



**Dancing in the Dark: A Cultural History of the Great Depression,** by Morris Dickstein (Norton, £13.99)

The great depression tested to the limit America's faith in itself and the belief of Americans in individualism and self-reliance, those pillars of the American dream. Dickstein's authoritative cultural history explores how the books, films, photography, radio programmes and music of the period reveal the inner life of the depression years, and also how they bound Americans together and offered them hope as they struggled to make sense of their plight. It was the age of the new mass media, of radio and movies, but he wisely refrains from making easy contrasts: "collective escape and entertainment can be just as revealing as solemn social criticism". Across the arts, authors, film-directors, photographers, composers and musicians "worked to incite, amuse, inform, or console a beleaguered nation", helping America emerge from the economic crisis a stronger, more unified nation. Detailed, insightful and elegantly written, this is a memorable cultural history of one of America's darkest periods.

**PD Smith**