## Reviews

The following reviews are freely available at www.dgfa.de and www.winter-verlag.de/de/programm/zeitschriften/amerikastudien/

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reviewer</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

At first sight, the project seems to be too ambitious, as it proposes to discuss the appropriation of patristic literature by the Puritans in England and New England. The topic presupposes the author’s expertise in two rather different types of literature: Greek and Latin Church Fathers on the one hand and the extremely prolific output of mainly seventeenth-century English-speaking Puritan writers on both sides of the Atlantic on the other. The exhaustive list of primary literature is definitely a challenge for the reviewer (cf. 405-23). The list of secondary literature of almost the same length is likewise impressive (cf. 425-42). Without the massive and relatively recent volumes of Irena Backus and Leif Grane et al., the author would probably not have found a proper scholarly context for her project.

The book consists of six chapters: the first is simply called “Introduction.” Here, the author defines her categories as ‘Puritanism’ and ‘church-fathers’ and proposes two theses. Her first thesis is that Puritan exegesis is mainly informed by the exegetical practice of the church fathers, and the second one is that the Puritans saw themselves as the typological antitypes of the ancient churches of the first centuries.

Chapter two offers a close reading of William Perkins’s Probleme of Forged Catholicisme, or Universalitat of the Romish Religion. Schäfer argues that Perkins explicitly endorsed the category of auctoritas patrum but was especially keen to prove that the Roman Catholic Church discontinued this tradition. Perkins quoted Vincent of Lérin’s famous dictum that the catholic church is the one “that onely bee beleived and taught, which hath been held in all places at all times and of all professors” (qtd. in Schäfer 39). However, in Perkins’s view, the Church of Rome corrupts this concept of universality, antiquity, and consent. Thus, Perkins does not see any problem in reconciling the Protestant principle of sola scriptura and the Catholic principles of auctoritas patrum, argumentum patrum, or even consensus patrum.

Chapter three provides a useful historical perspective on the concept of auctoritas patrum throughout the Middle Ages and the Reformation period. A notable omission from the survey of the English reception of the idea is the work of the martyr-reformer John Frith (1503-1533), whose answer to Sir Thomas More’s vindication of the Catholic view of the Eucharist was written shortly before his execution. In this work, Frith devoted a whole chapter to discussing the views of the Fathers. Frith was seen as the greatest intellect of the early English Reformation. Ironically, the newly appointed archbishop Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556), still holding Catholic views of the Eucharist, was one of the authorities that condemned him. In a few years time, this same Cranmer came to endorse the views of Frith and the Swiss reformers on the figurative interpretation of the Lord’s Supper. Consequently, he too was condemned and burned at stake. The rest of chapter three provides important (but not always exciting) encyclopedic information on institutions of Puritan learning. The author offers a closer look at Puritan education at Trinity and Emmanuel Colleges in Cambridge, England and Harvard College in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Schäfer also introduces the library resources of these colleges. This chapter gets more exciting when the author illuminates the tradition of the Comnonplace Book by demonstrating the patristic evidence in the work.

Chapter four, “Exegesis in Theory and Practice,” is the most valuable part of the book and treats hermeneutics, homiletics, and preaching. However, the introductory part of the “Principles of Puritan Hermeneutics” contains some questionable statements such as: “the concept of the fourfold sense, a literary approach whose origins can be traced back to the exegesis of the Alexandrian church fathers Clement of Alexandria and Origen” (149). Contrary to this statement, Origen stood for the idea of the threefold senses based on his trichotome anthropology. Another inaccuracy is the author’s statement that “Theodoret of


Cyrus” is the second of the Antiochian fathers rather than “Diodore of Tarsus” (150).

Apart from such minor mistakes, Schäfer shows her deep knowledge of Cotton Mather’s Biblia Americana and proves her exegetical skills in the chapter on biblical commentary. She is right when she says that Cotton Mather scholars “occasionally touch upon the ‘Biblia Americana’ […] yet […] these scholars have not focused on the commentary” (156). Like most Protestant authors, Cotton Mather also embraced the idea of the primacy of literal interpretation and disapproves of the medieval idea of the fourfold senses. He also defended the integrity of the text and acknowledged the existence of dark places of Scripture that must be opened up by the exegete, to which typology is one of the keys. Schäfer praises Mather for admitting his own intellectual limits in interpretation. Another interesting observation of the author is that Cotton Mather was in harmony with the Fathers in reading Genesis 1:1 spiritually when suggesting that the “beginning” means “Christ” (184). Thus, the first sentence of Scripture can be read as “In Christ did God create the heaven and the world” (188). Schäfer concludes her discussion of Biblia Americana by stating that the “Biblia Americana” not only relies on the force of the argumentum patrum, but Mather even goes so far as to claim the consensus patrum for his exegesis” (199). It is shown how Mather’s biblical commentary is different from other commentaries by contemporary Puritan divines.

Schäfer also analyzes Harvard President John Leverett’s Saturday lectures “Expositions of Scripture” (1708-1724), showing the author’s profound knowledge of the Fathers and his explicit exhortion of Harvard students: “Patres sunt honorandi.” The Protestant ideal of plain style is introduced in the close reading of William Perkins’s The Arte of Prophecying. Perkins claimed that the preacher should learn from the Fathers’ anti-heretical writings. As for Puritan preaching, we learn that “New England ministers usually preached twice every Sunday—in the morning as well as in the afternoon—and they also delivered a weekday lecture once per week on the so-called Lecture day” (245). While later Puritan preachers, such as John Mitchell and Samuel Parris, seem to have made less appeal to patristic sources than their predecessors, their political homilies and the so-called election-sermons contained many explicit references to the Fathers and the early church.

Chapter five is on ecclesiology. According to Schäfer, New England ministers appealed to the church fathers, especially to Cyprian and St Augustine, in their debate with their opponents. Separatists, such as Baptists (e.g., John Smyth), were seen as the antitypes of Donatist heretics. Both opponents and supporters of the “Half Way Covenant” (a more liberal baptismal policy) appealed to the writings of the church fathers.

In conclusion, scholars should be grateful to Schäfer for opening hidden libraries, introducing a wide array of formerly lesser-known books of Puritan literature and successfully substantiating her two theses. Her book is based on thorough and careful philological research; it is indeed an invaluable source of information and insights. The amount of material analyzed is more than impressive. However, throughout the book, the author, on the evidence of the material discussed, has frequently come to a certain (rather monotonous) quod erat demonstrandum type of conclusion.

This important work could have been even more fruitful had Schäfer been more courageous in challenging and refuting some recent critical assumptions that may have contradicted her proposed two theses. However, all in all, this book indeed fills a gap in Early American Studies.

Budapest

Tibor Fabiny

During the last forty years, the Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson (the much abbreviated title by which The Soveraignty and Goodness of God [1682] is now commonly known) has become an essential text, perhaps the essential text, of American Puritan literature. In anthologies and the syllabi derived from them, it is prominently featured, often to the minimizing, or even displacement, of once canonical historical works such as Bradford's History of Plymouth Plantation and Cotton Mather's Magnalia Christi Americana. It has repeatedly been interpreted as the ur-text of the captivity narrative, an important American sub-genre that was to include fugitive slave narratives as well as Indian captivities. Given Rowlandson’s repeated references to Indians as ‘merciless enemies’ and ‘bloody heathen,’ her Narrative suits the postcolonial critic’s central concern for the contrasts between ‘savage’ and ‘civilized,’ between white colonizers and native peoples, between ‘we western Christians’ and the Lacanian ‘Other.’ Moreover, Rowlandson’s Narrative was written by a woman fully aware of her gender and her sexual vulnerability, thus giving students a respite from the line of patriarchal Puritan writers from John Winthrop through Edward Taylor to Jonathan Edwards. As a form of spiritual autobiography, Rowlandson’s Narrative compels its readers to assess the applicability of biblical passages to a Puritan’s daily life. Whether Increase Mather had a direct hand in the composition and publication of the 1682 text raises a fascinating instance of the importance of textual research. And, above all, Mrs. Rowlandson’s Narrative is short, capable of being read carefully in ninety minutes. In sum, Rowlandson’s Narrative has everything to recommend it to recent scholarly-critical fashion.

Stratton’s book is less a comprehensive, detailed study of Rowlandson’s text than an investigation of the historical and literary circumstances of its origin, publication, and subsequent cultural and scholarly history. As such, Stratton makes important contributions to an already populated field. Stratton demonstrates that The Soveraignty and Goodness of God is not in fact the first captivity narrative. Citing Nabil Matar, Stratton shows that there were “at least ten accounts of English captivity in the Muslim dominions published between 1527 and 1625 in England alone” (30). These captivity narratives, mostly about Barbary pirates, might have been known to Rowlandson or to Increase Mather; they contain conventions of situation and characterization to be found in Rowlandson’s Narrative and in subsequent captivities. Secondly, Stratton carefully reconstructs the little that is known about the origin and printing of The Soveraignty and Goodness of God, then demonstrates undeniable similarities of syntax and diction between Rowlandson’s and Increase Mather’s accounts of the Indian attack on Lancaster with which Rowlandson’s Narrative so memorably begins. Stratton forcefully argues that the “breadth and integration” of the Narrative’s biblical citations, together with “their skilled application […] suggests his [Increase Mather’s] presence not only as the outside ministerial hand in question, but as the primary author of the narrative itself” (119). These arguments are plausible, even persuasive, precisely because they are tempered with reminders of all we still do not know, and cannot ever prove, about literary influence in the seventeenth century.

