Rather than fostering the image of farmers as basically a conservative group in terms of new inventions, Isern points out that innovative technologies, when proved effective, were quickly incorporated into local practices. Rural farmers, then, were no different from what has often been perceived as their more cosmopolitan urban cousins.

Bull Threshers and Bindlestiffs is an important study, dealing in part with the growing concern with how mass-production and machinery influenced rural cultures in North America. No longer can it be simplistically assumed that the machine (or similar villains of more recent years such as mass media) led to the destruction of traditional culture. Rather, such innovations were readily incorporated into existing value schemes, and quickly added to the accepted patterns of everyday life. Thomas Isern's book indicates how much still needs to be known about what historically were the most common occupations in North America: those that took place on the farm. That machines played such a central role is no surprise. Understanding that role will move us beyond the romantic suspicion of new technologies that has characterized so much of our past research.

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In 1953 at the age of fourteen I ran away from home with my friend Walter. We took a bus from the old Greyhound terminal on 34th Street to somewhere in Pennsylvania, slept out in a field, and the next day hitchhiked as far as

Hancock, Maryland, where we got a job shifting crates in an apple orchard packing shed. Maryland here was only about five miles wide, with West Virginia to the south and Pennsylvania to the north, all of it then, and perhaps now, wild mountain country with even wilder good old boys who exploited the proximity of two state boundary lines to disturb the peace and conduct illegal traffic with impunity. The orchard, which offered seasonal work, was full of such interesting characters and the owners could not have afforded to be very scrupulous about whom they hired. Nevertheless, two obviously runaway boys was a bit strong for them and they fired us after one day.

Walter and I stood around the shed after it closed hoping for a ride to somewhere else. A battered Buick pulled up after dark and a short wiry man with bad teeth who told us his name was Gordon Mentzer asked us if we'd give him a hand for a dollar. We shovelled some bruised and rotten apples from a pile outside the packing shed into the trunk of the Buick. When we had filled the trunk we shovelled them through the windows into the back seat. Gordon said we should get some supper so we got in the front with him and drove into Pennsylvania. At a place he seemed to know about, Gordon turned off the lights of the Buick and coasted into a corn field. He produced some corn choppers and showed us how to go along the rows gathering stalks in our arms while chopping the plants off at the bottom. We stacked the corn in on top of the apples as best we could and took off once more, back across Maryland to West Virginia.

During much of this long and hair-raising ride over narrow mountain roads Gordon turned off the engine to save gas and the lights to save the battery, coasting in the dark at terrific speeds. We eventually turned off the road into a barely discernible track that ended at a board shack with a litter of abandoned automobiles around it, at least one with chickens in it and others with various bits of rusty hardware. We had hardly stopped and got out of the car when it became apparent what the apples and corn stalks were for. A number of skinny red cows emerged from the darkness, mooing and nuzzling the back doors of the Buick in anticipation. Before feeding the cows Gordon stripped some ears off the stalks for our supper, which included, besides boiled field corn, a brick of Velveeta and some squashed apple pie we got from a food market along the way.

We had a few marvelous days with Gordon in the hills. It was apparently some sort of round-up time for his cows, which were spread out over four or five hundred acres that he said belonged to him, so we helped him chase the cows. It was never clear what they were for: whether, for example, he milked them. Gordon showed us his hernia, for which he wore a truss. We learned that he had relatives in Pennsylvania, farm people who might need help with the Fall harvest. Gordon said he would take us there, which he did, and Walter and I spent the next few months haying, shucking corn, picking up field stones

and painting out-buildings for Gordon's brother Marshall, near Waynesboro. We never saw Gordon again.

Gordon was, I suppose, an Appalachian hillbilly. I don't think I thought that at the time. I had read an account as a child of the Hatfield-McCoy feud, and I had already cultivated a taste for mountain songs, which I picked out on a guitar from the chord diagrams in a paperback collection by Burl Ives. The problem with Gordon, from the standpoint of my perception of him, was that he wasn't part of any society, not even a feuding one; he didn't sing songs; and he wasn't Anglo-Saxon. He was just a bachelor living in the hills because they gave him privacy and independence, because he had by some means acquired a place there that he was responsible for, and because he had become by degrees unsuited for anywhere else. It would have been difficult to say which, if any, of these had come before any other.

