Reviews

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

KLAUS SCHMIDT

TIBOR FABINY
Reiner Smolinski and Jan Stievermann, eds., Cotton Mather and Biblia Americana – America’s First Bible Commentary: Essays in Reappraisal (2010)

PHILIPP SCHWEIGHAUSER

JOHANNES VOELZ
François Specq, Laura Dassow Walls, and Michel Granger, eds., Thoreauvian Modernities: Transatlantic Conversations on an American Icon (2013)

MARTIN KLEPPER

NICOLE J. CAMASTRA
Miriam B. Mandel, ed., Hemingway and Africa (2011)

BIRGIT DÄWES
Kathryn Hume, Aggressive Fiction: Reading the Contemporary American Novel (2012)

MICHAEL BUTTER

SIGRUN MEINIG

MICHAEL BASSELER
In many a review, claiming the importance of the volume under discussion is little more than a rhetorical strategy. In the case of *John Neal and Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture*, it simply reflects the facts. As an experimental writer, contentious critic, unconventional editor, and fearless reformist, John Neal (1793-1876) played a central role in the cultural matrix of the early national period and in the transatlantic negotiation of an emerging literary marketplace. Equally influential as a proponent of literary nationalism, pioneer of American historical fiction, advocate of women’s rights, and new type of regionalist, he helped pave the way for a phenomenon later known as the American Renaissance. That an intellectual ranked by Edgar Allan Poe as “among our men of indisputable genius,”1 remembered by Nathaniel Hawthorne as “that wild fellow,”2 and praised by Margaret Fuller as “truly a man”3 could ever be written out of literary history would have been unthinkable in his time. As late as 1962, Hans-Joachim Lang was unable to imagine that Neal’s place in American literature was bound to become insecure: “It would be an exaggeration to say that John Neal […] is a neglected author. He was too forceful a personality […] to be easily forgotten […].”4 What Lang still labeled an “exaggeration” must now be called an understatement.5 This is evidenced by the fact that the present volume turns out to be the first collection of critical essays ever published on this key figure of nineteenth-century American culture. Its publication should in particular be of interest

5 Compared to the 5,496 entries for Melville, the 4,027 entries for Poe, and the 3,981 entries for Hawthorne included in the *MLA International Bibliography* under the heading “Primary Subject Author,” the 43 entries for Neal are more than depressing (search date: October 10, 2013).
to German Americanists, whose scholarly interventions have been instrumental in preventing Neal's oeuvre from sinking into obscurity.7

As the editors explain in their acknowledgments, the idea for this collection was formed during the Sixth Biennial Conference of the Society of Early Americanists in Hamilton, Bermuda (March 4-7, 2009). While none of the seventy-two panels were dedicated specifically to Neal,

Amerikastudien 7 (1962): 204-319; and Benjamin Lease and Hans-Joachim Lang, eds., The Genius of John Neal: Selections from His Writings (Frankfurt: Lang, 1978).

“seven papers discussed his work” (ix). Convinced that these papers were striking proof of the author’s relevance to current research, Edward Watts and David J. Carlson decided to offer a textual platform for further investigation. The contributors the editors finally managed to bring together in this collection make for a productive mix of specialists like Carlson, Elmer, Fleischmann, Orestano, Richter, Watts, and Weyler, whose publications account for almost half of what has been written on Neal in the last three decades, and scholars like Hayes, Holt, Insko, Merlob, Pethers, and Sivils, who look at Neal’s writings from the angle of more general approaches to early American history, literature, and culture.

The collection comprises thirteen essays and an introductory chapter. The editors’ introduction, “Headlong Enterprise: John Neal and Nineteenth-Century America,” is nothing less than a masterpiece. It affords revealing glimpses at Neal’s uneven career and idiosyncratic character, illustrates why the author gradually disappeared from the radar of American literary historiography, and lists compelling reasons for his current rediscovery. By criticizing his generation of writers for their lack of Americanness and continuing dependence on the aesthetic tastes of the mother country—and thus enabling “Emerson and his associates” to “imagine for themselves a fresh start” (xiii)—Neal ironically contributed to a nationalist narrative that would eventually exclude him from the American Renaissance he had called for all along. By re-interpreting the originality, experimentation, and contrariness of his life and art as emblematic of the tensions and contradictions underlying the social fabric of the early republic and antebellum America, scholars have increasingly begun to see John Neal as “an important touchstone for understanding the culture wars of his age” (xviii).

In “‘I Must Resemble Nobody’: John Neal, Genre, and the Making of American Literary Nationalism,” the first essay of the volume and one of its best, Matthew Peters (University of Nottingham) highlights the unconventional use of orality, time, and genre in Neal’s early novels—ironic, self-reflexive, and digressive texts, from Keep Cool (1817) to Rachel Dyer (1828), “whose generic indeterminacy paralleled and complemented an ongoing exploration of the competing forces within American literary nationalism” (3). Taking cues from theoretical constructs such

---

as Benedict Anderson’s “imagined community” and Wai Chee Dimock’s “deep time.” Peters demonstrates that Neal considered “the noisy diversity of the nation as requiring representation at the formal level as well as the thematic level” (29) and that in the early decades of the nineteenth century, “the triumph of a linear historical narrative over more accretive methods […] was by no means absolute or uncontested” (31).

While Matthew Wynn Sivils (Iowa State University) in “‘The Herbage of Death’: Haunted Environments in John Neal and James Fenimore Cooper” uses heterotopic concepts, e.g. Yi-Fu Tuan’s “middle landscape,” to diagnose a focus on “artifacts of injustice buried within the earth” (40) and “a decidedly gothic environmental imagination” (47) in Logan: A Family History (1822), Brother Jonathan (1825), and The Last of the Mohicans (1826), Jeffrey Insko (Oakland University) suggests that “Neal might be interesting, not despite, but precisely because of his incoherencies” (Chapter three: “Eyewitness to History” 59, emphasis in orig.). A good case in point is Seventy-Six (1823), Neal’s romance of the Revolution, where “[t]he function of a narrator […] is […] not to explain, but simply to present incidents with such vividness of interest that the reader becomes ‘an eye-witness’” (64), reflecting the idea that “narrative is not immanent in our experience, but merely a structure that is imposed upon it retrospectively” (64).

In his brilliant reading of Authorship: A Tale. By a New Englander Over-Sea (1830), Jörg Thomas Richter (Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung, Berlin) shows that Neal’s little-understood novel is far from being merely a thinly disguised autobiography, sentimental romance, or fictionalized Travologue but a trailblazing self-reflexive work that stages the problematic relation between author, text, and audience. Replete with allusions to contemporary English intellectual life and the utilitarian philosophy of Jeremy Bentham, Neal’s novel, through the allegorization of its characters (Holmes = the ‘author;’ Mary = the ‘reader/muse;’ Edwards = the ‘real text’) and the conflation of gambling and professional writing, “explores the collapse rather than the juxtaposition of the fact-fiction divide” and questions “the epistemic validity of authorial self-expression” (83).

Maya Merlob’s (Tel Aviv University) “Celebrated Rubbish: John Neal and the Commercialization of Early American Romanticism” foregrounds the ways in which Neal’s oeuvre textualizes the rise of a market society and reflects his program of literary patriotism. Following Harold C. Martin’s argument that Neal’s rambling style and excessive verbosity are “entirely intentional,” Merlob’s analysis allows us to see the interconnections between the author’s satire on the publishing industry and his celebration of “Yankee speech” (105) as an innovative form

---

11 See Yi-Fu Tuan, Escapism (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998) 24-25.
13 The title of Richter’s essay, “Notes on Poetic Push-Pin and the Writing of Life in John Neal’s Authorship,” refers to Bentham’s provocative remark that “a game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry” (The Rationale of Reward [London: Hunt, 1825] 206) and Clifford Geertz’s appropriation of Bentham’s notion of “deep play” in “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” in The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays (New York: Basic, 1973) 412-53. Richter’s conclusion that the intertextual loadedness of novels such as Authorship exemplify the need for “a critical edition of Neal’s work” (91) could not be more to the point.
of authentic writing. By making the “extempore man” texts because he is “paid by the page” the prototype of professional American authorship, Neal turns the ‘flaws’ of his art into a literary trademark and encourages a reappraisal of early American Romanticism as “a commercial enterprise” (110).