Scholarly temperance and impartiality are not the qualities, however, that describe Stratton’s attitudes toward the purpose, values, and lasting influence of Rowlandson’s Narrative. Stratton is determined to read Rowlandson’s book as evidence of what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have termed “determinitorialization” (45)—the rhetorical process by which a literate people imaginatively displaces and then dispossesses a native population of their land. Even though Mrs. Rowlandson’s text never directly considers the vexed issue of English versus Indian land ownership, to Stratton ‘determinitorialization’ is her book’s underlying purpose. Its title concern for the “Soveraignty and Goodness of God,” together with the Protestant notion of life as a pilgrim’s journey through afflictions toward restoration and salvation, are therefore treated as negligible considerations compared to the wrongs suffered by Native Americans at the hands of Puritan settlers, Puritan soldiers, and Puritan writers. John Winthrop’s and John Cotton’s familiar argument that untilled, unsettled land is a “Vacuum Domicilium” awaiting possession of God’s People is three times condemned as a mere “alibi” by which the Puritans rationalized a land grab (53; 63; 137).
Stratton will give no consideration to the possibility that leaders of the Great Migration could hardly have believed otherwise, despite the gadfly protests of Roger Williams, about whom Stratton is surprisingly silent.

In the cumulative rhetoric of Stratton’s book, Puritans increasingly become oppressors, Native Americans increasingly become victims, and there is little ground to occupy between them. Accordingly, the same split occurs in the degree of authority Stratton is willing to grant scholarly predecessors. Homi K. Bhabha, Jacques Derrida, Francis Jennings, Edward Said, Hayden White, and Howard Zinn are cited as authorities who correctly understood the truths of hidden historical fact and the deviousness of historical narrative. Twentieth-century scholars who granted differing degrees of credence to Rowlandson’s point of view—Michelle Burnham, Jill Lepore, Perry Miller, Teresa Toulouse, Alden Vaughan—are cited as representatives of a hegemonic academy unknowingly perpetuating falsities in order to maintain the neo-Puritan point of view. Stratton condemns the binary thinking of the Puritan mentality, but his own rhetoric does not escape such dualism; he merely inverts it.

_Buried in Shades of Night_—Stratton’s title is from William Apess’s now well-known _Eulogy_ of 1836—is something of an in-house production. Stratton wrote his dissertation, of which this book is a revision, under the guidance of Frances Washburn in the American Indian Studies Program at the University of Arizona. Stratton’s book is published by the University of Arizona Press. Frances Washburn wrote the foreword to Stratton’s book in which Washburn claims, misleadingly, that “very little attention has been given to the accumulation of injustices perpetrated by the Puritans against the Indian tribes of the region, injustices that led Metacomet (known as King Philip to the Puritans) to war against the Puritan colonists and also led to Rowlandson’s captivity” (xi). “Here at last,” Washburn announces, “is a scholar who writes back” (xiii). Sure enough, Stratton does indeed write back, concluding “the fact that [Mrs. Rowlandson’s] narrative is told through the perspective of a minister’s wife, or that it contains a narrative of repentance and redemption, does not invalidate its simultaneous status as a war-machine” (94). Stratton, however, is hardly the first voice of vehement protest. In chronological order, Hannah Adams, Washington Irving, Lydia Maria Child, James Fenimore Cooper, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, William Carlos Williams, Richard Slotkin, Michael Rogin, Alden Vaughan, Michelle Burnham, Jill Lepore, and others had already written back to reveal “the accumulation of injustices perpetrated by the Puritans.” In the throes of the scholarly need to gain notice by alleging something purportedly new, it is unwise, even unprofessional, to ignore the existence and worth of a longstanding counter-tradition.

Middlebury  
John McWilliams

"Im Rückblick erscheint es zwangsläufig, dass sich die Achttundvierziger früher oder später einer amerikanischen Partei anschließen mussten. Zu Beginn der 1850er Jahre war die Situation aber keineswegs so eindeutig" (73). Daniel Nagel legte eine Studie vor, die als wertvoller Beitrag zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der deutsch-amerikanischen Identität—vor allem der politischen Mentalität—vor dem Bürgerkrieg gelten darf. Der vielleicht etwas lang und umständlich geratene Titel deutet einen Prozess an: Der Weg deutscher Achttundvierziger in die amerikanische Politik steht im Mittelpunkt der Studie. Mit seinem Fokus auf genau der Dekade (1850-1861), die sonst in der deutsch-amerikanischen Historiographie in einem kurzen Absatz abgehandelt wird, argumentiert der Autor auf gut sechshundert Seiten (inklusive Anhang) erfolgreich gegen zwei in der Forschung virulente Stereotypen. Er zeigt auf, dass der Weg in die Republikanische Partei, in der viele der Revolutionäre von 1848 im amerikanischen Exil letztendlich ein zu Hause fanden, sehr viel komplexer war, als es im Nachhinein erscheinen mag. Außerdem widerspricht er vehement der älteren, aus der Hochzeit der Carl Schurz Forschung stammenden These, dass nur angliederte und assimilierte deutsche Einwanderer wirklich Erfolg in der amerikanischen Politik haben konnten.1 Die Assimilierungsversuchsetzung mag für die Wahrnehmung von außen—von Seiten der Anglo-Amerikaner—stimmen, so Nagel, berücksichtigt wird jedoch nicht, "dass es den meisten Achttundvierzigen nicht möglich war, ihre Ethnizität willentlich aufzugeben" (399).

Nagel geht sogar noch weiter und stellt die These auf, dass ihr Weg in die amerikanische Politik für die deutschen Einwanderer der 1848er Revolutionsgeneration ein entscheidender Moment in der Entwicklung ihrer ethnischen Identität war und diese "Ethnisierung des politischen Engagements als Ausweg aus der drohenden Bedeutungslosigkeit" gesehen werden kann (164). Die ewige Angst, nicht mehr als "Stimmpfeifen" (138) zu sein, spielte dabei ebenso eine Rolle wie inhaltliche Stellungnahmen zu den Kernfragen der amerikanischen Innenpolitik Mitte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, etwa der Exilpolitik, der Sklavenfrage, dem *Homestead Act* oder der Temperanzbewegung. Die Studie widmet sich jeder dieser Fragen ausführlich und so entsteht ein differenzieretes Bild der Diskurse unter den politisch engagierten deutschen Exilanten und Auswanderern im Antebellum Amerika. Zur Aufgabe des Traums einer eigenen deutschen Nation gezwungen, wurde die Gruppenidentität der Deutsch-Amerikaner, dank Massenauswanderung, für viele Achttundvierziger zu einem "Ersatzvolk" (202). Ähnlich hatte Günter Moltmann argumentiert, als er die Auswanderung als "Revolutionersatz" für viele Deutsche ausmachte.2


---


Nativistische Tendenzen bei den Republikanern, und vor allem in deren Vorgängerparteien, stellten die deutsch-amerikanischen Akteure vor ein Dilemma (vgl. 421). Gleichzeitig hielten sich die Deutschen für kulturell und intellektuell überlegen und fühlten sich berufen, das Land der „Baumwolle ohne Ideen,“ wie der prominente Achtundvierziger Friedrich Kapp sich ausdrückte, zu missionieren (199). Kulturchausnismus und Bildungsdünkel, der bei Heinzen wie bei vielen der akademisch ausgebildeten Achtundvierziger vorhanden war, kommentiert Nagel nicht näher.

Die Studie hat mit einer Ungenauigkeit umzugehen, die leider in der gesamten Forschung zum amerikanischen Exil der deutschen Revolutionsgeneration immer wieder zu Tage tritt. Wer sind sie genau, die Achtundvierziger? Handelt es sich nur um diejenigen, die nach oder während der Revolution flohen oder sollte man auch jene darzurechnen, die beispielsweise schon die Karlsbader Beschlüsse in die Auswanderung gezwungen hatte? Was ist mit denjenigen, die nach einem kurzen Aufenthalt jenseits des Atlantiks nach Deutschland zurückkehrten? Nagel nähert sich diesem Problem, indem er eine „gemeinsame politische Vergangenheit als deutsche Republikaner“ zur Prämisse macht (200). Auf diese Weise löst er die definitorisches Bedeutung des Jahres 1848 auf, läuft jedoch Gefahr, eine Homogenität in der politischen Grundeinstellung seiner Akteure anzunehmen, die es zu hinterfragen gilt. Nagel thematisiert in diesem Zusammenhang ausführlich die Konflikte unter den Deutschen im Antebellum Amerika, de-
ren Uneinigkeit er gar als “charakteristisch” sieht (63), wie etwa die Konflikte zwischen den verschiedenen Einwanderergenerationen, den sogenannten “Grauen” und den “Grünen” (142). Auch die dominante Rolle der New Yorker Staatszeitung, die bis zum Bürgerkrieg klar die Demokraten unterstützte, verschweigt er nicht (vgl. 78). Der Fokus der Studie aber liegt auf denjenigen, die sich nicht den Demokraten anschließen vermochten. Den endgültigen Bruch, so Nagel, brachte der Kansas-Nebraska-Act (vgl. 216).


Abschließend jedoch lässt sich sagen, dass das Buch zweifellos einlöst, was der Untertitel verspricht. Es ist ein nicht zu vernachlässigender “Beitrag zum Identitätswandel der deutschen Achtundvierziger.” Gerade die umfassende ideengeschichtliche Analyse unterschiedlicher politischer Themenfelder ermöglicht es Nagel Entwicklungsprozesse, Querverbindungen und unterschiedliche Prägungen im politischen Bewusstsein der Deutsch-Amerikaner vor dem Bürgerkrieg neu zu beleuchten und überzeugend darzustellen.

München
Charlotte A. Lerg

Niklas Luhmann’s standing in American academic circles over the past decades in many ways suffered from bad timing. The heyday of American cybernetics, which lasted from the New York Macy Conferences in the late 1940s and early 1950s at least into the 1960s, saw systemic thinking rise to prominence across a wide spectrum of disciplines, including mathematics, information theory, physiology, and psychology. Through the writings of Norbert Wiener, Luhmann’s intellectual forebear Talcott Parsons became invested in applying cybernetic tenets to sociology. Having attended Parsons’s lectures at Harvard in 1960/61, Luhmann took until 1984 to complete Soziale Systeme, his (self-proclaimed) leap forward from both Parsonian social theory and first-wave cybernetics. At this time, the cybernetic moment in American academia had all but passed, leaving Luhmann’s growing oeuvre out in the cold on this side of the Atlantic. Meanwhile, debates in American Studies became mired in the trenches of the culture wars, with theoretical impulses streaming in through the transatlantic channels of poststructuralism. A seemingly lifeless supertheory of society with little regard for power structures, representations, or even human subjects could hardly take root in this intellectual climate.

