

In 1798, the *Inclusa* passed into the hands of the *Junta de damas*, a society of noblewomen concerned with social and economic reform. The *Junta* reorganized the *Inclusa* by adding a second doctor and a second surgeon, doubling the staff and separating the sick from the healthy infants. Yet, the mortality rates continued to rise and, in 1804, despite the reforms, all the infants admitted that year to the *Inclusa* died. Sherwood concludes that the mortality rates declined only with the advent of medical advances at the end of the nineteenth century. In describing the reforms, Sherwood has shown the “medicalization” of charity institutions in Spain, and the growing influence of male doctors in a world which had been heavily populated by female nurses and midwives. Sherwood has also given an interesting sketch of the *Inclusa* gradually changing from a foundling institution to its present state — a pediatric hospital.

Sherwood relies heavily on statistical evidence gathered from the records of the *Inclusa*. Consequently, the book lacks a detailed discussion of the day-to-day functioning of the institution. It would be interesting to learn more about what contemporaries (including government officials, nobles and church leaders) thought about the *Inclusa*. This might help Sherwood match her statistical analysis to general trends in the 1700s. Nevertheless, the book is a welcome study of the major foundling institution and of poverty in eighteenth-century Spain. Sherwood has effectively used the *Inclusa* to illustrate the conditions of the poor in Madrid during the eighteenth century.

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Morag Shiach — *Discourse on Popular Culture: Class, Gender and History in Cultural Analysis, 1730 to the Present*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989. Pp. 238.

Once in a great while, a book comes along that is not only informative and provocative, but genuinely exciting; when the field is one as glutted with “discourse” as that of popular culture, the excitement doubles. Indeed, the consistent fascination with the topic since the early eighteenth century is at the heart of Shiach’s treatment, which might be more aptly titled, “Discourse on Discourses on Popular Culture”.

Far from another history of popular culture itself, this book instead delineates an ongoing dynamic between a “dominant” culture — that of Great Britain, in this case —, which the dominant has defined as “popular”. Central to understanding this dynamic is a realization that the power to define is also the power not only to mediate, but also to marginalize, repress and ignore (5). The ways that this power has been utilized is Shiach’s topic, the changes in the dominant social, political and economic structure provide the context. The underlying continuity of power relations expressed in cultural debate is the thesis. Utilizing an impressive array of primary and secondary sources (fluid categories, since the latter become the former in this kind of analysis), Shiach supports her thesis well by moving chronologically through an intriguing variety of genres, each with a specific point to illustrate.

Appropriately, Shiach begins with the term “popular” itself and demonstrates clearly the relationship between change and continuity that unites this study. “Basically”, she states, “‘the popular’ has always been ‘the other’” (31), but within this

continuum lie problems of interpretation. Perennially, a reference to “the people” by those who consider themselves, paradoxically, outside (above?) that category deemed popular is altered in content and meaning in ways that parallel changes in the political legitimacy of “the people”. Alternately, it could mean the equivalent of the “state” and, thus, the embodiment of political authority, or the masses in need of political control, or both at once. This rhetorical situation is further complicated by the transition from a feudal to capitalistic economy and the accompanying rise of an organized working class on the one hand and, on the other, by the simultaneous interest in locating national identity, equating it with “a people” and describing it in cultural terms.

The complexities involved in the emergence of capitalism as a social as well as an economic order are next examined in chapters on peasant poetry (1848), the rise of literacy and penny fiction in the second quarter of the nineteenth century and attempts to designate and/or collect the authentically “popular”. The former, as much a look at individual poets as poetry, offers examples of direct control exerted by patrons who reveal the ambivalence of the dominant culture toward the more “natural” effusions they supposedly seek. The complicated relationships between poet and patron, as the system disintegrated, and the social tensions they reveal are most vividly described in the career of Aberdeen poet William Thom, about whom Shiach summarizes, “He produced representations that were critical of the ruling classes, but remained locked in their definitions of poetry and dependent on their charity” (70).

