

ground up horses as it ground up men. One officer folded horses and men into the same casualty report.

Industry and industrialized agriculture could be hard on horses too. Especially grueling were the stationary units whose tramping horses turned the gears of power machines to do almost anything. “On the treadmill” was not a metaphor. Cities ran on horse power. In 1872, an epidemic of equine influenza brought Philadelphia to a standstill. They couldn’t even get beer to the saloons!

New York and Chicago each averaged nearly 500 horses *per square mile* by 1900; Milwaukee had 709, Richmond 615. Then the numbers began to collapse, quickly in the cities, much more slowly on the farms. As the millions of acres that once produced horse feed began producing surpluses, effects of the resulting depressed prices rippled through the economy. In 1933, the Census Bureau suggested the transition to automotive power as a main cause of the Great Depression.

Greene maintains that the abandonment of horses wasn’t inevitable. Objections to the ubiquitous manure, the greater privacy and independence provided by the automobile, humane considerations—these all played a part, but “the overriding objection [to horses] came from the discomfort of the visible, physical work of power production.” If the explanation for this most fundamental revolution in daily life can be reduced to so few words, then let me reduce it to fewer: man’s fatal attraction to the Machine.

Greene’s account is as much about the 19th-century cultural landscape as about horses. “Progress,” “civilization,” “prosperity,” become almost a chant, first linked to horses, then turning against them. Especially revealing is her discussion of animal breeding. Americans, in their ebullient new faith in controlling nature, were intent upon molding new horses for new purposes, but myth and prejudice pervaded all. Mules, for example, a hybrid between horses and donkeys that “straddled the border between what in the popular mind were two separate species,” were often discussed in “explicitly racial” terms. Americans “transformed horses,” Greene states,

hinting at radical genetic engineering, but ultimately all we know is that a few new specialized breeds emerged, and that horses got *much* bigger, the result of European imports.

As a lifelong horseman and teamster myself, I cannot but wish that Greene had avoided the technics, where she illuminates little, but this is a very small part of a vast scholarly work. As a historian, Greene has limited herself to the descriptive, but in her epilogue, falling out of—or perhaps into—character, she hesitantly suggests a future mixed-energy scene that might include horses. Why so timid?

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ARTS & LETTERS

## Canon Fodder

Reviewed by Eric Liebetrau

SINCE AMERICA’S BIRTH, ITS writers have attempted to capture the essence of the American dream. Jay Parini, a prolific poet and novelist and one of the nation’s foremost literary scholars,

taps into that common project in *Promised Land*. Putting a welcome twist on the concept of the best-of list, he searches the landscape of American literature for works that “played a role in shaping the nation’s idea of itself.” Parini is quick to note that his choices aren’t necessarily the “greatest” books, but rather a handful of “nodal points, places where vast areas of thought and feeling gathered and dispersed, creating a nation as various and vibrant as the United States.”

Inspired by British journalist Melvyn Bragg’s 2006 lecture “Twelve Books That Changed the World”—all of them, ahem, English—Parini settled on a baker’s dozen of works (a nod to the original 13 colonies) that he believes “helped to create the intellectual and emotional contours of this country.” The choices cover a wide swath of literary traditions, ranging from a 17th-century journal to 20th-

**PROMISED LAND:**  
Thirteen Books That  
Changed America.

By Jay Parini.  
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century self-help volumes. (Perhaps anticipating the arguments sure to result from his choices, Parini includes a helpful appendix, “One Hundred More Books That Changed America.”)

He proceeds chronologically, and each book receives the same treatment: a short introduction and author biography, a close reading, and analysis of the work’s legacy. The approach is by nature formulaic, but it is also effective, and Parini’s erudition allows him to deftly maneuver among these classic works to highlight major themes of American life: immigration and assimilation; the struggle for religious and civic freedom; the capacity for self-transformation and personal betterment; the desire to “light out for the Territory,” as Huck Finn put it so well.”

Certain works also cluster together in their similarities. *Of Plymouth Plantation* (published in 1856), William Bradford’s chronicle of colonial life and possibly “America’s first immigration narrative,” is echoed in the Old Country/New Country dichotomies of Jewish émigré Mary Antin’s memoir *Promised Land* (1912). The tradition of nature and travel writing initiated by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark in their *Journals* (1814) comes to bear on the meticulous detailing of wilderness living in Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854), as well as the acute observations of Mark Twain’s legendary narrator in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). The latter two works certainly had some effect on the unabashed celebration of freedom that is Jack Kerouac’s propulsive novel *On the Road* (1957).

A concern with freedom, in nearly every sense of the word, is the hallmark of all the authors Parini examines: Benjamin Franklin, whose emphasis on self-reliance in his *Autobiography* (1793) reflected a desire for autonomy and personal independence; Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, who in *The Federalist* (1787–88) sought to defend and explain the Constitution, the very embodiment of free democracy; and Harriet Beecher Stowe, creator of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), and W. E. B. Du Bois, the revolutionary author of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), who both wrote of the struggle to win freedom from slavery

and racism; Twain and Jack Kerouac, endlessly curious explorers on the road toward adventure; or Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and ambassador for second-wave feminism’s struggle to get women out of the house.

Though two of Parini’s picks—Dale Carnegie’s *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936) and Benjamin Spock’s *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (1946)—may not excite students of literature, their practical, quotidian nature is not out of keeping with the other texts, all of which illuminate “a climate of opinion, consolidating a tradition or marking a fresh turn in a long and winding road.”

Parini’s professorial tendencies show only in the occasional passage of academic-speak. He describes *The Federalist*, for example, as “clear and crisp, yet highly nuanced, with extraordinary flexibility and a mature sense of subordination—a far cry from the monosyllabic, flat style (with a fear of subordinate clauses) so popular today, post-Hemingway.” Such circumlocutions may deter some readers, but *Promised Land* reminds us of the diversity and potency of American literature and its profound connection to the country’s history.

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## Image Conscious

Reviewed by Grant Alden

IF YOU OWN A COMPUTER, YOU are—by default—a graphic designer. At your fingertips is software that makes it possible to design newsletters and invoices and bake sale posters, no formal training or special gifts required. Just as the do-it-yourself ethos of punk music taught many of us who keep a guitar in the closet that we *could* be in bands, it also revealed the importance of actually having something to say, and the skill to say it in a compelling fashion. The democratization of com-

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By Johanna Drucker and Emily McVarish.  
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