The editors of Addressing Modernity may have caught a more timely moment of publication. Among scholars of American literature and culture, Luhmann has recently found followers such as Bruce Clarke and Joseph Tabbi, both of whom contributed to the volume. Additionally, emergent strands of research in the fields of media studies and posthumanism have (re-)discovered Luhmann’s writings in their quest to resituate the human subject and its technological environment within the communicative structures of modern societies. Finally, Stanford UP (not Fordham UP, as indicated in Addressing Modernity) put out Luhmann’s magnum opus Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft in two volumes as Theory of Society in 2012/13, fifteen years after its original publication in German. Building on these expedient contexts, Bergthaller and Schinko use their introductory remarks to make a convincing case for a distinct Americanist perspective on systems theory. In the present, they argue, American Studies converges with Luhmannian thought in its thorough dismissal of the nation state as the primary conceptual bracket of social evolution. The oft-proclaimed transnational turn would thus have cleared the table for a more theoretically rigorous (instead of merely political and normative) description of American cultural evolution. In this endeavor, the nation must cede its place at the helm of the discipline and instead resurface among its objects of observation. The social semantics surrounding the American nation as an imagined community would therefore constitute “a regional adaptation to the new structural conditions produced by the functional differentiation of an incipient world society” (19).

The book contains four thematic sections, the first of which (“Literary Observations”) showcases the deep investment of the volume in literary studies. Martin Klepper’s opening essay on Henry James and William Dean Howells functions as an excellent portal to the individual chapters. Reflecting on late nineteenth-century realism, Klepper succinctly traces how American literature developed a communicational sphere of autonomy through its turn from the representation of the real to its self-conscious observation. He correlates James’s and Howells’s poietological writings with Luhmann’s comments on art as a social system. Beyond this, he parses canonical texts by Poe, Melville, and Hawthorne to indicate the discursive development of a semantics of literary value that became feasible only after markets and reading publics opened up a specialized niche for belles lettres. While Klepper does not undertake a radical rereading of established historiographies, he demonstrates admirably how concepts such as operational closure can be fleshed out in literary analyses.

Christoph Reinfandt and Edgar Landgraf each focus on a single text in their contributions. In T.S. Eliot’s The Waste Land, Reinfandt finds the paradigmatic modernist exploration of literary form, specifically with regard to what he calls “texture,” i.e., the material presence of the literary artifact. Yet despite his focus on just one work, Reinfandt presents anything but a close reading. Instead, his essay includes a dense theoretical model of literary mediality alongside a schematic map of Western literary history from the Renaissance to the present. While the scope of Reinfandt’s model appears daunting, one feels that
it relegates the literary work to the sidelines. He accordingly speaks of *The Waste Land* as a mere “example” of communicative practices already determined on the theoretical macro-level (80). Where Reinhard enwraps the literary text in a theoretical frame, Landgraf challenges this approach by describing both Don DeLillo’s novel *White Noise* and Luhmannian systems theory as epistemic programs of sensemaking. Taking off from this analogy, Landgraf argues that DeLillo presents a counter version to operational closure in his “focus on the nodes formed where incongruent systems realities intersect and force an observer to confront and negotiate their incongruence” (88). Other chapters on literature and literary theory engage with the travel writing of Henry James (Ulrich Brinkmann), Thomas Pynchon’s “world-fiction” *Against the Day* (Joseph Tabbi), and the aesthetic import of orality for African American Studies (Schinko) (313).

Several of the remaining essays underscore the self-reflexive pull of Luhmann’s writing, as they provide meta-perspectives on systems theory itself (Hans-Georg Moeller, Gert Verschraegen, Rodrigo Jokisch) or on the field of American Studies (Michael Boyden, Andrew McMurry). The companion pieces by Boyden and McMurry continue recent debates about the evolution of American Studies and provide suggestive readings of the discursive dynamics that propel paradigm shifts and political reversals within the field. Pondering the unlikely rise of Arnold Schwarzenegger to governorship in California, Moeller’s essay teases out the explicable potential behind Luhmann’s often misinterpreted notions of structural coupling and operational closure. Moeller’s talent to explicate Luhmann and produce lively accounts of systems theory (without trivializing it) is on full display here, as it is in his elegant and accessible recent monograph *Radical Luhmann.*1 Jokisch then tackles the very broad question: “Why did Luhmann’s Social Systems Theory Find so Little Resonance in the US?” Jokisch conducts a hasty *tour-de-force* through extended soundbites from transatlantic thinkers and statesmen in an attempt to outline ideal national types. Within the volume’s nuanced conceptional frame, Jokisch’s crude, monolithic understanding of “U.S.-American culture” feels somewhat irritating (207).

Overall, I wish to single out Bruce Clarke’s excellent chapter on the *Whole Earth Catalogue* (WEC), “that premier document of the American counterculture of the late 1960s” (260). In the WEC, Clarke finds the ideal material metaphor for the holistic ontologies and pop-philosophies of the day, a printed enactment of the exuberant conjunction between Stewart Brand’s activism, Buckminster Fuller’s and Gregory Bateson’s cybernetic thinking, and the American back-to-the-land movement. In artifacts such as the WEC, systemic discourses performed their very own cultural work in a more disordered and popular, but no less complex form than Luhmann’s orderly prose. Essays like those by Clarke, Klepper, and Staeheli—the latter on 19th-century semantics of monetary speculation—are suggestive illustrations of what it means to think with Luhmann, not just like him.

The editors naturally have to walk a tenuous line with regard to their audience, as they attempt to cater both to seasoned Luhmann readers and to relative newcomers. As a result, Bergthaller and Schinko have allowed their contributors to paraphrase systems theoretical tenets at length. Between the individual chapters, some repetitions and redundancies accumulate, so that one begins to wish for a bit less ‘social systems theory’ and for more extended engagement with ‘U.S. Cultures.’ The volume also exposes that the fusion of macro-social theory with common practices of close reading constitutes a distinct methodological challenge. In several instances, there seems to be a logical or historical disconnection between readings of an individual artifact and the abrupt transfer to the hovering strata of society or literature. In general, however, *Addressing Modernity* delivers ample proof that systems theory is a potent but still underrated contender in the theoretical repertoire of American Studies. The editors have initiated a transatlantic dialogue among Americanists that promises to open up fertile ground for further reflection and discussion.

Berlin

Alexander Starre

---


Mike Chasar’s rewarding study takes its cues from the observations that much more poetry was read and written during the modernist period than we assume today and that the canonical masterpieces we associate with the period comprise only a small segment of that poetry. The study pursues “four overarching theses” (9): that ordinary readers of poetry were more discerning than scholarship has assumed; that popular poetry of the period was more complex than existing scholarship suggests; that this poetry influenced now-canonical modernist writers in ways ignored by scholarship; and that it served as a laboratory for popular culture as we know it today. While ‘scholarship’ becomes something of a punching bag here, the study turns each of its theses to good use, both to organize its material and to extract surprising, entertaining, and highly illuminative insights into the vast realm of popular poetry in mid-twentieth-century America. Its focus on the concrete and the everyday usefully complements studies of canonic poetry and popular culture, most importantly Marjorie Perloff’s Radical Artifice (1991), and its wide range offers a more comprehensive perspective than thematic studies such as Mark Van Wienen’s noteworthy Partisans and Poets (1997).

I will address its five chapters one after the other, not only because each opens up a small world of its own but because this procedure will allow me to move from criticism to praise, emphasizing the latter. My criticism will focus on the first chapter, an examination of poetry scrapbooks by ordinary Americans that illustrates both Chasar’s strategies of validating his material and the problems these strategies can create. The chapter opens with a number of insightful observations about scrapbooking: it shows how ordinary readers moved easily between what we now regard as high and popular poetry; how the “quoting, cut-up, and collage practices of modernist writing” parallel those of scrapbookers (42); and how a number of now-canonical writers either assembled scrapbooks themselves or referenced them in their writing. It is when Chasar begins his examination of individual scrapbooks that things get tricky.

To justify his detailed scholarly analysis of these scrapbooks, he posits that they express their owners’ political attitudes and that these attitudes can be described in the terminology of agency and empowerment fashionable in current academia. It soon turns out, however, that there is little textual or contextual evidence for this claim. Most of the scrapbookers Chasar discusses are middle-class women from the mid-twentieth century, whose collections, far from expressing feminist belligerence, “tend toward respectful, controlled rhetoric and ethical feminine virtue” (71). As for contextual evidence, Chasar himself points out that he does not have any information about these women aside from their gender and the dating of their scrapbooks. His attempt to build elaborate political arguments on such scant evidence results in formidable overreadings. One unknown collector, we are informed, uses her scrapbook to resist “what she felt were the limiting and outdated values of a World War II–era literary establishment” (62). The fact that the collector’s favorite poet, a certain Robert T. Coffin, was a perfect representative of that establishment and its values—characteristic titles include “I Still Look Up,” “Joy Meets Boy,” and “Late Christmas”—spirals Chasar into a breathtaking series of conflations at whose end the avuncular Coffin comes to exemplify “masculinist authorial practices and their associated cultural virtues of hate and war” (72). Similarly, the collector’s fondness for feminine, domestic imagery generates musings about “latent,” “nearly repressed,” and “sublimated” fantasies of emasculation (71-72). Chasar goes on to read these speculations into a drawing of a dying soldier paired with a child’s farewell to a father departing for the war, which likely commemorates the death of an acquaintance, or even of the collector’s own father, in World War II. This never seems to occur to Chasar, who reads the farewell poem as a Freudian rejection of “male writing and male cultural values” and the dying soldier in the drawing as “emasculat[ed]” because his pistol is “pointed impotently downward, immediately in front of the figure’s crotch” (73-74). The dominance of such jargon-ridden projection over empathetic analysis makes chapter one the weak spot in an otherwise convincing study.