In “John Neal, the Rise of the Critick, and the Rise of American Art,” Francesca Orestano (Università degli Studi di Milano) emphasizes the author’s “independence of taste and originality” (130), which, in addition to defining “new aesthetic territory” (125), resulted in critical judgments that, according to Harold Edward Dickson, “have stood the trying test of time.” Jonathan Elmer (Indiana University) uses Neal’s 1824 London encounter with the ‘white Indian’ John Dunn Hunter and the former’s preoccupation with the latter’s staging of himself as a true American to offer a psychoanalytic reading of Hunter as Neal’s alter ego, a “double” (152) who has to be demonized in order to suppress parallels in literary adventurism and self-marketing (Chapter seven: “John Neal and John Dunn Hunter”).

David J. Carlson’s (California State University, San Bernardino) “Another Declaration of Independence: John Neal’s Rachel Dyer and the Assault on Precedent,” a notable contribution to the interdisciplinary field of law and literature studies and arguably the best essay in the volume, reads Neal’s historical novel as “a thinly veiled commentary on the need [for] a systematic codification movement” (163). Redirecting our attention to Neal’s embeddedness in a range of transatlantic legal and aesthetic discourses (174), including Bentham’s attack on the common law tradition à la William Blackstone, Carlson interprets Neal’s propagation of a “more unruly kind of speech” (170) in the subtexts and paratexts of Rachel Dyer as effectively calling for “a radical rejection of the authority of the past” (172) and the willingness to embrace “an authentically ‘American’ culture” (173).

The author’s development as a regionalist and his deconstruction of ‘Indian Hater’ narratives are focalized in the next two essays. “Here, There, and Everywhere: The Elusive Regionalism of John Neal” by Kerin Holt (Utah State University) elucidates how Neal’s weekly magazine The Yankee, by relying on a dialogical structure and presenting northern New England as a contested space, provided “a literary form that encouraged citizens to read the federal nation in diverse, yet cohesive terms” (194). In “He Could Not Believe that Butchering Red Men Was Serving Our Maker: ‘David Whicher’ and the Indian Hater Tradition,” Edward Watts (Michigan State University) comprehends Neal’s 1832 short story as “challeng[ing] the role of popular fiction in the articulation, perpetuation, and celebration of Indian killing,” a story in which the

---

15 See John Neal, “Thinking Aloud; or, Suggestions and Glimpses,” Sartain’s Union Magazine of Literature and Art 11 (July 1852): 171-75.
16 Pattee, ed., American Writers 159.
19 The publication of Hunter’s Memoirs of a Captivity Among the Indians of North America (1823) had caused a sensation on both sides of the Atlantic and enabled its author to associate with famous people such as Thomas Jefferson, Robert Owen, and the Duke of Sussex.
20 See John Neal, “Mr. John Dunn Hunter; the Hero of Hunter’s Captivity Among the Indians, &c.,” Monthly Magazine 5 (May-August 1826): 317-43; “The Adventurer,” The Token (1831): 189-212; and Neal’s autobiography Wandering Recollections of a Somewhat Busy Life (1869). After publishing Logan (1822), a novel about mixed-race characters and the complexities of ethnic identity on a ‘new’ continent, meeting an assumed cultural hybrid and possible impostor like Hunter must have been an uncanny experience.
21 Carlson’s title phrase refers to Neal’s “Unpublished Preface to the North-American Stories [...]” in which the author demands “another Declaration of Independence, in the great Republic of Letters” (John Neal, Rachel Dyer [1828. Amherst: Prometheus, 1996] xvii) and thus creates “a sustained metaphorical link between legal and literary reform by appealing to a sacred text from the nation’s revolutionary past” (165).
22 For the field’s ‘foundational text,’ see Robert A. Ferguson, Law and Letters in American Culture (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984).
restraint of its protagonist seems to “impl[y] the possibility of an American frontier governed by more civil models of interracial contact and behavior” (213).

Two essays are dedicated to the core of Neal’s social philosophy and reformist program, namely his feminism. Putting his works “in conversation” (228) with British and American writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Catharine Macaulay Graham, and Judith Sargent Murray, Karen A. Weyler (University of North Carolina at Greensboro) in “John Neal and the Early Discourse of American Women’s Rights” traces the author’s emergence as one of the “forefathers” (227) of the American women’s movement, a feminist thinker whose “relentless advocacy was crucial in bringing women’s rights back into the mainstream [...] and recuperating it from its scandal-tainted eighteenth-century origins” (241-42). In “A Right Manly Man’ in 1843: John Neal on Women’s Rights and the Problem of Male Feminism,” Fritz Fleischmann (Babson College) continues the conversation by extending it to include Neal’s synergetic relationship with Margaret Fuller and exemplifying the former’s lifelong engagement with issues of gender. Displaying an admirable grasp of Neal’s biography and literary oeuvre, Fleischmann selects 1843 as “a banner year” (248) for public manifestations of the author’s ‘male feminist’ agenda. With the aid of incisive readings of “Idiosyncrasies” and “Ruth Elder” as related tales of masculine hubris and patriarchal insanity, Fleischmann points to “Neal’s increasing doubts about the oppressor’s ability to speak for the oppressed” (253) and the necessity of rethinking a personality that is “notoriously multifaceted and a challenge to categorize” (262).

In the last essay collected in this volume, Kevin J. Hayes (University of Central Oklahoma) examines “How John Neal Wrote His Autobiography.” Encouraged by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and written almost completely from memory after the great Portland fire of 1866 had destroyed most of Neal’s personal papers, Wandering Recollections of a Somewhat Busy Life (1869), although warmly reviewed at the time of its publication, “has received virtually no critical discussion” (272). Composed in the same “free-and-easy, rambling style” (272) that characterizes his fiction, Neal’s autobiography is not only an indispensable source on the author’s life and works but, as Hayes argues, a self-reflexive and highly original text exploring “the give-and-take between memory and narrative” (271).

In terms of content, this collection deserves nothing but praise. It contains essays offering thematically varied, methodically innovative, and intellectually stimulating research that meets the highest academic standards. It also conveys new insights into Neal’s amazing range of interests, multiple talents, and incredible productivity. The image of the author that emerges from these excellent contributions is that of an irrepressible figure radiating vibrant energy and enormous vitality. A man who reviewed more than 130 American authors, only to tell his audience that, with very few exceptions, none of them was worth reading23; a man who, under the guise of his pseudonym ‘Carter Holmes,’ shamelessly, if self-ironically, described himself as “the most original writer, that America has produced”24; and a man who was not afraid of shocking his readers by opening the preface to Logan: A Family History (1822) with a hilarious antipreface: “I hate Prefaces. I hate Dedications. Enough for the one to say, that here is an American sto-

---

24 Pattee, ed., American Writers 68. Neal’s self-reflexive irony becomes more apparent if one looks at the passage in which his self-praise is embedded: “Neal is altogether too much of a poet. He overdoes everything—pumps the lightning into you, till he is out of breath, and you, in a blaze.—In his lucid intervals, he appears to be a very sensible fellow; but, in his paroxysms—there is not a page of his, that wouldn’t take fire, in a high wind. He writes volume after volume, to the tune of three or four a-month; hardly one of which it is possible to read through; and yet, we could hardly open at a passage, without finding some evidence of extraordinary power—prodigious energy—or acute thinking. He is, undeniably, the most original writer, that America has produced” (Pattee 68).
ry. [...] I do not dedicate my book to anybody; for I know nobody worth dedicating it to.” 25 The audacity of Neal's outrageous self-praise and forceful iconoclasm foreshadows and anticipates Walt Whitman, who, reviewing himself anonymously after the publication of Leaves of Grass (1855), welcomed the artist enthusiastically as “An American bard at last!” 26 and in poems such as “Song of Myself” uninhibitedly celebrated his ‘expanded’ self. The same is true for Neal's admiration for the vernacular and experimentation with textualized orality (“talking on paper”) 27 and notorious propensity to contradict himself—personal idiosyncrasies which we find immortalized in Whitman's much-quoted lines “I permit to speak at every hazard, / Nature without check with original energy” 28 and “Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes.)” 29