I thought of Gordon Mentzer and my brief experience of Appalachia while reading Allen Batteau's *The Invention of Appalachia*. We always try to understand an argument presented to us in terms of whatever we may already know about the subject and because our experiences pose questions for us that we may not be able to phrase intelligibly until someone supplies us with the missing elements. It struck me that both the understanding I brought to the subject of Appalachia and the questions I wanted to ask about it had to do with the problem posed by Gordon Mentzer. Appalachia was not mainly about ethnicity (more people of the same British stock went elsewhere, and you didn't have to be British to be Appalachian), nor mainly about poverty (there is lots of that everywhere), but rather about choices and the consequences of choices. People like Gordon Mentzer made Appalachia by going there and by living the life imposed by the mountains, by codifying in some way their perceptions of the constraints and opportunities of that life, and by their relations, voluntary or involuntary, with the outside. The problem is that it is possible to do these things and, in a sense, to make a place, but still not have a name or a conception for it. For that you need an invention.

The title of Batteau's book promises something along the lines of a moral and intellectual genealogy of this subject, in part because it echoes the titles of two well-known books: Edmundo O'Gorman, *The Invention of America* (1961), and Garry Wills, *Inventing America* (1978). O'Gorman's book shows that a place does not come to be because you land on it. It comes to be when it is prepared conceptually, when it is intellectually conceivable. Columbus, according to O'Gorman, was not prepared to acknowledge a New World and therefore can scarcely be said to have discovered it, whereas Vespucci was and may therefore be said to have invented it. And the consequences that follow from such an invention are truly revolutionary, since whereas a discovery only adds something hitherto unknown to the world, inventions arise out of the needs of the world and act reflexively on all its assumptions. Garry Wills makes a

similar point about the invention of the United States. In the language of the Declaration of Independence, Wills argues, we do not see principles that were somehow already embodied in the subject waiting only to be discovered. We see instead active invention of a place that could not have come to be as it was without this act. In other words, the invoking of the word invention in connection with a territory invites us to ponder acts of foundation, habitation and social identification as imaginative and reflexive operations, operations that create something new out of an old context and in the process irreversibly transform the context.

Batteau's book supplies us with many of the materials that would have to go into a history of the invention of Appalachia. He takes us through an account of the imagery and themes of an essentially literary Appalachia, beginning with the stories of Mary N. Murfree written in the 1870s and 80s, and climaxing in the novels of John Fox,Jr.: *The Kentuckians* (1897); *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come* (1903); *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1908). It turns out that the themes of this literary Appalachia are conventionally Romantic: "the contrast between 'domestic' and 'civil' spheres, the distinction between 'folk' and 'urban', and the metaphorical colouring of images of 'folk' with a feminized nature" (p. 40). These are more or less the themes of such historical and literary criticisms of pastoral and the middle landscape in America as Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (1950), R.W.B. Lewis' *The American Adam* (1955) and others, except that the Appalachian version of these themes has found a plausible "folk", something akin to European national and ethnic discoveries (or inventions) of a subject mentality in traditional society.

From this point of view perhaps the most informative and interesting part of Batteau's account concerns William G. Frost's Berea College after 1892. The stimulation of "traditional" domestic crafts at Berea, based on an idea of the ethnic homogeneity and specific racial characteristics of the region (ideas reinforced by subsequent ethnographers and sociologists), is as close to the "moment' of the grand invention of Appalachia as anything else in this account, and much more ought to have been made of it. Frost named the region ("This is one of God's grand divisions, and in default of any other name we shall call it Appalachian America" (quoted, p. 74) and fused historical, racial and aesthetic and moral associations with it in a way that brought both philanthropic contributions to Berea and missionaries to the neglected Anglo-Saxon heathen of Appalachia.