Chasar seems to find his interpretive balance in chapter two, a discussion of poetry in early radio broadcasting, which still contains occasional nuggets of jargon—one broadcast is described as a “queered wireless space” (88)—but builds its arguments on much stron-
ger evidence. The chapter draws on taped broadcasts and fan mail to examine the participatory dynamics of radio poetry shows, which offered listeners the opportunity to voice cultural criticism via poems and letters read out on air. Noting the hosts’ repeated references to scrapbooking, Chasar insightfully argues that this familiar activity became a “guiding metaphor” for the radio shows, familiarizing listeners with the new medium while at the same time emphasizing its interactive potential (89). In a similar vein, chapter three examines the widespread use of poetry in advertising campaigns to demonstrate not only the ubiquity of poetry in daily life but also the active involvement of ordinary Americans in the reception and even creation of such campaigns. Focusing on the long-lived billboard campaigns for Burma-Vita shaving cream, Chasar makes a compelling case for the impact of popular verse on practices ranging from children’s games to high modernist prose. Additionally, he draws on this material to recontextualize debates within the literary elite, from Pound’s references to “advertising […] for a new soap” in “A Few Don’ts By an Imagiste” to the billboard aesthetic of postmodernist poetry (126).

He substantiates these claims in two case studies of the interchanges between poetry and popular culture that make up the concluding chapters of the book. Chapter four considers William Carlos Williams’s poetics in relation to the language of roadside advertising he would have encountered on the way to his house calls. In a series of striking analogies, the chapter demonstrates that the critical potential of contextual readings is far from exhausted and that such readings can capture both the intricacies of complex literary texts and their entanglements in the perceptual patterns of modern consumer culture. Chapter five examines the work of Paul Engle, founder of the Iowa Writers Workshop and prolific supplier of verse for Hallmark gift cards, for its mediation between elite and popular poetics. The similarity of Engle’s greeting-card verse to the scrapbook poems discussed in chapter one reveals how Chasar’s approach has shifted in the course of the book: instead of preconceived ideological notions, he now relies on traditional close readings to valorize his material and makes a benevolent case for the formal complexity of Engle’s poetry. The chapter develops a useful perspective on the gradual differentiation of the poetry landscape into high-brow and low-brow during the mid-twentieth century. Its concluding observations on the persistence of popular poetry in the present day summarize the main tenets of Chasar’s argument and at the same time testify to the qualities that make his study such profitable reading: his willingness to look beyond the conventional field of analysis, his ability to trace connections between seemingly disparate phenomena, and a compelling enthusiasm for the subject that carries author and reader alike through the uncharted territory explored by this important study.

Augsburg
Timo Müller

Years after the Black Power era, professor and activist Angela Davis met with a young man who at first did not recognize her. When she explained who she was, the young man exclaimed: “Oh, Angela Davis—the Afro.” For Davis, it was humbling to learn “that a single generation after the events that constructed me as a public personality, I [was] remembered as a hairdo.” Saddened, Davis bemoaned the fact that cultural amnesia had reduced “a politics of liberation to a politics of fashion” (152). In his new German-language study Style Politics, Philipp Dorestal offers solace for Davis and an analysis of the intersection between racial identity and style in the African American freedom struggle from the 1940s through the 1970s. With chapters covering the Zoot Suit Riots, nonviolent direct action protests, the Black Panthers, Nation of Islam, and Blaxploitation cinema, Dorestal’s book is a deeply researched and at times provocative addition to the field of civil rights scholarship.

The book opens with the admission that the term “Style Politics” may seem oxymoronic. Is there a less political arena of culture than the self-consciously ephemeral fashion industry? Dorestal’s initial assertion that black style is inherently political will surprise few scholars of African American studies, but his research into the contentious debates about fashion within the freedom struggle offers a much needed corrective to civil rights studies that tend to mention style off-handedly, if at all. Early on, Dorestal follows Robin Kelley in asserting that wearing a zoot suit during the 1940s was a clear signifier of race rebellion. “We had to be rebellious to [wear the zoot],” explained a future activist, “but then it was the zoot suit. I wasn’t going to be a square” (95). That activist was not Malcolm X, as one might expect, but César Chávez.

The civil rights era of the 1950s and 60s witnessed a radical evolution of style. Dorestal observes that activists intentionally performed middle-class respectability by donning suits and ties for sit-ins, freedom rides, marches, and other public protests. Yet some of these same activists would perform working-class identities by wearing overalls when running voter registration drives in the rural South. “We were talking to people in work clothes,” recalled one activist in an oral history interview, “[w]e wanted to be in work clothes, too. […] Yes, we were from a university but we saw ourselves as workers and we were doing work” (127). When Bob Moses, a Harvard-trained educator, taught college students about the dangers of journeying to the Mississippi Delta for Freedom Summer, his denim gave him authenticity just as Martin Luther King’s impeccable dark suits gave him standing on national news broadcasts. Performance theory and questions of authenticity are, in fact, at the heart of this study. Dorestal should be given credit for letting theory inform his work without overwhelming its more substantive historical analysis.

As the Black Power era emerged, Dorestal finds a much more explicit debate about the role of fashion and style in the movement. This section is notable for two particular insights. First, Dorestal deconstructs the vicious debate between the Black Panther Party and Maulana Karenga’s Us organization on the West Coast of the United States. “If we were ever gonna be politically free,” Karenga told one interviewer, “we have to be culturally free. [...] When we changed our clothes and our names that was an act of self-determination” (225). To the Black Panthers, Karenga and other dashiki-clad activists were merely “cultural nationalists”—not true revolutionaries. Yet Dorestal’s analysis of both the Panthers’ performance and reception shows that the self-defense organization’s style left as much of an impression as its radical rhetoric and community activism. A subtle analysis of stylistic differences between Panther chapters on the East and West Coast in this section mirrors a similarly nuanced analysis of northern and southern activists’ styles during the earlier phase of nonviolent direct action.

Dorestal also challenges popular understanding of the Nation of Islam (NOI) based on an analysis of the religious organization’s style. Though Malcolm X and the NOI are often lumped in with Black Power groups based on their militant rhetoric, Dorestal suggests that the NOI’s conservative strictures for dress, hair, and (for women) make-up should be given credit for letting theory inform his work without overwhelming its more substantive historical framework.
One of the great strengths of Dorestal’s work from a historian’s perspective—his analysis of primary textual sources—is also one of this work’s few weaknesses. This study is based primarily on discourse analysis. Dorestal analyses how people talked and wrote about black style more than he deals with style itself. As a result, this book has a plethora of telling quotes about the contested evolution of African American fashion from the 1940s through the 1970s and the political implications of those debates for the strategies and goals of the black freedom struggle. That, in itself, is a worthy contribution to movement scholarship. However, the topic offered opportunities to do fine-grained image analysis as an art historian might. Without access to more period images with the text (perhaps a decision of the publisher), this study does not reach its full potential. Still, Dorestal’s book is the most comprehensive and thoughtful account of style in the civil rights and Black Power eras to date. Though the language barrier of the German publication may be a difficult hurdle for many American scholars, this is a book that deserves to be read and debated on both sides of the Atlantic.

Rohnert Park

Steve Estes

Tomasz Basiuk’s Exposures: American Gay Men’s Life Writing is an ambitious literary analysis of a representative body of autobiographies written in the last fifty years—the first monograph of this scope in English. The decision to begin the account in the aftermath of the 1969 Stonewall Inn riots is justified by the fact that these events marked a radical change in the consciousness of the American homosexual minority. When this minority, routinely harassed by the New York police, adopted the political strategy of confrontation, its visibility in the public sphere increased. Yet eradicating heterosexism took more than courage in altercations with the authorities. As Basiuk persuasively argues (invoking Jacques Rancière) without concerted efforts to restructure the aesthetic order, it would not have been possible to change Americans’ negative attitude towards same-sex desire. Neither would gay people have gradually acquired political subjectivity without subtle interventions in the visual arts, literature, drama, and film. As Rancière observed, it is the aesthetic order that determines what is visible in the public sphere and accessible to our senses.1 The challenge taken up by gay writers in the post-Stonewall era involved shifting the boundary between what is visible or representable and what is not by means of autobiographical discourse, which Basiuk interprets as a form of testimony.

Selecting his primary texts from a very large body of gay autobiographical literature, Basiuk uses the criterion of aesthetic value: all the texts discussed in Exposures were penned by acclaimed authors with more than one book to their name. Although, with the exception of Samuel R. Delany and John Rechy, the authors are white differ in terms of social background, age, and able-bodiedness. Stylistically and thematically diverse, their texts are connected, in Basiuk’s view, by a sense of shame acquired by homosexual people in contact with heterosexual others (12). In order to render the experience of shame in a text and to expose the mechanism of shaming, gay writers have developed original aesthetic strategies. For instance, Edmund White, writing over the course of forty years, described some of the same events from a variety of perspectives in both fictional and autobiographical works (61). The fact that the texts analyzed in Exposures belong to a wide range of literary genres, including the autobiographical novel, memoir, journal, essay, collection of humorous anecdotes, and even a home movie, provides a context to enter into the debate about the slippery categories of fact vs. fiction. The axis of this debate is Basiuk’s polemic with Philippe Lejeune, who proposed a notion of autobiography based on the autobiographical pact, that is, the authorial declaration that a given narrative approximates the truth. Unconvinced by Lejeune’s formulation due to the difficulty of telling fact from fiction (38-43; 342), Basiuk builds his own more capacious category of autobiographical texts characterized by a heightened moral consciousness, which is based on John L. Austin’s theory of speech acts.