The only misgivings I have about this book relate to formal weaknesses. To be precise, the text is riddled with editorial oversights of all types and categories: for instance, inaccuracies in the table of contents 30; lack of congruence between titles given in the list of illustrations and titles used in the main text 31; typos 32; misspellings of authors' and publishers' names 33; incorrect format-

30 E. g. a missing entry (“List of Illustrations”); incorrect page numbers (“vi” instead of “ix” [page v, line 2 (v.2), Acknowledgments]; “309” instead of “307” [vi.24, Index]; and “‘319” instead of “317” [vi.25, List of Contributors]); or lack of congruence between essay titles given in the table of contents and essay titles used in the main text (see v.13 – 57.3).
31 E. g. vii.2 – 195.35.
32 E. g. “Aufklärung” instead of “Aufklärung” (ix.11); “presumptions” instead of “presumptions” (xix.12); “which his” (7.24); “Fretz” instead of “Fritz” Fleischmann (97.4); “thriving” instead of “thriving” (144.4); “principle” instead of “principal” (161.30); “fiance” instead of “fiancée” (212.22); “no” instead of “not” (222.14); “Souvenir” instead of “Souveni” (307.6); “Idiosyncrasies” instead of “Idiosyncrasies” (312.44); or “Putitans” instead of “Puritans” (314.27).
33 E. g. “Hans Joachim Lang” instead of “Hans-Joachim Lang” (xiv.24); “Thomas Woff” instead of “Thomas Wolfe” (xxiv.37, 316.13); “Jorg” instead of “Jörg” (xxvii.5, 294.3); “Scheick” instead of “Scheick” (xxxi.2-3, 177.20, where Carlson even uses two variants [one correct, one incorrect] in two lines of the same note [see 177.20-21; also incorrect in the bibliography (301.16) and index (314.35)]; “Mathiessen” instead of “Matthiessen” (32.28 [mistake in the quoted original (Gould) that should have been marked with “sic” (in the index the editors opt for another incorrect variant, namely “Matthiesen” [311.41])]; “Nussenbaum” instead of “Nissenbaum” (177.29, 308.25); “McClennen” instead of “McClellan” (180.4 [“corrected to read “McClellan” but still incorrect in the volume’s bibliography (see 295.9) and index (see 311.43)]; “Phillips” instead of “Philip” Bradley (183.30 [equally incorrect in the bibliography]); “Fleischmann” instead of “Fleischmann” (216.15); John “Greenlief” instead of “Greenleaf” Whittier (225.2); “Clarke” instead of “Clark” (225.7); “Brooks, Peters” instead of “Brooks, Peter” (286.3); “Glenn Handler” instead of “Glenn Hendler” (286.33, 308.16); “Fluck, Winifred” instead of “Fluck, Winfried” (289.39, 309.42); “Dimock, WaiChee” instead of “Dimock, Wai Chee” (309.33); “Shakesperare, Wilam” instead of “Shakespeare, William” (315.11); “Shelley, Percy Brysche” instead of “Shelley, Percy Bysshe” (315.14); “Sue, Eugene” instead of “Sue, Eugène” (315.5 [including incorrect page number (“266” instead of “271”) in the index]).
Prior to discussing a few research desiderata that follow from the conversations collected in this volume, it is worthwhile recalling the canon-critical debates of the 1980s. In “Masterpiece Theater” (1984), Jane Tompkins pointed out that literary classics “embody the changing interests and beliefs of those people whose place in the cultural hierarchy empowers them to decide which works deserve the name of classic and which do not.”

The awareness of the contingent nature of literary value in turn entails the obligation to deal with the vicissitudes of canon formation and search for authors who have fallen through the grid of contemporary tastes:

The recognition that literary texts, like everything else, are humanly created, historically produced objects, whose value has been created and re-created by men and women out of their particular needs, suggests a need to study the interests, institutional practices, and social arrangements that sustain the canon of classic works. It also opens the way for a re-

---

34 E. g. 102.22 (extraneous boldface [period]); 179.10, 266.27 (extraneous italics [The]); 245.17, 312.29 (missing italics); 213.2 (small caps instead of caps).
35 E. g. xxiii.28, 99.15, 130.6, 165.6, 183.30, 183.30, 240.10, 294.3.
36 E. g. 137.25, 299.39, 307.2; 308.14, 309.40, 312.25, 313.12, 313.27, 315.42.
37 E. g. 4.13, 154.34, 318.22.
38 E. g. dashes instead of hyphens (cf. 113.4; 160.4, 311.2, 312.11, 312.22, 313.19, 313.37, 313.43, 313.25, 315.36, 315.28, 315.29); commas missing after appositions (cf. 179.16, 179.17, 179.33); inconsistent use of medium and long dashes (cf. 180.1, 180.15); missing or incorrect quotation marks (cf. 181.15, 243.41); missing parentheses (cf. 224.23, 243.8, 243.36); missing or extraneous periods (cf. 177.6, 177.40, 178.9, 225.37, 225.43, 244.9, 247.13, 299.32, 304.36, 314.3, 315.5); and missing or extraneous commas (cf. 183.13, 183.33, 216.14, 263.36, 310.34, 315.35).
39 E. g. xx.35, 161.13, 220.13, 222.9, 242.23 as well as 266.16, 267.28, 294.1.
40 E. g. incorrect or incomplete authors’ names and titles (see 285.34, 289.41 [cf. 208.22], 298.33 [cf. 282.2], 299.39 [cf. 267.29], 301.16, 303.26, 304.30 [cf. 184.3]); titles cited in the main text or the endnotes missing in the bibliography compiled by the volume editors (see Venable [205.13], Widmer [208.4], Hentz [211.14], Orians [224.32]); missing alphabetical order (see 284.18-25, 286.26-33, 302.16-20).
41 E. g. 157.9, 176.21, 177.30, 178.4, 224.4, 224.35, 225.14, 225.31, 319.15, 319.21.
42 E. g. punctuation, page numbers (one-, two-, three-digit system), etc. The fact that the majority of mistakes are to be found in the notes sections gives rise to the assumption that in several cases, essays originally formatted in classic MLA style (parenthetical documentation plus list of works cited) have unprofessionally been converted into a system based on endnotes (cf. e. g. 225.19-22 [correct] and 225.42-44 [catastrophic]).
trieval of the values and interests embodied in other, noncanonical texts, which the literary establishment [...] has—for a variety of reasons—suppressed.45

Responding to the seminal work of Tompkins, Annette Kolodny in her article “The Integrity of Memory” (1985) called for a “heroic rereading [...] that must proceed from the commitment to take seriously those works with which we are least familiar, and especially so when they challenge current notions of art and artifice.”46 The willingness to face the risks of de-familiarization enables the modern critic “to stand before the vast array of texts—canonical and non-canonical alike—and view them as more or less complex assemblages of rhetorical and stylistic devices whose meanings and value have been variously constituted over time by changing audiences.”47 Correspondingly, Kolodny demands a rehistoricizing of any early American text to be evaluated from today’s perspective: “To understand how a text works out ‘problems inherent in the culture at the moment of composition’ [...] allows us to reassess our literary heritage by means and in terms of reembedding texts and authors into encompassing, complicated, and dense historical processes.”48 At the end of the 1980s, it was David S. Reynolds who, brilliantly if controversially, dared to throw stones at one of the temples of Americanist canon-building by taking on F. O. Matthiessen’s American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman (New York: Oxford UP, 1941). In Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville (New York: Knopf, 1988), a title both paying tribute to and intertextually undermining the magnum opus of his famous predecessor, Reynolds argued for a methodology of “reconstructive criticism,” asking scholars “to reconstruct as completely as possible the socioliterary milieu of literary works through the exploration of a broad array of forgotten social and imaginative texts, paving the way for responsible reinterpretations of canonized works and making possible the rediscovery of lost literature.”49 Although sticking to an essentialist hierarchy of ‘major’ and ‘minor,’ exemplified by the use of “beneath” as a guiding metaphor, Reynolds was the first literary historian to appreciate Neal’s special achievement:

