
Reviewed by Michael F. Miller

"Why," Allan Bloom asks rhetorically in *The Closing of the American Mind*, "can't there be a respect for both human rights and culture? Simply because a culture itself generates its own way of life and principles, particularly its highest ones, with no authority above it..." (or, if not)...(t)he folk mind takes the place of reason" (1987:192). Bloom clearly perceives culture as something "high," "profound," and separate from most people within the milieu. Yet Levine, in his latest book, seeks the answer to the question that Bloom perhaps intentionally leaves unnoticed: Is culture truly split between high and low, between the "highest" human ideals, apparently attained by only the few, and the basest of human behaviors, apparently shared by all?

This book helps define important concepts for trying to make sense of American cultural change. The most important facets of the book are that it relates that cultural hierarchy was an invention, the remnants of which we still live with today, and that it brings essential clarity and precision to the study of the particular question. This work also helps provide insight into the process by which that hierarchy developed, fostering a more complete understanding of just what American culture is.

Levine approaches the problem through the historical record generated in conjunction with two forms of expressive culture during the nineteenth century, music and Shakespearean drama. He then follows the changes evidenced in these expressive forms into institutional forms, specifically Central Park and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Levine's initial positing of the problem was a simple one, yet it had significant ramifications for the study of culture. He knew that black minstrels commonly parodied Shakespeare throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. But how could these performers make fun of a form so deeply ingrained within the culture they were ostensibly ignorant of? The answer, evidenced by the material presented, was that a gradual social stratification had taken place concerning the behaviors and attitudes towards the role of the performing arts in American culture, in that Shakespeare, and other forms of newly defined high culture, became less accessible to the mass of people over time.

The main point of the discourse is that cultural adjectives, such as "highbrow" and "lowbrow," were in fact creations of "arbiters of culture" who sought to define what fare was appropriate for specific groups of people. While even the author himself admits that not all cultural change at the time was attributable to the efforts of these particular people, he does point out that they had a definite effect over time. Their objective was clear: "They were convinced that maintaining and disseminating pure art, music, literature, and drama would create such a force for moral order and help to halt the chaos threatening to envelop the nation" (200).
Yet as the author mentions in the epilogue, the book is something of a response to Bloom's work in that Levine attempts to refute the idea that culture must follow a particular canon or be forever lost in mass tastelessness. He also comments that Bloom's cultural criticism is not a new one, being revived periodically by whichever echelon of society feels their position eroding. The author is also very clear in expressing his intellectual orientation to American cultural study, hoping that a "more careful understanding of what culture has been in our past and can become in our future" can be attained (259). All in all, Levine had created a useful tool for current and future scholars interested in investigating the facets and dynamics of the American cultural milieu.


Reviewed by Linda Kinsey Adams

Anyone who enters a graduate program in folklore these days quickly learns what it is like to be caught in a tug of war between anthropological folklorists and literary folklorists. After hearing an anthropologically-oriented lecture, the literary faculty member will comment to a student, "Rather radical in his/her approach, don't you think?" After hearing a literarily-oriented lecture, the anthropological faculty member will comment to a student, "Rather conservative in his/her approach, don't you think?" Depending on how one responds to either of these feeler-comments, a student seemingly is placed in one camp or the other. A new student can feel almost like the object of a custody fight; the problem is, the student knows neither progenitor well enough to take sides, nor would the student want to take sides even if everything were known. Today's folklore student looks for a way to get along with members of both camps without having to commit exclusively to either.

Rosemary Levy Zumwalt, in a book adapted from her 1982 Ph.D dissertation at Berkeley (directed by Alan Dundes), traces the intellectual history of precisely this tension between literary and anthropological folklorists. The jacket notes are slightly misleading, stating that Zumwalt focuses on the period from 1888 to the early 1940s. Actually, she traces some elements of the split up through the early 1970s, when the performance school emerged. Her observations incorporate insights gleaned from previously unexamined personal papers.

A consummate historiographer known for her work on Schoolcraft, Van Gennep, and others, Zumwalt uses an alternating, point-by-point comparison in a chronological framework to highlight the differences that separated the two camps. According to the dichotomy she draws, anthropologists focused on people, their lives, and the cultural patterning in those lives; literary scholars on forms, genres, and written texts. Anthropologists saw folklore as "part of the