

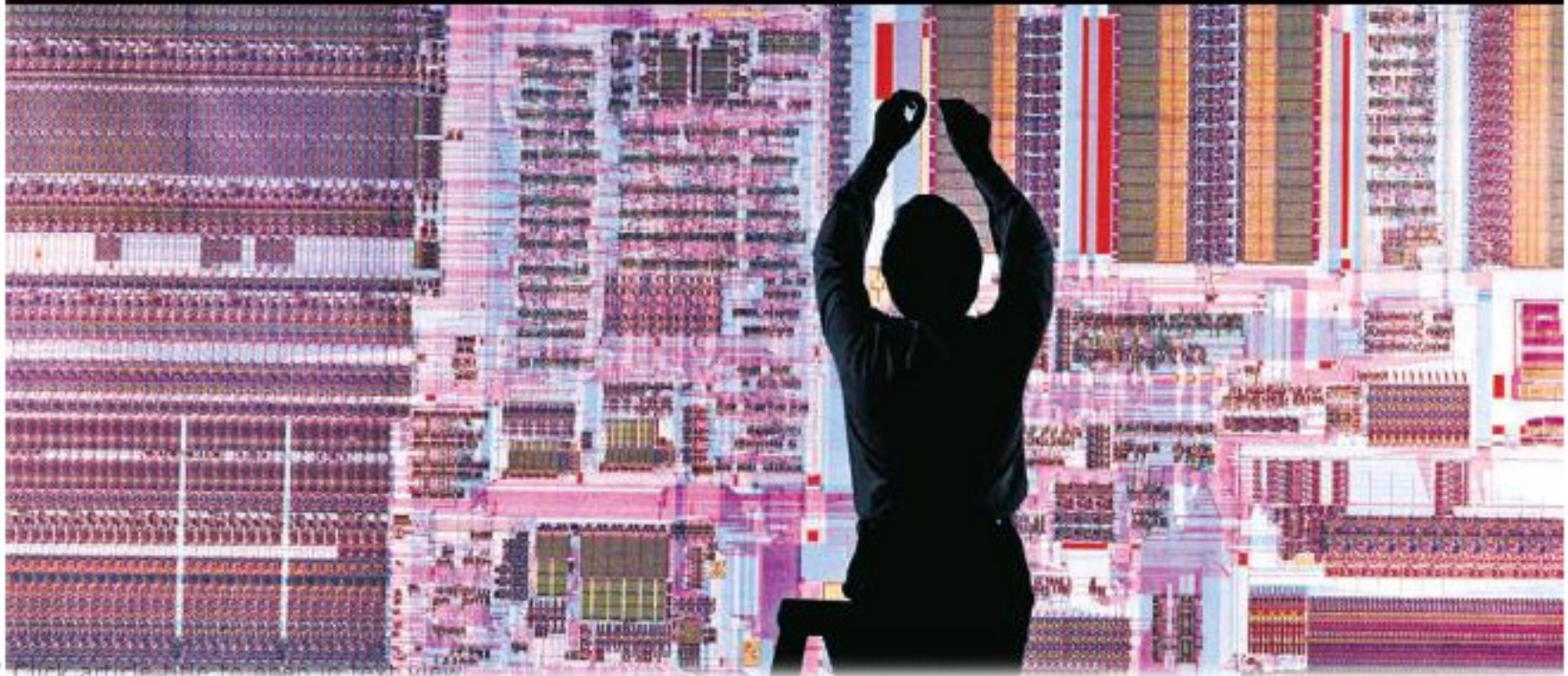
TLS

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Literary Criticism

David Tucker, editor

BRITISH SOCIAL REALISM IN THE
ARTS SINCE 1940

340pp. Palgrave Macmillan. £50.