He put theory into practice in a series of remarkable novels, which are our earliest full examples of the American Subversive Style, characterized by emotions heightened to a fever pitch, extreme sensational action creating a dizzying effect, sudden shifts in perspective, and narrative discontinuities. Subversive fiction, as introduced by Neal [...], tried to be deliberately outrageous, inflammatory, disquieting. It spit in the face of conventional literature. [...] What may seem the most glaring flaw of many Subversive novels—their formlessness, their wildness—was an extremely important groundbreaker for the major writers.50

In his foreword to the 2011 paperback edition of this pioneering text, Sean Wilentz confirms the critical potential of Reynolds’s revisionist methodology and pleads for its fruitful application in an era of digitalization: “The time is propitious for this reconstructive approach to intensify and spread [...], since many rare works that once had to be hunted down in archives are now available online.” According to Wilentz, we are now in a unique position “to rescue ‘representative’

45 Tompkins, “Masterpiece Theater” 641-42.
47 Kolodny, “The Integrity of Memory” 303.
51 Reynolds, Beneath the American Renaissance 200-02.
geniuses'] lesser known contemporaries from undeserved oblivion, by tapping into the kinds of hidden cultural energies that Reynolds reveals in his landmark book.”

Keeping in mind these calls for more holistic readings of American literature and culture, one should not read Neal as someone who contributed to discursive layers “beneath” the American Renaissance but as a personality who was part of a complex literary polysystem in which competing voices were vying for recognition. More specific desiderata concern a recontextualization of Neal's life and writings within the parameters of current research paradigms; a reinvestigation of his influence as a mentor and literary critic; a reappraisal of his role in the Delphian Club and early nineteenth-century belles lettres culture; a comprehensive survey of his activities as a social reformer and political activist; a new reading of the author as an innovator and epistemological skeptic experimenting with early forms of stream of consciousness, literary self-reflexivity, and the dissolution of genre boundaries; studies of the deeper meaning and intratextual connectedness of Neal's short fiction; and a reconsideration of Neal’s later life and work (1840s to 1870s).

At the end of their excellent introduction, Edward Watts and David J. Carlson make a claim that, like Whitman's poetry, seems to be inspired by the bravado of the younger Neal: “Neal's erasure from the literary and cultural history of his moment should, by now, be at an end” (xxx). That a renaissance in Neal studies is not only proclaimed but has actually begun manifests itself in both the publication of this long-awaited volume and the positive evaluation of Neal's oeuvre in recent literary histories. In *Truth's Ragged Edge: The Rise of the American Novel* (New York: Farrar, 2013), for instance, Philip F. Gura devotes almost ten pages to Neal and his writings. Unlike Reynolds, however, for whom writers like Neal were primarily pathfinders destined to pave the way for their more important successors, Gura recognizes Neal as an author ahead of his time, a major catalyst whose art is worthy of study on its own: “There were also novelists—the incomparable John Neal most memorably—who questioned the very efficacy of historical knowledge to inform behavior in a time of transformative change” (Gura xv). Hence, Neal was convinced that writers “who truly confronted contemporary challenges had to conceive of new kinds of narratives […]” which explains the radical otherness and originality that distinguish Neal's handling of the novelistic form:

 [...] [Neal's] own works fit the description he gave [Charles Brockden] Brown's oeuvre: full of perplexity, incoherence, and contradiction. Frequently criticized for a lack of discipline [...], Neal filled his novels of the 1820s with raw and exhilarating energy. In his struggle to contain his large, unruly imagination, he openly broached topics that few other American novelists would touch, and to do so, broached various stylistic conventions and literary genres.

If other standard works follow Gura's example and enough scholars seize the opportunity to explore the fascinating oeuvre of one of the most neglected authors of his age, rewriting Neal into the cultural history of nineteenth-century America will no longer be wishful thinking but a viable and realistic project.

Mainz/Germersheim

Klaus H. Schmidt

52 Sean Wilentz, Foreword (2011); Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance* xii. That Wilentz misremembers the subtitle of Matthiessen's famous study (“Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Melville” [ix.19] instead of “Emerson and Whitman”) may be astonishing, but does not detract from the cogency of his argument.

53 Philip F. Gura, *Truth's Ragged Edge* xv.

54 Gura, *Truth's Ragged Edge* 42-43.

Written between 1693 and 1728, Biblia Americana, the longest book of the most prolific American Puritan Cotton Mather (1663-1728), had to wait for more than three hundred years until its publication was realized thanks to the scholarly perserverance and accurate scholarship of its editors: Reiner Smolinski of Georgia State University, USA, and Jan Steievermann of the University of Tübingen (now at the University of Heidelberg). Six huge folio-sized holograph manuscripts, though not undamaged, were preserved in the archives of the Massachusetts Historical Society of Boston. The editorial plan is to publish this huge work, the oldest comprehensive commentary on the Bible composed in British North America, in ten volumes as a transatlantic joint venture of the prestigious theological publishers of Mohr Siebeck and Baker Academic.

In 2008, an international conference was held in Tübingen. The twenty “essays in reappraisal” are the tangible fruits of this conference. This book is a proper companion to the series and powerfully offers a revisionist image of this New England polymath, a ‘New Mather’ whose intellectual heritage has unfortunately been grossly misinterpreted. Impressive current scholarship uncovers the hidden scholarship of this eighteenth-century intellectual giant. The earlier disrespect came mainly from the one-sided interpretation of Mather’s participation in the notorious Salem witchcraft hysteria of 1692 but, as Harry Stout remarks in the Preface, “[t]he Mather revealed in the unpublished ‘Biblia Americana’ is not your grandfather’s Mather of witches and hysteria, but an incredibly erudite interlocutor of Enlightenment learning” (x). The publishing of the ten volumes, also in digitalized form, can only be compared to the edition of The Works of Jonathan Edwards of the Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University.

The first, as well as the last, essay in the collection is by Jan Steievermann, the co-editor of both the text and the twenty papers and it serves a general introduction to Cotton Mather and his Biblia Americana. We learn from this erudite and carefully written study that Mather published over four hundred works in his lifetime, of which he considered his unpublished Biblia Americana the most important of his works. His interdisciplinary commentary marks the beginning of historical criticism, well before the advent of German high criticism. Mather used several Bible translations simultaneously, including, of course, the original Hebrew and Greek texts, the Septuagint, Jerome’s Vulgate, and the Aramaic Targums. He had to face the emerging rationalism of the mid-seventeenth century represented by influential works such as Hobbes’s Leviathan (1651) and Spinoza’s Tractatus Theologico-Politicus (1670), both fundamentally challenging the traditional ideas of divine revelation.

According to Steievermann, Biblia Americana has been overlooked for so long especially due to the size and the format of the commentary—the printed edition comprised some 15,000 pages packed with quotations from the ancient languages. Also, the market was well supplied by the annotated commentaries of Matthew Poole (London, 1683-85) and Matthew Henry (London 1708-10). The third and final reason is Mather’s negative and unpopular reputation; for example, in his Main Currents in American Thought (1927), Vernon Parrington portrayed him as a “crooked and diseased mind,” “oversexed and overwrought” (16). Even Kenning Silvermann’s Pulitzer-winning The Life and Times of Cotton Mather (1984) gave him the dubious title of “America’s national gargoyle” (61).