As Basiuk notes, unlike feminist writers, who can address their texts to a broad and receptive readership conscious of the feminist tradition that goes back at least a century, men who openly write about their homosexual desire cannot count on the receptivity of the “average reader” (42). In anticipation of a less-than-friendly response, all the writers discussed in Exposures endow their texts with an affective potential, so that they testify about the experience of shame, putting the reader in the position of a witness capable of identifying with the narrator because he or she too has experienced shame—a universal affect. Empathy, in turn, builds an emotional bond and triggers various thought processes. The heterosexual reader who witnesses shame expressed in the text and comes to understand the mechanism of shaming may be able to reject his or her own shame and even to feel a sense of belonging to an imagined community. Meanwhile, a heterosexual reader may acknowledge the narrator’s “heightened moral consciousness” that characterizes the act of giving witness; this reader may also feel empathy for the character/narrator who is being shamed and thus reconsider his or her prejudices (43). But above all, the stigmatized person’s risky act of testifying builds visibility and facilitates the emergence of a group consciousness, coupled with demands for political change.

The focus on performing shame, which constitutes a sort of game in which the au-
tobiographer engages the reader, is Basiuk’s most interesting contribution to the study of life writing. The sense of shame understood as being unworthy of love and attention is not new in life writing. Conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies written by Puritans in colonial America were pervaded by a sense of shame. Though these public confessions of shame were highly ritualized, they were nonetheless ardent. Yet the Puritan spiritual journals and conversion narratives are atypical, for autobiography is usually motivated by a sense of pride. It was pride in his own accomplishments, ineffectually masked by a humble pose, that inspired Benjamin Franklin to write *The Autobiography* (1771-1790). Many immigrants wrote autobiographies motivated by a sense of pride in having overcome great adversity in order to achieve the prized status of U.S. citizenship. Autobiographies are published by presidents, CEOs of prosperous companies, and other people who regularly make newspaper headlines. Those who do not proudly look back on their lives (or at least on substantial segments of those lives) rarely consider writing autobiographically—or so we would assume. Yet Basiuk has identified a group of autobiographical texts produced precisely because their writers had been deprived of the right to feel proud of themselves. These writers redefined the experience of being shamed as interesting literary material. Writing about stigmatization, however, calls for a different “distribution of the perceptible” (Rancière: *partage du sensible*). Strategically “exposing their shame” or “making a spectacle of themselves,” gay writers take on the risk of rejection in the hope that intimate contact between the performer and the reader/viewer has the potential of disrupting and thus altering the viewer’s understanding of the world (261).

*Exposures* is a theoretically refined study written by a scholar who is highly aware of the genealogy, potential, and limitations of the critical terms he makes use of. Basiuk combines theories derived from various fields of the humanities, translates them into terms used in other fields, develops, and illustrates them. He often draws attention to the theoretical interventions made in the literary texts themselves (for instance, in Samuel R. Delany’s autobiography). The inclusion of Peter Friedman and Tom Joslin’s video-diary *A Silverlake Life* (1993) in his study must have been dictated by the desire to unpack the term “exposure,” which in photographic terminology means ‘exposing to light.’ The mechanism of shooting a film makes visible that which is consciously exposed to the camera lens as well as that which falls outside the frame. Thus, *A Silverlake Life* plays a double role in the study: it provides a theory of the division of the perceptible in an unusual form as well as primary material for analysis.

*Exposures* makes a substantial contribution to the theory of affects initiated by Sigmund Freud, developed most fully by Silvan Tomkins in the 1960s, and introduced into queer studies by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in the 1990s. A pioneering study of affect in autobiography, *Exposures* is likely to inspire literature scholars to explore the psychology not just of shame but also of other affects, such as interest, pleasure, and surprise. Other theoretical strands present in the study include various schools of psychoanalysis, from Freud, through Jacques Lacan, to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari; queer theory as represented by Douglas Crimp, Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Lisa Duggan, Leo Bersani, Lee Edelman, Judith Halberstam, Jasbir Puar, David Eng, and Didier Eribon; Erving Goffman’s work on stigmatization, as well as Dominic LaCapra’s theories of trauma. Simultaneously, all the analyses are firmly anchored in their historical context.

Basiuk approaches the ideas of other writers—autobiographers, fiction writers, and theorists—with deep respect. It is because he wants to give them their intellectual due that the study ends up being almost four hundred pages long. It consists of a fifty pages long introductory section, six long chapters, and a full conclusion. Although the material is presented thematically, the chapters roughly follow the chronology of events significant for the gay minority. I will stop at briefly summarizing the contents and highlighting a few themes that interested me the most.

Chapter one discusses the theme of shame in the works of Edmund White, one of the most respected gay writers in the United States, as well as a sensitive observer (or “chronicler” as Basiuk calls him) of America’s social mores. This chapter reveals White’s self-reflexiveness, political consciousness, and humor and, at the same time, introduces the historical context for the subsequent chapters of the study. Chapter two analyzes the writings of Samuel Delany, Daniel Mendelsohn, and Wayne Koestenbaum, which belong to
the genre of personal criticism—a form of social diagnosis based on personal experience. I find particularly interesting and subtle Basiuk’s interpretation of The Motion of Light in Water by Delany, an author who in a series of memorable scenes manages to encapsulate the moment of the emergence of a new group consciousness and of an open, nonhierarchical gay male community in New York before the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic.

In chapter three, Basiuk looks at four gay narratives that bypass, complicate, and in some cases subvert the emancipatory “coming out” paradigm that is central to the work of literary scholar Paul Robinson. Using Martin Duberman’s The Cures as a prime example, Basiuk shows that the ‘coming out’ episode is followed by a humiliating period of psychotherapy that leads the narrator to internalize homophobia. Finally, the narrator abandons psychotherapy in order to replace it with a form of therapy he finds far more effective; he chooses sexual relations with men who affirm his desire, and it is only that second ‘coming out’—to other homosexual men—that cures him of his shame. The other texts analyzed in this chapter illustrate the consequences of shrouding non-heteronormative sexuality with silence and point to the need for parrhesia—speaking frankly about one’s sexuality despite the risk of rejection.

A large part of chapter four theorizes the socially unacceptable mourning of people who died of AIDS as well as the melancholia caused by the denial of dignity to gay mourners. The analyzed autobiographies testify to the slow death of friends and partners on whom the society at large has turned its back. By giving testimony about the humanity of the dead, the narrators overcome their own sense of shame and humiliation and claim their right to mourn. The argument presented in chapter five, titled “Dissent,” concerns writings that express anti-assimilationist sentiments. While the LGBT movement in the United States tends to emphasize the similarity between hetero- and homosexual lifestyles, goals, and values in order to justify the demands for equal treatment, a parallel movement opposed to assimilation has long existed. Consolidated during the AIDS epidemic, the ‘barebacking’ subculture draws many gay men deprived of health care, housing, and family support, who cut themselves off from middle-class values, forming communities that affirm sexual freedom and provide indispensable care. Basiuk’s analysis of several ‘dissident’ autobiographies through the prism of the theories of Leo Bersani, José Esteban Muñoz, and Leo Edelman forces us to rethink such basic issues as ‘ties of blood’ and the right to pleasure and sexual self-expression. It is the most balanced and informative presentation of this radical movement that I have come across.

The final chapter is devoted to David Sedaris’s humorous approach to shame. Writing in the 1990s, when positive representations of gays and lesbians were beginning to appear in the American media, Sedaris became immensely popular telling jokes about himself that minutely described moments of acute embarrassment. In order to understand the mechanism of shaming oneself in the reader’s eyes, Basiuk turns to theories of humor and psychoanalytic tools developed by Freud and Karen Horney. In the conclusion, he returns to current theoretical debates on such key concepts as affect, shame, emancipation, utopia, and witnessing.

I find particularly inspiring Basiuk’s exploration of the relations between shame and interest, which is also classified as one of the basic affects (78–79; 159–160; 217–219). Silvan Tomkins argues that humans would not be able to function without interest, which enables us to focus on selected features of our environment, get to know them, differentiate them from other features, and build an emotional attitude towards them. The fact that we are interesting to others (i.e., worthy of their attention) is of fundamental importance throughout our lives. The mutual interest of mother and child becomes the paradigm of all subsequent relations built on this affect. Shame may be the reaction to lack of interest on the part of the mother or a significant other, Tomkins claims.2 Taking off from this observation, Basiuk writes about interest and its lack in the context of literature representing the lives of openly gay men. When writers choose to represent that which, in a given historical moment, is considered unrepresentable (and thus unworthy of attention), they have to think deeply about how to elicit the readers’ interest and get them emotionally en-

---

gaged. This applies to minority authors in general, whose interests often diverge from those of mainstream audiences.

Due to the weight given to emancipatory politics in American academia, as well as the strong influence of New Historicism in literary studies, until recently psychological theories were depreciated as apolitical and were rarely used. Yet as Basiuk demonstrates, the psychology of affects can help literary and cultural studies critics understand what is going on not just on the narrative level of a text but also in its reception. Located at the intersection of aesthetics and ethics, Exposures shows the work literary texts do to engage their prospective readers, evoke their empathy, make them blush with remembered shame, or express righteous indignation in a way that will allow it to be perceived and acknowledged.

Wrocław
Dominika Ferens
RENE DIETRICH, Revising and Remembering (after) the End: American Post-Apocalyptic Poetry since 1945 from Ginsberg to Forche (Trier: WVT, 2012), 254 pp.