978 0 230 24245 6

A collection of essays about "social realism" with an introductory essay that initially refers to Samuel Beckett is likely to be wide-ranging. Faced, in addition, by what David Tucker calls the "mediocrity of the mainstream", several of his contributors take up their own counter-intuitive approaches to the topic. For Keston Sutherland, "poetry will not be 'social realist' unless it can make a more radically truthful picture of life than the forms of representation that are popularly considered 'realistic'". He sets about proving this with analyses of two poems: Philip Larkin's eight-line "Wires" and Tom Leonard's sixteen-line, sixty-word "nora's place". It turns out that a politically alert "pedantic reader" of Larkin "would be likely to want to throw the poem in the bin", which, if nothing else, would allow more time for appreciation of Leonard's work as "the best – most moving, critical and technically accomplished – social realist poetry written in English in the past 60 years".

If Sutherland's attitude is wilfully disproportionate to the literature it treats, Stephen Lacey's essay on drama might usefully have been expanded into a short book. Lacey starts with the question "not 'is this play social realist?' but rather 'what is there in this play that is social realist?'" , a tactical modification that justifies a crowded tour from John Osborne to Kwame Kwei-Armah and Jez Butterworth.

Rather more practically, Rod Mengham restricts his account of fiction to half-a-dozen working-class classics, while Dave Rollin-

son's "Small Screens and Big Voices: Televisual social realism and the popular" touches on related issues of class in his discussion of the historical interaction between the documentary tradition, soap opera and the experimentation of Dennis Potter.

Critics and their theories dominate throughout. Gillian Whiteley writes sympathetically on Laura Knight, Jack Smith and post-war sculpture, but is even more concerned with the contemporary polemics of John Berger. Paul Dave's essay on film continually cites the authority of Terry Eagleton; elsewhere, Raymond Williams is still a dominant presence. It's the names of the realist artists themselves that are less well known these days. Alun Owen, Ted Willis, Nigel Balchin and Barry Hines all deserve more extended attention than they get here.

JOHN STOKES

Mikhal Dekel

THE UNIVERSAL JEW

Masculinity, modernity and the Zionist
moment

304pp. Northwestern University Press.

Paperback, \$29.95; distributed in the UK

by Eurospan. £26.95.

978 0 8101 2717 3

F*in-de-siècle* Zionism internalized an anti-Semitic stereotype of the Diaspora Jewish male as weak, feminized and sickly. In contrast, it was thought, the Israeli would be sun-tanned, hardy and a man of action; what Max Nordau called the "Muscle Jew". Such visions persisted long after the foundation of the Jewish State, and the image of the hyper-masculine Israeli still exerts a powerful hold on Israel's self-image and on the self-understanding of Diaspora Jewry.

Mikhal Dekel's *The Universal Jew*, a literary study that concentrates on the early Zionist movement, both affirms and complicates

critical perspectives on the interplay between masculinity and Zionism. Although Dekel acknowledges the parallels between early Zionism's view of the Diaspora and the anti-Semitism of the time, Zionist understandings of Jewry were not simply marked by negative stereotypes. Zionist writers were pivotal to the process through which Israel was built, even while most Zionists were based in Europe. As Dekel argues: "it is in this specific interplay between text and reader . . . that the process of nationalization occurs and readers are inscribed as citizens at the Zionist moment".

Dekel offers a sophisticated reading of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* and its reception within the early Zionist movement, Theodor Herzl's *Altneuland* and a range of other works. *The Universal Jew* is not an easy book, but Dekel's refusal to offer simplistic readings is welcome. Ultimately, the book suggests that the problematic aspects of early Zionist writing, including its construction of gender, sprang from the same questions and anxieties that other European writers were dealing with at the time.

KEITH KAHN-HARRIS

Biography

Giles Milton

WOLFRAM

The boy who went to war

335pp. Sceptre. Paperback, £8.99.

978 0 340 84083 2

Wolfram Aichele grew up in the small town of Pforzheim in south-west Germany. He was born in 1924 into an educated middle-class family with conservative political views but self-consciously bohemian tendencies. His father, Erwin, had been an art teacher in 1914 and a war artist during the Great War, and his mother was from a distinguished military family. Their social