A re-evaluation of Mather began with Robert Middlekauff’s The Mathers (1977), Richard L. Lovelaces’s The American Pietism of Cotton Mather (1979), and the gradually appearing critical editions of Mather’s individual works such as his rightly celebrated Magnalia Christi Americana: Or, the Ecclesiastical History of New England, edited by Kenneth B. Murdock in 1977, The Christian Philosopher by Winton U. Solberg (1994), and The Threefold Paradise by Reiner Smolinski (1995). All these editions point towards the necessity of an image of a ‘New Mather,’ as powerfully claimed by Steievermann and epitomized by the authors of the remaining essays of the volume.

There are six sections in the volume; section one, “The Vicissitudes of Mather’s Reputation,” is represented by two essays. William Van Arragon’s “The Glorious Translation of an American Elijah: Mourning Cotton Mather...
in 1728” (unfortunately preserving a typo in the head-title throughout pp. 63-81) is to reflect that contrary to his later debunking and unsympathetic readings, the funeral sermons, biographies, and diary accounts composed at the time of his death testify to Mather’s image not only as a typological ‘Enoch,’ ‘Elijah,’ or ‘Aaron’ but as a public father, a ‘communal pater familias’ (73).

E. Brooks Holifield’s metaphorically titled “The Abridging of Cotton Mather” investigates with minute scholarship (based on 328 books, sermons, journal articles, etc., all composed between 1728-1870) the process of how and why Mather’s glorious reputation had turned to its contrary by the nineteenth century. Holifield suggests that it is not due to Mather’s personal involvement in the Salem witch trials but rather due to his views on church government, which were picked up by the nineteenth-century liberal Unitarians in their debates with Calvinist Congregationalists. In this debate, the liberals exposed and caricatured Mather’s supernaturalism and thus damaged his reputation, which survived long after the debate and consequently, for all his prolific intellectual output, “he was trapped in Salem” (99). Thus, through the literary works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Washington Irving, or Harriet Beecher Stowe, he became an emblem of dogmatism, intolerance, and superstition. According to the Holifield, it is ultimately anachronistic and thus mistaken when a retrospective generalization selectively imposes later values upon an earlier age or author.

Section two opens the horizon on “Mather in the Context of International Protestantism.” Francis J. Bremer is concerned with the international and ecumenical background of Biblia Americana. He provides a wide survey of the history of the contacts between the Puritans and Continental Europe prior to the times of Cotton Mather. Bremer concentrates on the activities of Samuel Hartlieb and his circle, which included John Dury, who had close ties with the Moravian Calvinist Jan Amos Comenius and the American John Davenport and John Winthrop, Jr. The Hartlieb-circle had millenial expectations that led them to suppose that the native Americans were the descendents of the lost tribes of Israel. This view was endorsed by Menasseh ben Israel’s The Hope of Israel (1650).

Oliver Scheiding’s “The World as Parish: Cotton Mather, August Hermann Francke, and the Transatlantic Religious Network” is one of the most brilliant articles in the collection. Critically surveying earlier scholarship on the links between Boston Puritanism (Cotton Mather) and German Pietism (Johann August Francke), Scheiding reasseses this relationship by thoroughly examining a so far unpublised Narratio Epistola, partly written by Francke and his close associate Heinrich Callenberg (1694-1760). Both Francke and Callenberg considered the bond with Cotton Mather “a highly pleasant friendship […] because of their similarity of intentions and undertakings” (133). The Narratio was forwarded to Wilhelm Böhme, a German chaplain at the English court, who was meant to dispatch it to Mather. Scheiding provides a twelve-page English translation of the fifty-page Latin Narratio in the appendix that not only sheds light on Francke’s knowledge of Mather’s works but also on his activity as a missionary. Francke succeeded to reconvert Duke Moritz Wilhelm of Saxony (1664-1718), shortly before his death, from his adopted Catholicism to the evangelical faith of Lutheranism (153-62). Scheiding’s conclusion is that the ecumenically open-minded Mather “did not only incorporate science and natural philosophy, but also an experimental practice-oriented approach to religion that can be found in the Pietist works of Spener and Francke” (148). The last essay in this section by Adriaan Neele on “Peter van Mastricht’s Theoretico-practica: Theologica as an Interpretative Frameworks for Cotton Mather’s Work” is only indirectly related to the Biblia Americana.

Section three, “Enlightenment Rationalism, Biblical Literalism and the Supernatural,” contains three essays. The first one, “Cotton Mather, The ‘Biblia Americana’ and the Enlightenment” by Winton U. Solberg, is a well-written, though somewhat textbook-like survey of the works of Enlightenment philosophers and theologians, most of whom were well known to Mather. Though Mather was a pioneer in embracing the new sciences, he shared, for example, William Lowth’s hostility to the works of Spinoza and the radical form of enlightenment that denied the idea of divine inspiration. While open to new ideas and methods of the age, the author of Biblia Americana remained orthodox in his faith.

Michael Dopffel’s “Between Literalism and Scientific Inquiry” is a case study of Mather’s interpretation of Jeremiah 8:7 “Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times;
and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the LORD.” This is one of the “Curiosa” (204) of the Biblia Americana in which Mather, with ample scientific evidence on migratory birds, tries to reconcile biblical literalism with empirical science. The third study, “Cotton Mather and the Invisible World,” is by Paul Wise, who is currently editing Mather’s controversial Wonders of the Invisible World (1693). In the article he provides us with an extensive survey on demonology and witchcraft from the Middle Ages through to the eighteenth century. In a useful chart, Wise enumerates on the one hand works credulous of witchcraft (sixty-seven) and on the other hand works skeptical of it altogether (twenty-one), all published between 1688 and 1750 (cf. 247-63). Mather, as Wise demonstrates, shared his contemporaries’ beliefs, including the beliefs of some prominent members of the Royal Society, namely in the existence of demons and witches. Mather even claimed that his senses had been convinced of the existence of this invisible world. For Mather and his intellectual fellow-believers in the invisible world, the existence of spirits was closely tied to their belief in God.

Section four is entitled “Mather’s Historical Method and His Approach to the History of Religion.” The first article, written by Rick Kennedy, compares Mather’s historical approach to the tradition of commonplace books and exploits the rich potentials of metaphors such as “flower-picker” or “honey-bee” (263) in order to describe the activity of the historian. No wonder anthologies of classical writers were called florilegia just as theological commentaries were catena or loci communes during the Middles Ages and the time of the Reformation. Mather saw his task as a historian in Biblia Americana as “gathering” (263); just as a bee collects honey for its hive, Biblia is the “Common Hive” (262). Moreover, Kennedy argues, the tradition of the commonplace book tradition as well as Mather’s commentary method of ‘Question’ and ‘Answer’ owes a lot to the Aristotelian tradition.

Kenneth P. Minkema, the executive director of the Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, is also involved in the Mather-project. He is editing Mather’s “Historical Books” beginning with Joshua and ending with the Chronicles. Minkema argues that Mather exploits the minute historical details of events and accounts of these books to be acceptable for the history-oriented rational criticism of his contemporaries. However, having established that context, Mather built typological and prophetic readings of his material. When writing about the idols and the false gods of Israel’s contemporaries, he approached them in a comparative way that was not without risk in regard to the unanimously accepted sacred nature of the biblical texts.

Another challenge to traditional biblical scholarship was Mather’s engagement with John Spencer (1630-1693) and the debate about the pagan origins of the Mosaic laws, rites, and customs. This is the subject of Reiner Smolinski’s contribution to this collection. John Spencer was a most erudite Christian Hebraist of Corpus Christi College Cambridge, whose massive De Legibus Hebraeorum Rituibus Earumque Rationibus was first published in 1685. Spencer powerfully argues that the ceremonial laws were not given by Moses but were adapted from Israel’s Egyptian, Canaanite, and other neighbors who Israel assimilated during its long captivity. This evolutionary and comparative view undermined the traditional typological readings of Leviticus. Choosing, among others, the case example of the golden calf, Smolinski shows how far Mather complies with Spencer’s insights and when he departs from them. While praising Spencer’s deep erudition, Mather parts company with Spencer when his insights contradict divine inspiration and revelation of Scripture. However, unlike within the closed providentialist perspective of the Magnalia, Mather, in the Biblia Americana, “carved out an intellectual space in which he could converse with his European colleagues on their terms” (330).

