

post-structuralist focus on the parallels between literature and paper money as forms of symbolic representation.

University of Manchester

PETER KNIGHT

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Elaine Cardenas and Ellen Gorman (eds.), *The Hummer: Myths and Consumer Culture* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007, £22.99/\$34.95). Pp. 284. ISBN 978 0 7391 1477 3.

The Hummer is the civilian cousin of the US military's High Mobility Multi-purpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV). Dubbed the Humvee, the HMMWV was introduced as a replacement for the Jeep in the early 1980s but became synonymous with American military muscle during the first Gulf war. After enquiries from those who saw it in television war coverage, among them Arnold Schwarzenegger, the first civilian model was sold in 1992. Associated with poor handling and dreadful fuel consumption, sales were low through the 1990s, but following the events of 9/11 and the development of the war on terror, and the introduction of smaller H2 and H3 models in 2002 and 2005, sales have increased and this behemoth has become a more common sight on American roads.

Working on the assumption that we can learn about a culture by understanding the products it uses and consumes, the contributors to this genuinely thought-provoking collection analyse one of the most disturbing and fascinating products to have emerged from the United States in recent years. As Elaine Cardenas suggests, "Not for decades has an automobile captured the imagination of the American public as the Hummer has" (147). The authors represent a cross-section of different approaches within American cultural studies and while semiotics provides a backbone to the analysis, their essays adopt a broad range of methodological approaches that provide a variety of alternative readings of the Hummer.

Understandably, much focusses on what a vehicle that can be seen both on nightly news broadcasts from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and on suburban streets means within contemporary American society. Several of the authors suggest that its popularity reflects an increasing militarization of society in the post-9/11 world, and that it represents a desire for impenetrability at a time of perceived global and national insecurity, terror and threat. Others connect its rise to the trend towards gated communities or to neo-fascist tendencies within American society, while others link it to notions of gender, race, patriotism and morality. Questions related to the authenticity of a civilian automobile designed to look like a military vehicle are addressed in an analysis of Hummer advertising, which is elsewhere connected to post-9/11 angst and concerns about the rise of the EU, while an analysis of a website that allows those who dislike the vehicle to vent their anger asks what it tells us about the current state of public debate. Though most contributors explore the significance of the Hummer today, the vehicle is also examined in its historical context of Reagan-era Cold War politics and increased military spending, and in comparison with its predecessor, the Jeep.

If at times accounts of the Hummer's development become repetitive across the essays, this is an interesting book that explores the connection between products, culture and politics. It provides an innovative view of recent American culture, and is an important addition to the growing body of work on consumer products and consumption.

Birkbeck, University of London

THOMAS TURNER

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Kathleen Connors and Sally Bayley (eds.), *Eye Rhymes: Sylvia Plath's Art of the Visual* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, £25.00). Pp. 269. ISBN 978 0 1992 3387 8.

Individual aspects of Sylvia Plath's visual art have been long identified as important elements in her overall artistic vision but this is the first time that a single volume has offered a comprehensive overview of Plath's visual imagination. And in its totality, what a substantial and lifelong feature of her work her visual art turns out to be.

The book has its origins in the Arts of Sylvia Plath project and the exhibition of Plath's art work at the seventieth birthday anniversary symposium at Indiana University, and this is reflected in the long opening essay by the exhibition organizer, Kathleen Connors, which makes three important points. Firstly, until her final years as a Smith student Plath thought it just as likely that a future life in art would be spent in drawing and painting as in poetry and prose. Secondly, and more prosaically, we have such a complete record of the evolution of Plath's art work because her mother kept absolutely everything. Thirdly, from Plath's earliest childhood, representations of the female dominate her sketches and her figurative work.

Such prolific evidence of female representation poses the inevitable question picked up by several of the other contributors: are the drawings of glamorous 1950s beauties, of mermaids and princesses, ironic critiques of an artificial construction of femininity revealing an early awareness of masquerade, or are they standard, unremarkable childhood drawings which, as Susan Gubar argues in the closing essay, are the result of an early idolatry of ideas of 1940s and 1950s womanhood, an idolatry which is overturned only in the poetry? In her essay, Sally Bayley supports the Gubar thesis, cleverly relating Plath's iconography of womanhood to the idealized model of suburban domestic architectures, and suggesting that Plath had a split-level version of womanhood. Such a reading contrasts the Disneyfied version of compliant, domesticated femininity in Plath's Snow White painting and Girl Scout self-portrait with the other "level" of such cross-examination poems as "Lesbos," "Two Sisters of Persephone" and "The Tour." On the politics of her girlhood art the jury in this book is divided, but there is little dispute about the continuity between the visual art and the writing, illustrated by Ted Hughes's revelation (not included here) that Plath used the same instrument for pen and ink drawings and for writing poetry. Connors makes clear how important colour is to Plath's writing, particularly in the later poems with their frequent blues and blacks supplanting the reds of poppies, tulips and roses. Connors is particularly good on the series of poems Plath wrote inspired by specific paintings by de Chirico, Klee