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### Book Review: Backstage Domains: Playing "William Tell" in Two Swiss Communities

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## III

## BOOK REVIEWS

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Regina Bendix, *Backstage Domains: Playing "William Tell" in Two Swiss Communities*. Bern: Peter Lang, 1989.

Written by a folklore scholar, this book is a detailed, behind-the-scenes account of the many aspects required for staging Schiller's play, *William Tell*. To accomplish this, the author undertakes a comparative approach by studying production of the play in two Swiss communities, Altdorf and Interlaken - communities the author sees as "culturally distinct and each embodying different values of Swiss society." The author notes that Altdorf tends to be the guardian of Tell's memory while Interlaken functions at the forefront of Swiss tourism. Separate chapters on each of these two Swiss communities provides an interesting historical account of the area and a description of the organizational structures designed to stage the long-running William Tell play, in Altdorf since 1899 and in Interlaken since 1912.

To provide an account of the "backstage domains" of these two performances, the author uses a person-centered perspective by the conducting of extensive interviews with actors, staff, and community leaders. From the author's analysis of these interviews, the reader gains an appreciation of the cast's interpersonal dynamics and multi-tasks required for the successful production of this regularly occurring display of Swiss culture.

The reader is introduced to interesting related historical information. We learn that the Tell story, as a story, was originally published in 1512 and performed in Altdorf that same year. Friedrich Schiller's

version of the William Tell story first appeared in 1804 and has been subject to various adaptations for the stage by both Altdorf and Interlaken, some scenes being removed altogether. Being given a view of the human side of staging a cultural play, we take pleasure in hearing about the pranks cast members play on each other.

As a study in folklore, this book contains extensive endnotes and a fine bibliography on folklore research. One shortcoming is that no index is given to its many topics. This study can be regarded as an excellent example of extensive and detailed folklore research. In addition, this book provides for those interested in Switzerland, a window on the functioning of communal culture in the production of a patriotic ritual.

Donald G. Tritt

Norman F. Cantor, *The American Century: Varieties of Culture in Modern Times*. New York: HarperCollins, 1997.

Western civilization today is very technologically proficient but lacks the dynamic and creative ideas needed to launch a new cultural revolution. Bereft of a unique vision, our post-modern culture nostalgically borrows from the past, mining especially the gems of modernism.

This exciting book by Norman F. Cantor, Professor of History, Sociology and Comparative History at New York University, is replete with such incisive observations. The work covers the whole gamut of twentieth century cultural history. Its core is a stimulating chapter on modernism which includes literature, theater, dance, drama, music, the visual arts, the social and behavioral sciences, history, theology, and the relationship between World War I and modernism.

Cantor entitles his book *The American Century* since a major theme of the twentieth century has been the growth in importance of the United States, a country which in addition to its own contributions to culture acted as a magnet upon Western European culture, for it was in the United States that ideas of European origin reached their fullest expression. The author is unabashed about his book's