Harry Clark Maddux’s article shows how Mather used the ideas of prisca theologia (ancient theology) as well as Euhemerism, a name suggesting the interpretation of mythological figures on the basis of biblical figures supposedly real and historical. The name is given in reference to the Greek historian Euhemerus and has to do with the idea of preparatio evangelica of the church father Eusebius. The underlying belief is that figures of both Jewish and pagan religion come from the common patriarch Noah, whose three sons carried religion to all quarters of the world. In prisca theologia, the created world with all its mythology and literature point to the revelation in the Bible. Thus it is blamed, among others, that Nimrod is identical with Orion and all
classical literature is ultimately of Hebrew origin. With the interpretative method, Mather could undermine Spencer’s thesis concerning the Egyptian origins of the Mosaic laws.

Section five on “Aspects of Scriptural Exegesis” contains four essays. The first one is by the well-known Edwards scholar Stephen S. Stein. In his essay, he compares Mather’s and Edwards’s readings of the Epistle of James in the *Biblia Americana* and the *Blank Bible*, respectively. For all the theological similarities, Stein notices the difference, namely, that Mather is more interested in historical, textual issues than the more spiritual-minded Edwards. Mather even mentions the possibility that this letter, the Epistle of James, had originally been written by Jews and for Jews and that it was given a Christian coloring only at a later stage when it was canonized among Christian texts (372).

The next essay is by Paul Silas Peterson, who explores Mather’s christological interpretation of the “Shechinac Glory” (383), i.e., God’s visible manifestations in history. Peterson points out that Mather was familiar both with Rabbinical interpretations of divine theophanies as well as with the works of contemporary Christian Hebraists. Peterson argues that with the christological interpretation of the shechinac, Mather could uphold not only the organic unity of the Old and the New Testaments against the disintegrating tendencies of historical criticism, but it also helped him develop a theological aesthetics comparable only to that of Jonathan Edwards.

Finally, two essays are devoted to eschatology in this biblical section. According to Michael P. Clark, Mather developed an “eschatological semiotics” (420) in *Biblia Americana*. He believed that the full meaning of signs will be revealed only in the eschaton. David Komline shows that later in his life, Mather adopted a preterist view of the millennium abandoning his earlier millenialist expectations that the conversion of the Jews would usher in the second coming. The reason for this change, Komline argues, arose from the contemporary debates on Arianism. Mather’s earlier millenarian views were inspired by the views of the well-known millenialist William Whiston. However, when Whiston’s Arian views came to be known, Mather abandoned his earlier enthusiasm concerning the impending eschatological events in the early eighteenth century.

Section six (the last in the volume) is entitled “Gender, Race and Slavery in the ‘Biblia Americana.’” The first essay, written by Helen K. Gilenas, is on the daughters of Eve in *Biblia Americana*, in which the author demonstrates that Mather was both a traditionalist and an innovator. Robert E. Brown’s essay is a meticulous study on the role and the gender significance of long hair, based on 1 Corinthians 11, touching on questions such as why Cotton Mather wore a wig. In the last essay of the collection, Jan Stievermann argues that modern concepts such as racism or slavery cannot be imposed on earlier ages in retrospect.

All in all, the publishing of this eye-opening series of essays, proposing an image of an entirely ‘New Mather,’ is an important milestone in the history of Early American studies. The essays radically change the populist image of Mather as well as that of the eighteenth century. The distorted view of the past was ill-motivated and biased as it lacked evidence. With primary sources now unpacked, the historical evidence suggests that we must work on the correction of the mistaken, caricature-like image of Cotton Mather, probably the greatest ever Puritan thinker.

Budapest
Tibor Fabiny

When Philip F. Gura, the author of *Jonathan Edwards: America’s Evangelical* (2005) and editor of *Early American Literature*, publishes a book subtitled “The Rise of the American Novel,” this marks an event in Early American Studies. And when the dust jacket tells us that this book presents “a comprehensive and original history of the American novel’s first century” that “paint[s] a complete and authoritative portrait of the era,” expectations run high. In what ways, the expectant Early Americanist asks, does Gura challenge and revise the accounts bequeathed to us by the groundbreaking revisionist studies of the 1980s by Jay Fliegelman, Emory Elliott, and Cathy N. Davidson, the challenges posed to these seminal works by, among others, Larzer Ziff, Grantland S. Rice, and Michael T. Gilmore as well as the more recent transnational turn in American Studies?

What is most irritating about Gura’s latest book is that he does not even attempt to provide an answer to that question. Instead, he understands his own contribution as a response not to these studies but to “Alexander Cowie’s 1948 history *The Rise of the American Novel*,” which, Gura tells us, “still remains, along with Richard Chase’s 1957 classic *The American Novel and Its Tradition*, one of the most thorough and well-regarded studies of its kind” (xviii-xix). In building on this scholarship from the 1940s and 1950s, Gura’s “hope is that bringing women and African American novelists into the discussion will result in the fullest understanding yet of the early American novel” (xix). Reading large parts of *Truth’s Ragged Edge*, one is led to believe that the last thirty years of literary scholarship on the early American novel never happened. What Gura does here is not just contribute to the ‘trade gap’ diagnosed by Eric Slauter (that literary critics read and cite historians but not the ‘trade gap’ diagnosed by Eric Slauter (that literary critics read and cite historians but not the ‘trade gap’ diagnosed by Eric Slauter (that literary critics read and cite historians but not the ‘trade gap’ diagnosed by Eric Slauter (that literary critics read and cite historians but not vice versa); it constitutes an all-out boycott.

This has palpably negative consequences, which already become apparent in the first chapter (“Beginnings”) of the first part (which covers the years 1789 to 1850). There, Susanna Rowson’s sentimental novel *Charlotte Temple* is described as nothing but “a simple morality tale” (21) that apparently lacks the internal tensions and antipatriarchal undercurrents identified by Fliegelman and Davidson a quarter century ago. Equally disappointingly, Gura’s discussions of novels here and elsewhere all too often amount to little more than biographical sketches of their authors, plot paraphrases, and attempts to pin down the “message” (13) or “point” (22) of each literary work. When he does go beyond these, for instance in his concise discussion of the combination of religious enthusiasm and psychological pathology that precipitate disaster in Charles Brockden Brown’s *Wieland* (cf. 33-37), he adds little new to already existing Brown scholarship on these issues by, again among others, Frank Shuffleton and Steven Watts (whom Gura does not cite).

Gura’s second chapter (“Glimmering of Change”) deserves more praise in that it focuses on writers that made their mark in the 1810s and 1820s but have indeed received less attention: John Neal, Sarah Savage, Catharina Maria Sedgwick, William Gilmore Simms, and Robert Montgomery Bird (the last of which, I confess, I have never heard of). Yet again, apart from briefly situating their writings in their historical contexts (Neal and Jacksonian democracy; Savage and religious tract writing; Sedgwick and Unitarianism, liberalism, and the discourse on the ‘vanishing Indian’; Simms and urbanization; Bird and the liberal self), Gura races through their lives and works, devoting at most a couple of paragraphs to plot summaries of each of their novels, liberally adding more famous contemporaries’ appreciative assessments (Poe, Hawthorne, William Cullen Bryant) and some of the writers’ own accounts of their works’ reception—which in Neal’s case are peppered with characteristic hyperbole (“like a lighted-thunderbolt, dropped into a powder magazine” [44]). In this chapter, too, there is very little engagement with recent scholarship on these writers. To give but one example: the rich body of recovery work on Sedgwick’s sentimental negotiation of nationhood, women’s social roles, and Native American rights, much of which has been published in the 1990s and 2000s, is almost completely ignored even though these are precisely three of the social and political issues in Sedgwick’s work that Gura focuses on.