Literary studies of the apocalyptic imagination since 1945 are usually studies of narrative, for the representation of apocalyptic endings has most commonly taken the form of the novel or popular film. Such studies overlap in part with more sociological studies of apocalyptic social movements and the texts they study and create. However, even these apocalyptic phenomena, whether religious or secular, are made coherent through prophetic or hypothetical narratives: certain events will come to pass, brought about by particular human or divine agents, and will have certain consequences for the faithful and unfaithful. The traditions of lyric poetry are not generally seen as intersecting with the main currents of modern apocalypticism. Indeed, the second half of the twentieth century has seen a distinct, increasing separation between scholarship on prose fiction and film and that on poetry—a separation or specialization that did not previously exist, at least not to this degree. The classic mid-century text on apocalyptic thought and modernism, Frank Kermode’s The Sense of an Ending (1966), considered poems by Eliot and Yeats, plays and novels of Beckett and Burroughs, as well as poems, novels, and essays by D.H. Lawrence. In addition, studies of English romanticism (most recently, the work of Steven Goldsmith) have long considered the apocalyptic elements in Blake and Shelley. But, for the most part, scholarship on literary apocalypticism since Kermode—the work, for instance, of Warren Wagar, Peter Schwenger, Lee Quinby, Richard Dellamora, James Berger, Philip Wegner, and Teresa Heffernan—has focused on novels, movies, and (as has been the case for much literary scholarship from this period) philosophy. American postwar poetry seems to have its own trajectory. Like many other representations in this period, late twentieth-century poetry has been notable for its fragmentations, disjunctions, and various senses of endings, especially the posited end of subjectivity and the lyric voice. These lyric disasters, however, have not been critically regarded as apocalyptic in the way that, for instance, Gravity’s Rainbow or Ridley Walker demand consideration of their apocalyptic perspectives. There remains a tendency in the scholarship on postwar American poetry to regard its conflicts and disruptions as contained in the history of poetry. The formal or thematic novelty of poet X of today is a response not to social realities or histories but to Stevens, Williams, or Whitman. As vilified as it often is, the spirit of Harold Bloom’s oedipal poetry is stronger than we like to acknowledge.

It is in this context that we read Dietrich’s intervention into postwar American poetry and apocalyptic thinking, Revising and Remembering (after) the End. Postwar poetry, for Dietrich, is poetry written in the wake of historical cataclysm—of that series of ‘posts’ that seem to define the period: post-World War II, postcolonial, post-Hiroshima, post-Holocaust, postmodern. Accordingly, for Dietrich, the poetic responses he examines are ‘post-apocalyptic’. That is, they are in the paradoxical position implied by his book’s title. The poems revise and remember the, or some, ending and necessarily (and impossibly) do so from a moment after that ending. Some world has ended, but a voice or language from that world—though damaged or mutated—struggles to be heard. Given the post-apocalyptic premise of the termination of its terminologies, how can the voice be heard or understood? By whom would it be heard? We acknowledge, of course, the premise as a fiction. We are here, after all, reading the poems, probably in a position of comfort, not of agony. But the poems of (after) the end purport to reveal something—to stand in an apocalyptic, i.e., revelatory, relation to the disasters they point toward.

Dietrich’s sense of post-apocalypse draws largely on the work of Berger and Heffernan. This is interesting and valuable, because the approaches and conclusions of these two scholars are quite different. Dietrich’s book benefits from these contrasts but is also torn by them. For Berger, post-apocalyptic representation refers to an event. Berger employs a psychoanalytic terminology in which the apocalyptic event is seen in terms of trauma and the post-apocalypse is a landscape of symptoms. ‘Apocalypse’ is a trope through which we both apprehend and obscure a traumatic history; it is a mode both of memory and amnesia, or, as Dominick LaCapra in other contexts often puts it, of acting out and working through. Post-apocalyptic representation is a kind of Artaudian “signal-
ing through the flames’’1 of an auto da fe, a form of therapeutic hyperbole (which may, however, not be therapeutic but merely symptomatic). For Heffernan, on the other hand, post-apocalypse signifies a going-beyond and a rejection of the need for apocalyptic thinking altogether. Why, Heffernan’s post-apocalyptic writers (such as Rushdie, Delillo, and Morrison) ask, cling to the focus on endings at all? Why not proceed post-Kermode? Abandon telos and omega and all the reprehensible, genocidal baggage they have entailed through the millennia. Adopt a narrative method not of foreshadowing a known ending but, as Gary Saul Morson and Michael Andre Bernstein have so usefully theorized, of sideshadowing a set of possibilities that might lead to different outcomes. And yet, Berger might respond, certain traumatic and significant events did occur. They were not inevitable, yet they happened, and we live amid their multiple consequences. We may want to be ‘post’ in the second sense but still are ‘post’ in the first.

Between these not-always compatible poles, Dietrich spins out his careful and astute analyses of poets from two postwar moments: Allen Ginsberg, W. S. Merwin, and Mark Strand writing in the generation close to the end of World War II (from the late 1950s through the late 1960s) and Susan Howe, Joy Harjo, and Carolyn Forche writing from the 1980s into the early twenty-first century. These selections show a wide range of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic sensibilities. It is illuminating to view through Dietrich’s eyes Ginsberg’s exuberant descents and ascents via Whitman and Blake through the darkest and most revelatory locations of personal and historical experience and to set these moments alongside the subdued lines and images of Merwin and Strand—verses that, as Dietrich observes, seem to have been uttered by voices of the dead. In all these works, to take a phrase from Strand, “the dreadful has already happened.”2 But what is it? What has happened? For each poet something different, of course. In Ginsberg’s great poems, “Howl” and “Kaddish,” which are Dietrich’s concern, the action is still happening, the world is very much ongoing in spite of the loss and damage the poet has witnessed.

From Ginsberg’s expansiveness to the condensations of Merwin and Strand is a big jump, and this grouping—the ability to regard these disparate poets under one rubric—is a measure of the audacity and risk of Dietrich’s project. Merwin and Strand speak with voices coming out of Eliot’s The Waste Land and Stevens’s “Snowman,” though without Eliot’s humor. They are, Dietrich notes, voices of the dead, of those caught permanently in catastrophe. And this is, it seems, for the most part, an amnesiac, utterly traumatized condition—with a few exceptions, without reference to history or social conditions. Dietrich cites Merwin’s critique of Whitman for an unreflective celebration of the American imperial project and for ignoring the extinct and the dispossessed. But surely this is a misreading on Merwin’s part. “Through me many long dumb voices / Voices of the interminable generations of slaves, / Voices of prostitutes and deformed persons”—Whitman’s oeuvre is full of such utterances.3 It seems that for an American poet to miss the complexity of Whitman’s view of America is to cut off part of his mind and tongue. I wonder whether Dietrich overstates Strand’s and Merwin’s work as post-apocalyptic. Might their work merely be expressing the poets’ depressive moods? Dietrich writes of the resignation and apathy that seem to characterize Strand’s work. What strikes me as uninteresting about Strand and Merwin—and yet, at the same time, interesting in a symptomatic sense—are their postures of despair. Lines as pretentious as “I was young and the dead were in other / Ages / As the grass had its own language // Now I forget where the difference falls” evidently had appeal for some readers at the time they were written.4 What is, or was, the cultural resonance of that tone of despair? Why does it seem no longer convincing? Even aside from the mythologies of her life, the poetic anguish of Sylvia Plath still sounds right. The flatness, or deadness, of voice in Ashbery’s Three Poems is still compelling and that book—which is more obviously post-apocalyptic than any work of Merwin or Strand—still commands

our attention. Ginsberg is the proper place to start, but Dietrich could have selected more interesting poets to put beside him.

The poets of the second half of the book—Howe, Harjo, and Forche—present ways of escaping the traumatized minimalism of Strand and Merwin. Howe’s poetic rewriting of colonial American narratives might be described as a poetic version of the post-nuclear novel *Riddley Walker* in which language itself passes through a crucible of “time, sorrow, and injustice” (in William Faulkner’s words) and emerges as an instrument of understanding equally obscure and revelatory. As Howe’s protagonist enters the wilderness, wilderness in turn enters language, and language, as Dietrich writes, becomes a “force against the totalitarian unity of apocalyptic thought” (181). We might read Howe as a way of linking the two post-apocalyptic theses of Berger and Heffernan: the working through of irredeemable historical trauma and a gesture toward new premises of historical imagination.

In Harjo’s work, as Dietrich presents it, we see an even more open opposition to apocalyptic thought, which, for Harjo, a Native American poet, is the dominant feature of the European expansion that nearly destroyed American Indian life. Harjo’s work focuses on retrieving Native American culture and voices. It is a poetry, as Dietrich puts it, of “‘renewal and continuity’” (188) and of “‘resistance’” (201). Her work shares these features with Howe’s poetry, but while Howe’s language enforces the distance between ourselves and the past and resists attempting to re-create the past, Harjo’s project is to defeat the apocalyptic forces that overwhelmed her culture and to create it again in a living language available for use in the present.

Finally, Carolyn Forche’s *Blue Hour* returns us in some ways to the minimal, traumatized poems of Merwin and Strand. As Dietrich writes, her work, and especially the masterpiece of *Blue Hour*, the forty-page alphabetical poem “On Earth,” “perpetuates […] the moment after the loss […] of disrupted temporality and traumatic memory” (208). However, this is a document of particular memories, ruins, losses, survivals, and crimes. It is a poem of insistence. It invokes the spirit and politics of witnessing that infused her previous (and, to my mind, far less successful be-

cause more self-righteous) book, *The Angel of History*, but is a sort of Whitmanesque litany via a Kabbalist sensibility of reassembling the broken pieces of the historical world. It is Benjaminian in its implied neo-Kabbalist negative messianism but not in the sense of that so-often invoked passage on the “angel of history” in which the angel views “one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet.”7 That angel negates the value of the ruins; it is utterly without hope. In its negative sublime, it can represent nothing. The exhaustive listings of “On Earth” cherish their objects; they remember, represent, and transmit them. The only false note of the poem is its last letter, its last line: “zero.” It is obvious, of course—but the logic of the poem makes it untrue. There should be no ‘z.’

There is no absolute rupture in cultural production. Kermode made this point long ago and Dietrich allows us to understand it again in a new way. The poems Dietrich studies are poems of seepage, remainder, traumatization, mourning, outrage, and opposition. They illustrate a range of responses to catastrophe and can all be read as ‘post-apocalyptic’ as long as we understand a wide range of meaning for those terms. If we think either ‘post’ or ‘apocalypse’ can be narrowly defined, the unity of the argument breaks down.

Even with the reservations expressed, I consider this a compelling and important book. Dietrich demonstrates that the history of American poetry since 1945 does not consist simply of a set of responses of poems to other poems and that apparently disparate bodies of work share and participate in the apocalyptic sensibilities of the culture as a whole, in spite of formal differences. Dietrich raises more questions than he is able, finally, to answer. But these are the questions we will be continuing to ask for many years to come.