As an organized working class developed, in concert with industrial capitalism, controlled by patrons and appropriately deemed “direct intervention” in the cultural discourse, it gave way to more ideological but no less powerful means of governing the dangerous through (their own) culture. Hence, says Shiach, the chagrin over penny fiction as corrupting, coupled with attempts to raise the standards of popular taste, the dynamics of the controversy over the authenticity of Ossian’s poetry, the search for a British folk song tradition and the appropriation involved in the arts and crafts movement are united by common threads: each reflects the fears of the ruling classes in the insistence upon the power to define, and so, mediate and control cultural discourse. Less important to Shiach’s discussion is whether these forms are “genuine” examples of the popular. And more important are the elements of continuity: the search for an authentic folk or popular tradition; the effect of that search in mythifying history, particularly in terms of creating recently-past “Golden Ages”; and the marginalization or outright exclusion of women from the “people” and, thus, from the discourse.

The dynamics of power change little, it seems, with the twentieth century and the efforts of workers to define themselves and their culture. In this case, Shiach examines theatre and makes a good case for the genre as possessing the most potential for a truly alternative culture. Efforts ranged from the relatively mild experiments with radical subject matter within traditional forms to complete rejection of the forms and structure of the inherited tradition. The reference point remained the dominant culture, however, and the difficulties of self-consciously creating something “pure” (a persistent theme in American culture) are concisely expressed:

...in rejecting the dominant culture completely, the WTM [Workers’ Theatre Movement] did little to undermine it: there was simply no point of contact. It washed its hands of the history of Western theatre, and so could say nothing about it (169).

Finally, a discussion of TV serves well as a summary of the main points as well as a convincing example of the continuities of discourses on the popular. The advent of this new form, says Shiach, oddly has not produced much new in terms of thinking about culture, but, instead, reinforces the dynamics hitherto outlined. Especially prominent is the insistence upon literary models, and this, along with the focus on TV as a technology, emphasis on its domestic role and fears of its effects, has dominated TV criticism, according to Shiach. Like penny fiction, TV is suspect, due to its very popularity and accessibility and, thus, seen as evidence of cultural decline. Like folk songs and arts and crafts, there is already a search for the “authentic” in TV, however ill-defined, and an attending myth of a recent Golden Age. Like all forms examined, control of TV and its discourse represents social and political control, and this, in turn, is partly characterized by the absence or trivializing of women. As a review of the literature, this chapter is excellent, but for the same reason, it is a bit disappointing as an analysis, particularly in light of the expectations created by the rest of the book and by this reader’s own special interests.

*Discourse on Popular Culture* is a must for anyone seriously interested in the subject. It is not a quick read, wordy in places, but the occasional over-explanation is forgivable, in light of the complexity of the topic and the sophistication of the treatment. It promises much and delivers on it, with the possible exception that this reader would have liked to see the feminist analysis more central than its place here as an occasional, albeit recurring, framework. Lastly, despite its attention to British culture only, the theme of power relations in cultural discourse is easily, and necessarily, transferable to not only other capitalist societies, but to broader discussions about the ongoing creation and recreation of history itself to suit the needs of those who control it.

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Marc and Muriel Vigié — *L’herbe à Nicot : Amateurs de tabac, fermiers généraux et contrebandiers sous l’Ancien Régime*. Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1989. Pp. 586.

Tobacco arrived in Europe in the mid-sixteenth century and quickly became an important popular, fiscal and economic resource. In *L’herbe à Nicot*, Marc and Muriel Vigié have taken an unusual and interesting approach by using this product as a case study to illuminate many aspects of Ancien Régime society, instead of the more predictable choice of a geographic location, social group or institution. Their study corroborates from this different angle many existing theses about pre-revolutionary society, as they follow tobacco from its introduction to the execution of twenty-eight tax *fermiers* in the Terror, an action which confirmed the popular hostility expressed in the National Assembly’s 1791 decision to abolish the tobacco monopoly.

The authors have divided their study into four parts, each examining a different aspect of tobacco’s impact on France. The first part examines the period before the establishment of the tobacco monopoly, in 1674. Tobacco was introduced to France in the reign of Henry II. Shortly after, Jean Nicot brought this novelty to the attention of