Things begin to improve with chapter three (“Preparing the Ground”), which begins with a lively and learned account of major changes in the American publishing world around the mid-nineteenth century and the rise of literary nationalism in rivaling magazines such as...
Chapter five (“On the Color Line”) focuses on various novelistic treatments of pre-Civil War race relations: from Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* over William Hill Brown’s *Clotel* to Harriet E. Wilson’s *Our Nig*. The selected novels and the topical terrains traversed by them (southern slavery, the Fugitive Slave Law, racist discrimination in the north, miscegenation, African repatriation) are too familiar to leave this reader satisfied with Gura’s author biographies and plot summaries. In the book’s sixth chapter (“Discovering Self-Consciousness”), Gura turns his attention to some of the most securely canonized and critically surveyed novels of the nineteenth century, among them Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Blithedale Romance* and Melville’s *Typee*, *Moby-Dick*, *Pierre*, and *The Confidence Man*. Considering the vast body literary and historical scholarship devoted to these writers and their works, Gura’s by now familiar disregard for the work of other scholars is outright offensive. My point is not that Gura cannot do this to the ‘greats’; my point is that he should not do this to his colleagues in literary studies, especially if it impacts the quality of his own readings, which amount to little more than plot paraphrases enriched by a host of quotations from author’s letters and contemporary book reviews. After all, these culminate in the less than original observation that, even more so than Hawthorne’s work, it was Melville’s who fully registered that “subscribing to Transcendentalist egotism required abandoning the principles of good citizenship and the commonwealth upon which the nation had been founded” (215).

Gura’s third part begins with an exploration of those women writers who entered the publishing world in the 1850s by way of new middle-brow magazines such as *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* and *The Atlantic Monthly*. To discuss this more secular, less sentimental, more realist and skeptical, and in several cases openly political generation of writers—Alice Cary, Lillie Devereux Umsted Blake, Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard, and Rebecca Harding Davis among them—under the heading of “A Neglected Tradition” in a monograph published in 2013 rings false. Both in term of the relatively broad distribution of their work in the mid-nineteenth century (which Gura emphasizes) and the attention devoted to these authors by late twentieth and early twenty-first century scholarship (which Gura again mostly ignores). Even a quick search of the MLA Bibliography shows that two of these four authors have received ample critical treatment: from 1980 to 2012, no less than seventy-two monographs and articles were published on Stoddard, and ninety-nine on Davis. Once
more, Gura ignores many of the trailblazing publications of a great number of critics, including, to name but a few, Sybil B. Weir, Susan K. Harris, Joanne Dobson, Sandra A. Zagarell, Susan Belasco, Jennifer Putzi, Julia Stern, Charlotte Goodman, Tillie Olsen, Jean Fagan Yellin, Kristin Boudreau, Cecelia Tichi, and Ruth Stoner. And thus, the title of Gura’s seventh chapter reminds this reviewer of a second “neglected tradition” here: the invaluable recovery work that has been done mostly by female critics since the 1980s. To be fair to Gura, he does cite some of those critics (Ellery Sedgwick, Judith Fetterley, Nina Baym, Grace Farrell, Sharon M. Harris, and Jean Pfaelzer), but his engagement with their work hardly ever goes beyond a single-sentence quote or a bibliographical reference.

In his short final chapter, “From a Theology of the Feelings to an Ethics of Love,” Gura surveys three rather different writers, Henry Ward Beecher and his liberal Protestant fiction Norwood; or, Village Life in New England, Oliver Wendell Holmes and his engagement with contemporary science in Elsie Venner: A Romance of Destiny, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s fictional inquiries into spiritualism, science, social inequality, and the ills of modern life. The chapter ends with a coda in which Gura reiterates an ethics that informs most of the novels he discusses in his book. His final sentences read: “Making the mind aware of itself is not enough; it must become aware of and concerned with others. Trying to encourage such awareness and concern was the burden of American fiction in its first century. It remains ours” (281).

By way of concluding my rather critical review, let me say that I admire Gura’s courage to paint with broad strokes. He never gets bogged down in critical skirmishes and provides a refreshing account of the first one hundred years of the American novel. Truth’s Ragged Edge also introduces us to many a little-known literary work. These are achievements in themselves that testify to Gura’s admirably broad knowledge of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American history and culture. The problem I have with this book is that, in largely refusing to engage with previous literary scholarship and opting for plot summaries, author biographies, and surveys of contemporary reviews instead, Gura gives us a book that may appeal to a lay audience but, quite apart from implying that literary scholarship can safely be ignored, too often adds too little to what we already know about the novels he discusses.

Basel Philipp Schweighauser

In June 2009, Thoreau scholars from the United States and Europe (mostly France) convened in Lyon—“the first ever such meeting on European soil devoted to Thoreau,” as the organizers insist (xi). *Thoreauvian Modernities: Transatlantic Conversations on an American Icon* is its outcome. Several of the sixteen contributions present compelling new ideas on hotly debated topics in recent Thoreau scholarship, particularly regarding Thoreau's intense preoccupation, in his later life, with recording the particularity of his natural surroundings. While *Walden* remains a touchstone for virtually all the critics in this collection, it is his Journal and “Kalendar” project that elicit the most fascinating readings. A few of the contributors, particularly Michel Granger, William Rossi, and David Robinson, focus on the book's nominal topic—Thoreau's relation to modernity—by negotiating Thoreau's critique of modernity with his modern conception of knowledge. But one clearly senses the editors' effort to graft a common theme onto a diverse set of inquiries. While readers interested in a systematic study of Thoreau's position vis-à-vis modernity should not expect too much from *Thoreauvian Modernities* (they might instead turn to the recent studies by Shannon Mariotti and Clemens Spahr as well as to the essays compiled by Jack Turner in the *The Political Companion*), this does not make the book less worthwhile. The exigencies of marketing academic events and publications all too often require making false promises, but in this case ample compensation is offered by the book's—less marketable—quality of bringing together an international roster of experts whose common topic is quite simply Thoreau.

Before considering a few of the more striking essays assembled here, some words are in order regarding an editorial decision that yields problems more severe than the collection's packaging. It seems accurate to refer to the book as conference proceedings rather than as an essay collection. Though surely revised with great care after their initial presentation at the conference, the pieces collected by the editors retain the somewhat provisional character of conference talks. The essays' main text seldom exceeds fifteen pages; in many cases it amounts to no more than ten. Brevity can be a virtue if it is the result of willful condensation, but here it tends to keep the authors from presenting fully developed arguments. Consequently, *Thoreauvian Modernities* collects spirited statements rather than landmark essays. Strangely, this feel of the provisional even affects some of the more extended pieces, like co-editor Laura Dassow Walls's otherwise fascinating “Walking West, Gazing East: Planetarity on the Shores of Cape Cod.” Reading Thoreau's *Cape Cod* against the essay “Walking,” Walls proposes a “heuristic” (30; 36) for reading those of his texts (like the Journal, Kalendar, maps, and drawings) that “resist being read by more conventional literary tools” (31). Her heuristic consists of four qualities—mobility, planetarity, vascularity, and transjectivity—which she defines and describes in her analysis of *Cape Cod*. In brief, her four terms aim to show that Thoreau's texts are characterized by different kinds of relationality that create interstitial spaces between the self and changing surroundings (mobility), differently scaled perspectives (planetarity), networks of meaning that knot together the ideational, textual, and material (vascularity), and subject and object (transjectivity). Walls's conceptual quartet has the advantage of addressing head-on the literary scholars' central problem of being confronted by Thoreau with texts that question their own literariness. Indeed, several of the other contributors, such as Dieter Schulz, Kristen Case, and Michael Jonik, whose essays I discuss below, describe Thoreau's nature writings along similar lines, though without using Walls's terminology. But in how far her terms offer alternative “literary tools” (31) rather than figurative descriptions of Thoreau's texts remains unclear. Some of her earlier essays—particularly her brilliant engagement with Bruno Latour in “Romancing the Real: Thoreau's Technology of Inscription”—con-

---

stitute efforts in this vein that are much more carefully developed.²

One of the collection’s most provocative contributions is Joseph Urbas’s “‘Being is the Great Explainer’: Thoreau and the Ontological Turn in American Thought,” which boldly projects the current-day “ontological turn” back onto the nineteenth century. Urbas’s erudite essay draws on a wide range of writers associated with the Transcendentalist movement to underline his point that the New Englanders turned to “the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers […] of the Platonizing turn that preceded the psychological and epistemological turn of the eighteenth century” because their chief interest was not in knowledge or science but in the permanence of laws and Being, in whose service knowledge and science stood (115). What’s provocative about this reading is not only that it implicitly aims to delegitimize some of the most influential critical approaches of recent decades, such as that of Stanley Cavell,³ but also that it complicates readings of Thoreau that celebrate his naturalism as a welcome turn away from metaphysics. Urbas is right, of course, that the Transcendentalists, including Thoreau in his scientist phase, looked for moments of contact with the real—and in that sense with Being—but his pitting ontology against epistemology ultimately obscures the point that in such moments of contact knowledge and Being join forces to the point where the distinction between them collapses. As Emerson famously writes in Nature: “I am nothing. I see all” (10).⁴ But though he may be overstating his case, Urbas brings to attention a useful conceptual distinction that can serve as a lens for the way several of the other essays interpret Thoreau’s scientific-poetic endeavors.