Although Batteau never says so explicitly, one gets the impression throughout the book that Frost's geographical and ethnic essentialism is Batteau's own bedrock vantage point, beginning with his evocative portrait of the landforms and communication systems of the region, and in the continuing sense of the book that there is a violated subject, a people and an ethnicity that

have not been served by the "invention" of his title. Invention for Batteau seems to mean something that is either a lie or a travesty. Berea does not qualify in this sense because in Batteau's account Berea has merely identified and preserved what was already the essence of Appalachia. The invention of Appalachia was rather the product of a series of mendacious or self-serving episodes ranging from hillbilly humour to the discovery by the mass media of the uses of Appalachia in the war on poverty. The book takes up virtually every episode in which Appalachia figured importantly in the twentieth century in national news, public policy or media event. These episodes are not only linked thematically but stem directly from the literary idyll:

> Murfree's initial formation occupies a privileged position with respect to later versions of Appalachia: with certain modifications and elaborations, all have been based on the structure she established. The eventual use of this structure within the federal Appalachian policy of the 1960s is but a recent episode of a process that began in the 1870s. (p. 40)

This is a large claim to make for literature. There is a distinguished tradition in American intellectual history of such claims, and it would have been good to have a closely reasoned case for the argument here. Unfortunately, Batteau doesn't make it. We have no idea of the identity or the site of the subject mentality in which this literature functions. It is certainly not the Appalachians themselves, who are curiously shadowy in this book. We have novelists, cartoonists, government men, industrial operators, media personalities, but there is no theory of communicative process or social action that convincingly connects the intentions or the constituencies of these people, other than that the subject of some activity of theirs was Appalachia and that they were often up to no good. What we have instead is a bewildering assortment of preachments and *obiter dicta* on such topics as archetypes, commodity fetishism, rising gentry, Karl Marx, history as a form of consciousness, Lockean individualism, the primal American experience, and so forth, that do not clearly further the argument in hand and that make the book much harder to read than it needs to be.

Batteau's conclusion suggests the reason for the shape of his book, and for its allegiances and resentments:

> When the due bills of the 1980s are finally presented for payment, America may well discover again the dignity of domestic production, and look once more to the far corners of Kentucky and Tennessee and North Carolina for the fast-receding islands of self-sufficiency named Appalachia. (p. 203)

There is an ethical vision worth pondering in this, but it would have been more ponderable in a book less blind to the grand invention of which it is itself a testimony, namely the ideas represented by William G. Frost and Berea College, and in a book with a more open conception of place, of choice, of character, of contingency. Maybe domestic production is dignified and maybe

it will save us, but I get no closer to Gordon Mentzer by thinking such thoughts than I do by reading Mary Murfree.

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Peter VERGO (ed.), *The New Museology* (London , Reaktion Books, 1988)

In Canada the phrase "new museology" is heard most often from Quebec-based heritage workers and refers to developments in museums and museum-like practice which attempt to restructure the social partnerships between people, objects, heritage and institutions. Pierre Mayrand suggests

> ... the mandate of this museology has also been broadened to include a territorial perspective in which user populations are encouraged to assume the responsibilities traditionally delegated to "professionals".[1]

This is not *The New Museology* reflected in the 1988 collection of essays under that title edited by Peter Vergo whose authors write essentially from a British perspective and predominately from the Fine Art and large gallery institutional tradition.

In these essays there is an urgency to reorder and expand their tradition, and suggestions on how museum institutions might re-focus, but there is no call for the radical disassembling of the structure of museum work as is implied in the "new museology" of France and Quebec and no suggestion the folk should take over from the professional. These essays, after all, were written by Keepers and Assistant Keepers at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Museum of London, the Royal College of Art and universities at Essex and Canterbury.

This is writing about museums — what they do, their aims and policies, their dual nature of entertainer/educator, and particularly their role as evaluator of the beautiful, significant and worthwhile. While the old museology concentrated on methods, according to Vergo, the new museology discusses purposes.

There are essays by eight men and one woman — not a reflection of the predominately female museum work force — all of whom are struggling in one

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1. Pierre Maranda, "A new concept of museology in Quebec", *MUSE* 2.1 (April 1984), 33.