Yale  

James Berger

---


Since the 1990s, scholars in American Studies have tried to come to terms with the challenges globalization poses for a field traditionally organized around the nation-state. If transnationalism has seemed to turn this identity crisis into an opportunity for a fresh start—now the United States must be studied all over, this time in a decentered manner—it has seldom tried to answer, or even systematically tackle, the underlying analytical problem of how the relation between transnationalism or globalization and the nation-state ought to be conceptualized. Indeed, the investment in transnational flows has tended to divert attention from the question of what has happened to the nation-state. Has it become obsolete? Has it adjusted to globalization? Has it become a mere transnational border crossing? Has it become obsolescent? Has it adjusted to globalization? If transnationalism has seemed to turn this identity crisis into an opportunity for a fresh start—now the United States must be studied all over, this time in a decentered manner—it has seldom tried to answer, or even systematically tackle, the underlying analytical problem of how the relation between transnationalism or globalization and the nation-state ought to be conceptualized. Indeed, the investment in transnational flows has tended to divert attention from the question of what has happened to the nation-state. Has it become obsolete? Has it adjusted to globalization? Has it become obsolescent? Has it adjusted to globalization?

But what promises to be a truly critical study impatient with the facile romanticization of transnational border crossings ultimately turns out to be marred by a methodology of ideology critique conceptualized too narrowly. Chandra convincingly sets out to describe globalization (which, in her study, is largely synonymous with transnationalism) simultaneously as historical process and ideological discourse. However, she pays attention almost exclusively to ideology. Focusing on “the rhetorical, discursive, metanarrative dimension of [the] ideology [of globalization]” (3), her main thesis contends that this ideology is propelled by a contradictory dynamic: while it seems to celebrate the transgressions of national boundaries and, more generally, the transcendence of everything local, it at the same time reconsolidates the centrality of the nation and the local. This double strategy Chandra calls “dislocalism.” Her neologism is intended as a pun that captures the essence of the tension she describes: the word itself never lets go of the letters that spell ‘localism,’ even if ‘dislocalism’ seems to signify its negation (cf. 6). Chandra’s exploration of the intersection of the global and the local has particular relevance for American Studies in so far as it purports to explain the link between globalization and Americanization. Indeed, Chandra claims that globalization, understood ‘dislocally’, is identical with Americanization: “The effects of globalization, due to the leading U.S. role in its institution [sic!], are themselves identified as Americanization” (8). In making this point, she sidesteps the question of what Americanization actually means in the practical reception and negotiation of American culture abroad. She criticizes critical work by John Tomlinson and Jan Nederveen Pieterse on this issue for regarding globalization as a “fait accompli” (236) and thus buying into the ideology of globalization. But it is Chandra herself who becomes open to this charge: throughout her book, the identification of globalization with Americanization appears not just as an effect of ideological discourse; rather it is presupposed by Chandra herself.

Her take on the coalescence of the global and the local could have been made clear without coining a neologism—it would have been perfectly sufficient, for example, to stick to David Harvey’s notion of the “spatial fix,” which Chandra invokes repeatedly to clarify her concept (e.g., 13, 20, 74). The term “dislocalism” becomes a rhetorical necessity, however, because it is burdened with providing coherence for her book. Chandra divides her chapters into four exemplary areas in which she sees “dislocalism” at work. These include management theory, recent scholarship on immigrant fiction, travel writing, and food writing. Critiquing these four areas as ideological sites of “dislocalism” may be the book’s gravest problem. Aiming to reveal the same ideology in these very different realms of writing, Chandra presupposes that ideology operates in the same manner in each of them. However, not all of these fields try to smuggle covert nationalism into overt globalization. Some of them unabashedly flaunt American exceptionalism.

Chandra is most convincing, therefore, in her chapter on transnational literary studies.

---

Here she performs what ideology critique does best: she unearths ideological commitments that run counter to the field’s self-understanding and thus helps to demystify the subfield of transnational American Studies concerned with immigrant fiction. As case studies, she scrutinizes criticism on two recently canonized ethnic novels, Julia Alvarez’s How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents (1991) and Diana Abu-Jaber’s Crescent (2003). Alvarez’s novel, Chandra argues, has served critics, such as Lucía M. Suárez, Pauline Newton, and Maribel Ortiz-Márquez, to draw a picture of multiculturalism that subtly reaffirms spatial, temporal, and genre divisions between the Dominican Republic and the United States by invoking the logic of trauma and the genre of testimonio (cf. 106). Chandra shows that in the essays she discusses—which she holds to be “anything but atypical of current scholarship in ethnic and immigrant literary studies” (107)—“the space of the real,” which contains terror and trauma, is identified with that outside the United States (in this case, the Dominican Republic), while after immigration to the United States, “personal trauma and terror can safely be worked through in therapeutic, ‘testimonio’ fashion” (107). As a result, these readings reconsolidate American exceptionalism, while deflecting from “broader global socio-historical conditions” that do not fit into the framework of identity politics underlying “U.S. literary paradigms of localized ethnic identity” (114).

In a similar vein, Chandra makes the case that recent readers of Diana Abu-Jaber’s novel Crescent (she focuses on Carol Fadda-Conrey) bracket off “the cultural and historical complexities and specificities [...] in favor of establishing an ethnic identity so as to facilitate their inclusion within an American literary canon and curriculum” (125). As incisive as Chandra’s critique is in this chapter, it seems premised on a one-dimensional view of American power. For when she suggests her alternative approach to reading Crescent, we get a better sense of what her vague vocabulary of “historical complexities and specificities” comes down to. Americanization, we learn, has already infiltrated the rest of the world and seamlessly interpellated anyone who has come in touch with American culture. Thus, when the male protagonist of Crescent, a young Iraqi, struggles to negotiate his awareness of American imperial power with the liberating effects of his education in a U.S.-sponsored school in Cairo during the 1970s (an education which made him “obsessed with just anything cultural—literature, painting, drama,” but which also awoke his interest in “theories about economics and foreign policy” and drove him into the underground resistance against Saddam Hussein),2 Chandra resolves the character’s ambivalence in a gesture she believes to be critical: his “decision to study American literature could [...] be inferred as something directly linked to American foreign policy, given the U.S. State Department’s long history of funding American studies programs around the world and supplying these programs with publications that frame American literature as one great espousing of universal values” (135). International American studies, Chandra seems to think, mindlessly regurgitates the official views of the State Department. Evidently, it has not occurred to her that her own type of anti-imperialism may be the best example of “dislocalism.”

Chandra’s other chapters largely miss the critical edge of trying to demystify what is hardly mystified. No doubt, travel writing, such as Robert Kaplan’s The Ends of the Earth (1996), Mary Morris’s Nothing to Declare (1989) and Paul Theroux’s Hotel Honolulu (2001), frequently contends that travel in times of globalization no longer allows for errands into the wilderness. But neither do these authors adopt a cosmopolitan ethic that declares travel to be an anti-nationalist practice. Chandra insists that “dislocalism” is called forth to solve the contradictory task of proclaiming the crumbling of borders while simultaneously reconsolidating them through the act and the discourse of travel” (155). But the crumbling of borders for these writers simply does not put America into question. In a sense, Chandra’s critique here merely states the obvious. The same is true for her chapter on food writing, in which she rehearses lengthy close readings of pieces from the magazines Gourmet and Food & Wine and episodes from Anthony Bourdain’s TV show A Cook’s Tour, in order to show how a self-professed cosmopolitan food culture reinforces American identity. Thus, she quotes a writer from Food & Wine according to whom eating at the New York fusion restaurant “66” “is like traveling to Shanghai without leaving New York City”

(202). For Chandra, this demonstrates how the global tastes of fusion become “a tacitly American mode of consumption” (199). But there is nothing tacit here at all. Not having to leave New York City is part of fusion’s marketing strategy.

More interesting, although also more deeply problematic, are the opening chapter and some passages of the conclusion that discuss academic and popular work in various branches of management theory. Chandra makes two discoveries. Firstly, management theorists respond to neoliberal flexibilization by looking for guidance from postmodern theory and even fiction. Secondly, management gurus give expression to a certain anxiety about globalization, evidently fearing that “the centrifugal forces of globalization” (48) might make management obsolete altogether. In Chandra’s view, her two observations are immediately linked. Thus, she sets out to show how management theorists distort postmodern theory until it serves the conservative end of giving “closure to management’s narrative of obsolescence” (48) and how fiction gets construed as providing a “spatial fix” (58). Chandra concludes from this that “both the humanities and the business disciplines legitimate themselves and—in actual practice—reshape their own objects of study with respect to each other” (28). However, it seems mistaken to argue that just because the business disciplines eclectically absorb postmodern theory they legitimize themselves “with respect to” the humanities. Chandra constructs a false parallelism that equates management’s requirement to adjust to capitalist innovation with the systematic onslaught of utility-free inquiry in the humanities. One part of her argument is quite acute: she makes the point that as long as the humanities complain about their irrelevance, they will remain unaware of how they help articulate neoliberal practices in business. However, Chandra takes this insight to mean that economics and the humanities are equally under pressure. This is a drastic misreading, which is perhaps the final outcome of her decision to set side by side such disparate entities as literary studies and management, all for the purpose of critiquing—and thereby construing—a unified ideology of globalization. Chandra practices a type of ideology critique that ironically blinds itself to actual imbalances of power.

Frankfurt/M.  Johannes Voelz

In this fundamental text, Susan Schweïk connects discourses within the field of disability studies with an analytic approach to law and its ultimate consequences. The exhibition of disabled bodies in freakshows has been discussed extensively in the last decades, particularly in the United States. At the heart of these discussions is the tension between exploitation, economic need, and celebrity status, as the shows contributed to nineteenth-century discourses of national identity and body politics. Writing about the same time and geographical location, the protagonist of Schweïk’s text is the “unsightly beggar” (2), who is banned from the streets of American cities due to his/her body being visually disturbing. This display of bodies differs from the freakshow, since it is obviously less connected to the entertainment industry and its glamour and fame. However, the body politics and discourses of national identity are comparable, if not the same.

