The back cover of the book states that it is 'written in a practical, versatile manner' but we found its authoritative style to be sometimes patronizing. The reader is faced with many bald and unsubstantiated claims (e.g. 'increasingly boys are also translating emotional issues they have into food and body-image problems' (p. 86) and 'in middle-class families there is often considerable emotional distance between fathers and children' (p. 94) which lack any form of verification or support).

We were hoping that the Conclusion would provide a clear summation and thus clarify the author's arguments and intentions, but unfortunately it is incoherent, consisting of un/semi-connected theoretical paradigms and assumptions which left us rather disoriented.

Overall, this is an interesting text, which does challenge some aspects of the theoretical discourse within masculinities. However, illumination of the issues raised using empirical research would have provided a more engaging read. Also, as much time is spent in critique of major theories/theorists with little background information, this book would be more suited to readers who have already familiarized themselves with the major texts and arguments within this area.

Dave Clarke and Richard Taulke-Johnson

doi:10.1057/fr.2008.17

American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture

Ilana Nash; Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2006, viii + 264p, ISBN 0-253-21802-0, £14.95 (Pbk)

American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture provides a lucid cultural history of the teenage girl in American popular culture from the 1930s to the 1960s. Examining such figures as Nancy Drew, Judy Graves, Corliss Archer, Patty Duke and Gidget, Ilana Nash's fascinating study anatomizes portrayals of adolescent femininity in and across mainstream media – including books, magazines, films, television and theatre. The term 'narrative cycle' is used here to describe 'a collection of stories about a single character across several media' (p. 5). This definition enables Nash to draw a critical distinction between 'narrative cycles' as reiterations of a character across different narrative forms (resulting from its popularity among consumers) and 'franchises', which 'introduce new characters with the intention of exploiting their brand simultaneously in several different markets' (p. 5). The study focuses on comic narrative cycles because, unlike dramas of the period, they bring into focus

'the teenager' as a figure in need of interpretation and categorization in the mid-twentieth century American cultural imagination.

Nash begins with a discussion of the contradictory representations of teenage girls as either subordinate angels or agents of chaos – constructions that position them as 'types' and thus deny their subjectivity and personhood. Moreover, she argues, while professing to define the 'average' teen girl by placing her at the centre of their narratives, many of the comic texts under discussion function to define and protect the stranglehold of paternal authority in both its familial and societal formations. Simultaneously sexualized and infantilized, the adolescent girl's 'voyeuristic appeal' is most often articulated through the recurring motif of 'the chrysalis moment' – that is, 'the carefully manipulated scenario in which an adolescent female is shown crossing a threshold of sexual maturity' (p. 23). As Nash illuminates in the subsequent chapters, adolescent female sexuality is very often at once exploited and contained, with disturbing consequences, through various configurations of the father/daughter relationship.

The history and reception of the Nancy Drew Mysteries provide the focus of the first chapter. Making her debut in 1930, Nancy Drew is one of the most enduring images of teenage girlhood, and has undergone many makeovers (her most recent being in Andrew Fleming's 2007 feature film). However, while highlighting the extent to which the portrayal of Nancy Drew presented a space for imagining an alternative definition of independent, confident and accomplished girlhood, Nash challenges her straightforward positioning as a feminist icon in the 1970s. Analysing constructions of class and racial difference in specific mysteries, she argues that Nancy's sense of personhood 'is inextricably bound with ideologies of white supremacy and classist elitism' (p. 57) – a charge that can still be levelled at many contemporary representations of adolescent femininity in popular culture.

The second chapter moves on to explore the 'radical reconstructive surgery' (p. 73) performed on Nancy Drew in Hollywood. More generally, the study is concerned with how the teen-girl protagonist is subjected to heightened processes of sexualization, diminishment, humiliation and punishment as she is translated from fiction to film and theatre scripts. In this instance, Nash charts Nancy Drew's intellectual and physical diminution at the hands of Warner Bros., situating her discussion in relation to the socio-cultural demands and impact of the Depression and a concomitant 'crisis of masculinity'. With reference to 'the teenager' as 'a creature whose public visibility reached new heights on the eve of World War II' (p. 118), chapter 3 examines constructions of female consumerism and delinquency in the Junior Miss and Corliss Archer narrative cycles, culminating in an unsettling account of the latter protagonist's punishment into subordination by various male authority figures. Focusing on post-war girlhood in *The Patty Duke Show* (1963–1966) and *Gidget* (1965–1966), chapter 4

highlights how, after a dearth of teen-girl texts in the early 1950s (and a shift into the domestic world of the ingénue), narrative cycles of the 1960s dramatized a patriarchal desire to put unruly teenage girls 'back in their place' (p. 213).

At once engaging and disquieting, *American Sweethearts* not only offers a compelling account of constructions of teenage girlhood from the 1930s to the 1960s, but also provides an important context in which to develop analyses of subsequent portrayals of adolescent femininity. As Nash argues in the epilogue, while American popular culture has expanded its definitions of girlhood, contemporary representations continue to recycle traditional types and myths – for example, Buffy the Vampire Slayer's 'kick-ass' agency is mitigated by her 'lack of intellectual acumen' (p. 219) and adherence to the disciplinary practices of traditional femininity. Although the epilogue is relatively wide-ranging in its tour of late-twentieth-century representations of girlhood, its discussion needed to attend more directly to their relationship with contemporary feminist and post-feminist discourses. Indeed, while one of the strengths of this study is its breadth of reference and approach, there are times when its methodology needed to be framed more rigorously. The introductory assertion that substituting 'teenage girl' for 'Orient' in Edward Said's seminal argument that the Orientalist 'makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West' will provide 'an accurate description of the female adolescent's rendering in popular culture' (p. 4) is a particularly conspicuous example of this theoretical over-simplification. That said, *American Sweethearts* is, overall, a persuasive and dynamic study and, as such, will make a vital contribution to current conversations about constructions of girls and girlhood in American popular culture.

Rebecca Munford

doi:10.1057/fr.2008.12

British women writers 1914–1945: professional work and friendship

Catherine Clay; Ashgate, Aldershot, 2006, 194p, ISBN -10: 0 7546 5093 6 (Hbk), £50.00 (Hbk)

The focus of this book is the friendship and professional networks of a group of women writers living and working during the period framed by the two world wars. It centres on women connected to the feminist journal *Time and Tide* and is primarily concerned with the social and professional lives of key contributors Stella Benson, Vera Brittain, Winifred Holtby, Storm Jameson, Naomi Mitchison and Margaret Haig, and Lady Rhondda, who was the journal's founder and financier.