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They Aren't, Until I Call Them: Performing the Subject in American Literature by Enikő Bollobás (review)

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American Studies, Volume 51, Number 3/4, Fall/Winter 2010, pp. 238-239
(Article)

Published by Mid-American Studies Association
DOI: [10.1353/ams.2010.0122](https://doi.org/10.1353/ams.2010.0122)



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his insistence that his story “is not simply an exercise to evoke important moments in labor history” but also “provides important insight and subsidy to further the ongoing debate regarding the future and revival of the American labor movement” (201) is more an author’s unfulfilled wish than a set of lessons persuasively conveyed.

Both books leave various questions unanswered. What, precisely, was the meaning of ethnic heritage and Catholicism to Portland’s dockworkers? How did they negotiate interethnic relations as newcomers joined the Irish union over the course of the twentieth century? On New York’s waterfront, who were the persistent Communists who remained a thorn in the ILA’s side for so many years? How and why did so many dock workers acquiesce to the rule of their corrupt union leadership for so long? And what about racial segregation and civil rights on the docks—themes explored earlier by historians Colin Davis and Bruce Nelson, among others? What approaches to race did the ILA, rank-and-file militants, leftists, and black dockers pursue in these years?

Connolly and Mello have added rich detail to our understanding of the diversity of the longshore labor experience in the United States. Their work also suggests that the subject has hardly been exhausted.

The George Washington University and Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
Eric Arnesen

THEY AREN’T, UNTIL I CALL THEM: Performing the Subject in American Literature. By Enikő Bollobás. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. 2010.

The author explains her opaque title on her first page: in baseball, a strike is not a strike until the umpire pronounces it a strike, so the title-anecdote raises a question about existence, when a word can make a thing, but also a question about agency when a good umpire understands the performative power of his rulings. “His being a good umpire does not pre-exist his call” (9), and the realities of the game and the umpire are brought about in the speech-act, on the spot. Enikő Bollobás, recently the author of a Hungarian-language history of American literature where she re-thinks the canon with the help of discourses of gender/sexuality/race, in this new book has narrowed her concerns to the literary implication of one productive discovery in speech-act philosophy. This is the performativity of (what used to be called illocutionary) utterances that declare strikes, dub knights, pronounce man and wife. Under Bollobás’ generous development, performativity theory gathers strong claims for connecting speaking and writing, writing and social-historical agency. She gives warrants for those claims by extensive readings that show how various-genre American texts, from the Declaration of Independence to a recent novel by Philip Roth, produce subject-positions and perform gender, sexuality, and the racial and sexual phenomenon of passing.

The book consists of three chapters that expose the main theme—that summarize speech-act philosophy as relevant in the work of J.L. Austin, Mary Louise Pratt, and several others (e.g., Wittgenstein, Grice, Derrida, Searle, Strawson), and that give the author’s own arguments on how the theory can be extended to literary-social

relevance; and three concluding chapters designed to foreground, with plentiful examples, a feminist and gay-lesbian position that would surpass the texts and readings of texts that take women as objects. A new performativity theory developed in Chapter 2 and through the massive evidence in the book's examples, would promote what the author mentions frequently, "a speaking-seeing-acting subjecthood." This argument is furthered by a distinction, pursued relentlessly with special italics (see especially 85-89), between *performance* of social scripts, and *performativity* where the speaking subject, realizing she is produced discursively, can see beyond and resist the power of a dominant group's beliefs. The examples chosen range across American literary history, so that every chapter has "chronology as a framework within sections . . . not otherwise chronological" (22), but usually there is a contrast between texts before 1890 that perform social norms and those after that date. The historical point: after the modernist breakthrough, writers are more able to free themselves from the script (89), and can "try out [subject] positions of in-betweenness" (181).

Narrative and dramatic works by these authors are taken up for brief or extended analysis: Twain, Hurston, Mailer, Bierce, James, Albee, Dreiser, Chopin, Wharton, Faulkner, Williams, O'Connor, Stein, Cather, Barnes, McCullers, Nabokov, Hwang, J.W. Johnson, Larsen, Roth. In all texts analyzed, the performative is shown to work by producing the subject of the literary character, and also the narrator; so social construction is the overall methodological assumption. The readings are often brilliant, and at times are enhanced by practical points about teaching American texts in Hungarian universities (also welcome: reference to Hungarian scholarship on American themes). While these evidences are essential to success of the book, the main contribution lies in the summary and extension of performativity theory.

The University of California, San Diego Donald Wesling

BLOWOUT! Sal Castro & the Chicano Struggle for Educational Justice. By Mario T. García and Sal Castro. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2011.

Set against the historical backdrop that was the urban Chicano movement of the late sixties and early seventies, Mario García provides a compelling story of individual courage and commitment personified by Sal Castro, a Los Angeles high school teacher for forty years, primarily in the city's eastside barrio working with Mexican American students. Utilizing the *testimonio*, an oral history of oppositional political activism often used in a Latin American context, Mario García highlights the invaluable leadership provided by Sal Castro in the struggle for educational justice, culminating in the student "blowouts," or walkouts, of March 1968, at a number of eastside high schools. The interviews with Sal Castro, transcribed and presented in his own voice, are also supplemented with periodic inserts, or voices, provided by other historical actors involved in these walkouts and other displays of political activism that poignantly convey a larger collective process.

Mario García skillfully employs the concept of liberation education identified with the work of Brazilian educational philosopher, Paulo Freire, in an attempt to better understand this galvanized political consciousness displayed by Sal Castro