The first part of the book is concerned with the emergence of the ugly laws that eventually allow a persecution of disabled people begging in public space. Schweïk departs from newspaper announcements and laws issued in San Francisco, Chicago, and New Orleans—three cities that continue to be her main examples next to New York City. She historically contextualizes these cities and looks at the structure and planning involved to place the unsightly beggar within the city landscape, finding that musicians were at a particular risk of being persecuted. Urban space develops in particular ways during the nineteenth century, mapping cities as structured categories of human lives.

As early as her second chapter, Schweïk includes the Charity Organization Society and the idea of pity in her analysis to question the dynamics of the law and the involvement of charity within it. Thus, she can relate the idea of biopower as conceived by Michel Foucault to several institutions and to a general mapping and planning of the city these institutions are ultimately part of. Schweïk includes and discusses alternative city concepts, such as Ebenezer Howard’s map for a “Slumless, Smokeless Garden City” (74)—which is indeed a map—and narratives that challenge the concept of the city as such.

As a scholar of literature, Schweïk carefully observes the language of the issued laws and reveals its grotesque logic and medical reference while the wording is at the same time extremely vague and open to interpretation. She also shows the dynamics of that language that is not only isolated in the law—an inevitably closed text—but also springs from and feeds into a public discourse about the body. Inevitably, the laws do not only affect the city landscape as such but also significantly influence immigration rules and concepts of work and employment and thus turn out to be concerned with class and poverty.

The originality of the book really lies in the great richness and variety of the material Schweïk uses and connects smoothly. Various newspaper articles, laws (and drafts of laws), public responses, cartoons, maps, and images are part of her investigation—material that in its majority is analyzed and published for the very first time. As a literary scholar, one of her focuses is literature produced and sold on the street by disabled people. The chapter “All about ugly laws (for ten cents),” which is also the concluding chapter, is devoted to the analysis of the life and texts of Arthur Franklin Fuller, whose income depended on the mendicant literature he produced. Fuller was born in Chicago in 1880 and pursued a musical career, but continuous suffering from unknown causes prevented him from further work and eventually tied him to a wooden carriage from which he, unable to move, began to write stories, predominantly autobiographical, to sell on the streets. Due to the ugly laws, Fuller was continuously prevented from selling his books and eventually wrote about the experience of discrimination, also critically examining charity organizations and their role in the ugly laws. Fuller was not the only author of such literature; several disabled men shared their fate this way. Their texts positioned their heroes as extremely unfortunate (already marked in titles such as *How I lost my Feet. Written by a Loser* [cf. 259]) and negotiated their bodies as both disabled and normal. By analyzing these texts, Schweïk introduces original material that will
be valuable beyond her text to scholars of literature looking at autobiography and disability.

*The Ugly Laws* places the issue of the “unsightly beggar” within the dynamics of nineteenth-century capitalism, urban landscapes, physical and mental disability, gender, class, and race. By trying to theorize these bodies, she also discusses the concept of intersectionality, which has been most usefully formulated by Valerie Smith and Diana Courvant’s concept of confluence to establish performed and negotiable identity (cf. 61). It becomes clear that the body (and its aesthetics) are not only the focus of the ugly laws but also the issue of poverty that a rising middle class tries to avoid. Schweik’s book has already become a standard work in disability studies because it addresses crucial issues such as the body in public space and the connection between law and language. It is a most valuable source for further thinking about disability in connection with law, identity, and history, and it is useful material in the classroom when looking at aspects of American history, immigration, and (popular) literature.

Rostock

Andrea Zittlau

The recent history of the American death penalty has been characterized by a number of rapid shifts. The most notable shift occurred between 1972 and 1976, between the U.S. Supreme Court’s declaration that the death penalty was unconstitutional as practiced and its later decision declaring that revised state statutes passed constitutional muster, thus restoring the death penalty to constitutional legitimacy.1 Another such shift occurred between 1977 and 1983, a period when the Court went from deciding the majority of the death penalty cases it heard in favor of the defendants to inaugurating a process by which the Court backed away from tinkering with the machinery of death, as Justice Harry Blackmun later memorably phrased it.1 One of the cases decided during this period was Penry v. Lynaugh, in which the Supreme Court ruled by a 5-4 majority that there was no constitutional bar to the execution of mentally retarded defendants.4 In surveying the national landscape, Justice John Paul Stevens’s opinion found that a national consensus had developed against the execution of mentally retarded defendants.4 In surveying the national landscape, Justice John Paul Stevens’s opinion found that a national consensus had developed against the execution of mentally retarded defendants.4 In surveying the national landscape, Justice John Paul Stevens’s opinion found that a national consensus had developed against the execution of mentally retarded defendants.4 In surveying the national landscape, Justice John Paul Stevens’s opinion found that a national consensus had developed against the execution of mentally retarded defendants.4 In surveying the national landscape, Justice John Paul Stevens’s opinion found that a national consensus had developed against the execution of mentally retarded defendants.4 In surveying the national landscape, Justice John Paul Stevens’s opinion found that a national consensus had developed against the execution of mentally retarded defendants.4

In many ways, Atkins’s case is noteworthy only in degree; the death penalty is a highly complex process at every level, which makes explaining these intricacies a difficult job under the best of circumstances. The Atkins case hardly qualifies as such, but Thomas G. Walker’s book’s best feature is the ability to distill and communicate complex legal and procedural problems clearly. Walker notes that he had been looking for an opportunity to write “a detailed account of an important constitutional decision” for some time (x), and Atkins certainly fits that bill. Walker has four goals: to help readers understand the Atkins decision and its importance; to take readers through the many layers of jurisprudence along the Atkins case path as a way to demonstrate how this convoluted process works; to explain the rights accused and convicted criminals have under the Eighth Amendment; and to talk about the “real people—often society’s most vulnerable—who frequently have suffered catastrophic losses and have much at stake” (x).

Trying to achieve these goals, Walker proceeds methodically through each stage of the process, from the crime through the penul-

---

6 536 U.S., at 321.
7 In Re: Commonwealth of Virginia, Record Nos. 0802282 and 080283 (Supreme Court of Virginia [S.Ct. VA], 2009).

Amerikastudien / American Studies 59.1, ISSN 0340-2827 © 2014 Universitätsverlag WINTER GmbH, Heidelberg
timate stage in this particular case. Walker’s concise history of the American death penalty, the procedural elements of the investigation and the process by which the case is first tried and then the decision appealed, and the history and standing of the controlling case law is clear and understandable to readers with limited or no foreknowledge. The accompanying website (walker.cqpress.com) supplements the sparse bibliographic content of the notes accompanying each chapter and has the added feature of giving the author a way to update the book by concluding the story outside of the pages of the book itself. That said, one wishes that the author or press had taken greater advantage of the website and updated the sometimes dated literature that Walker cites in his bibliographic notes or otherwise augmented the sparse citations.

The book’s expository style helps Walker achieve his first three goals. His explication of the Atkins case, case path, and importance is exemplary in its simplicity and elegant clarity. Along the way, Walker’s engagement with the Eighth Amendment more broadly and with the history of capital punishment in the United States as it bears on the Atkins case is crisp and understandable. Readers already familiar with the intricacies of the jurisprudence and history of the death penalty will find nothing new here, but experts are not Walker’s primary audience. Interested laypeople are his primary audience—the book works very well at that level—and is an excellent volume for classroom use. That said, the near lack of a scholarly apparatus—“[t]o enhance the readability of this book, standard footnote references have been omitted” and “bibliographic note[s]” substituted for a bibliography or bibliographic essay (x)—limits its usefulness in upper-level courses or beyond. Moreover, while these bibliographic notes contain information regarding useful sources, they are in themselves insufficient to broaden the book’s utility far beyond Atkins. Where Walker achieves his first three goals within the narrative, the narrowness of the references to the death penalty generally limits the book’s ability to speak to the issue more broadly.

Walker is also less successful in achieving his fourth goal of speaking about the ‘real people’ at the heart of the process. He dutifully profiles the major figures in the narrative—Atkins, Jones, Nesbitt, Addison, and others—but limits his treatment of the families of the defendant and victim and the Supreme Court Justices who decided the case. This, combined with the crisp, methodical way in which the various issues involved in the case path are discussed, prevents readers from engaging with the human element beyond generic responses to crime and punishment in general and murder specifically. The explicationary nature of the narrative causes Walker to miss several opportunities to deepen the book. There are also minor errors in presentation, such as the claim at 97 that Chief Justice William Rehnquist was a “Reagan appointee[e].” Rehnquist was a Nixon appointee to the Court whom Regan elevated to Chief Justice following the death of Warren Burger, as Walker later notes (cf. 185).

Moreover, while Walker has a broad national and historical focus appropriate to a thorough discussion of a case of major constitutional import, the book occasionally becomes too focused on the specifics of the Atkins case. The description of the way Virginia revised its capital punishment statutes to comply with Furman does not explain how Virginia’s revised statutes were or were not broadly representative of all such statutes (cf. 127-28). Additionally, in a book that is otherwise outstanding in its clear, cogent presentation of complicated legal and procedural issues, the fact that Walker merely mentions and immediately transitions away from the 1996 Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (cf. 77), arguably the most significant piece of death penalty legislation since Furman, is bewildering, particularly since it impacted how Atkins had to file his appeals. Finally, in a book that is likewise excellent in its understandable presentation of the complex Eighth Amendment jurisprudence that preceded Atkins, Walker puzzlingly uses Witherspoon v. Illinois (1968) to discuss problems with voir dire, rather than the two cases that substantially modified Witherspoon: Wainwright v. Witt and Lockhart v. McCree. Despite these complaints, Eligible for Execution is useful in classroom settings, particularly American Studies and history courses dealing with the American death penalty, legal history, or crime and punishment in general, and the accompanying website opens up a number of possibilities to utilize non-traditional assignments in such courses.

Heidelberg

Anthony Santoro

---

Atkins, Jones, Nesbitt, Addison, and others—but limits his treatment of the families of the defendant and victim and the Supreme Court Justices who decided the case. This, combined with the