Dieter Schulz, in “Nature, Knowledge, and the Method of Thoreau’s Excursions,” seems to be in basic agreement with Urbas. In order to make sense of Thoreau’s science, he approaches him through Gadamer and distinguishes between the modern scientific method à la Francis Bacon—which Thoreau explicitly rejected—and the Greek understanding of method, which originally means “following or accompanying something on its way” (174). In this ancient sense, the science of nature finds its paradigmatic practice in the excursion. Rather than studying nature as an object separate from the subject, the excursionist scrutinizes nature by experiencing it herself—a type of relational knowledge Walls calls “transjective” (31). The excursionist’s experiential findings are necessarily provisional and dynamic. But Schulz’s Thoreau does not despair over the limits of tentative knowledge. “[W]e can trust in the structural and ontological priority of Being,” Schulz writes—and closely echoes Urbas by concluding that “Being always precedes and exceeds knowing” (180).

Kristen Case, on the other hand, emphasizes Thoreau’s antifoundational empiricism. In “Thoreau’s Radical Empiricism: The Calendar, Pragmatism, and Science”—one of the collection’s highlights—she discusses Thoreau’s relational epistemology as suggestive of an “understanding of knowledge that anticipates twentieth-century developments, including pragmatism, ecological science, and science studies” (189). Thoreau’s interest, she maintains, “is at least as much the act of perception as it is the object being perceived” (194). In contrast to Urbas and Schulz, she argues that for Thoreau the vagaries of knowledge are not abetted by a preceding Being; rather, observation itself is our mode of being in the world: “Thoreau learned in the course of documenting his increasingly intimate relation to the natural world […] that close observation is a mode of participation, that we are part of the world we would know” (196).

A similar line of argument is pursued by Michael Jonik in his searching “‘The Maze of Phenomena’: Perception and Particular Knowledge in Thoreau’s Journal.” Jonik slightly revises Stanley Cavell’s placement of Thoreau in the context of Kantian epistemology. Where Cavell sees Thoreau, following Kant, recovering the object of knowledge (the thing-in-itself) in Jonik’s reading “Thoreau’s emphasis shifts from the ‘recovery’ of the object to its relationality,” which requires

---


acknowledging “the resistant thingness of objects” (203; emphasis in orig.) as well as grasping how the particular thing relates to the human (cf. 207). In *Thoreauvian Modernities*, touting the relationality between subject and object sometimes comes close to turning into a trite gesture that is sure to garner consent. For this reason, it is all the more welcome that Jonik points to the immense difficulties this relationality poses for Thoreau. As he remarks, Thoreau’s perceptions in the Journal “do not harmonize poetry and science but arise from their unresolved agon” (209).

If for Jonik, Thoreau’s late praxis of perception recovers the poetic despite its apparent focus on natural facts, François Specq pushes this argument even further by approaching the Journal from the vantage point of its poetics. Implicitly rejecting the “ontological turn” Urbas makes out in Thoreau, Specq reads Thoreau’s Journal as a demonstration of “the process whereby presence is established” (231). The process of perception, in this reading, far outweighs any notion of Being, because it is the act of coming to know that the poet (even the naturalist poet) seeks over and over. For Specq’s Thoreau, “only the process of perceiving truly constitutes reality” (230). Thus the reign of poetic epistemology is reinstated. While one had wished for more in-depth explorations of the many provocative ideas presented in these pages—even at the cost of reducing the number of contributions—*Thoreauvian Modernities* remains an important addition to Thoreau scholarship for the way its contributors’ views overlap in the questions raised, and dramatically diverge in the interpretations offered.

Frankfurt/M. 
Johannes Voelz

It is true, as Susanne Rohr and Miriam Strube suggest in the introduction to this volume, that American pragmatism in general and William James in particular still count as something of an embarrassment in mainstream European philosophical and cultural quarters: an embarrassment in the double sense that pragmatism in its “evasion” of “epistemology-centered philosophy” or systematic conceptualization (119-20) has always appeared, on the one hand, slippery or glib (or, worse, expressive of American capitalism) and, on the other hand, predestined to highlight the limitations of traditional European philosophical practices. Quoting Joseph Margolis, Rohr and Strube view pragmatism’s advantage as “favoring the flux of history over fixity, invariance, universalisms of every sort, cognitive privilege, abstract truths” (10).1 This antifoundational stance also motivates pragmatism’s preoccupation with practice, with method, and with process—with unfinished and unfinishable business, so to speak.

The aim of this volume is an inquiry “into the role pragmatist thinking currently plays and could play in the future” (10). In order to do this, the book presents four sections: “William James: Foundations” (a somewhat ironic title for an antifoundational theory, assembling essays on James’s strategies), “The Truth and Nature of/in Pragmatism” (essays on the concept of truth, James’s idea of man, and pragmatism’s swerve towards cultural criticism), “Pragmatism and Cultural Politics” (articles on pragmatism’s affinity with radical political, critical race, and Native American thinking), and “Current Debates in Politics, Ethics and the Sciences” (essays on recent practical utilizations of pragmatism). In other words, the volume presents a wide variety of explorations into pragmatism’s claims and validity.

I have greatly enjoyed reading the essays in this collection. One has to keep in mind that this is neither an introduction to pragmatism nor to William James (a difficult enterprise, anyway; and there are already a number of helpful entries into the topic);2 and it is not a systematic collection of specific issues or topics within pragmatist practices. Rather, the volume probes a range of current debates and applications of Jamesian thinking. As such it is inspiring, sometimes surprising, and always interesting. I suspect that Susanne Rohr and Miriam Strube aimed at reminding the reader of how productive, fascinating, and momentous William James’s ideas can still be—and they certainly succeeded, at least with me.

The first section deals with William James’s modes of thinking (he would perhaps call them his denkmittel). It is the liveliest section, owed to Heinz Ickstadt’s sagacious (and helpful) responses to essays by Joan Richardson and Herwig Friedl. Richardson engages in an imaginative conversation with some of James’s remarks on religion in Pragmatism, The Principles of Psychology, and Varieties of Religious Experience as well as Wallace Stevens’s lecture “The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet,” recuperating the aesthetic, musing (and musical) element in James’s thought. Ickstadt, in turn, does not question this element, yet points out that James “places himself on borderlines, Janus-faced, between poetry and philosophy, between his fascination with the irrational and his need to put it under the control of reason and of habit” (49). In a similar way, Ickstadt wonders whether Herwig Friedl’s emphasis in focusing on the ontology of William James (his exploration of the fluid experience of Being) as “a methodos, a leading of our imaging and thinking towards conceptualization and back again” (66; my emphasis) does not underrate James’s investment in civilization and control:

William James stands curiously in-between: He is torn between a fluid, self-dissolving vision of the marginal, of the pre-conscious and pre-linguistic realms of the irrational which

---


powerfully attracted (yet also repelled) him, and a felt need to control, through the reign of habit, this newly discovered contingent and chaotic territory of knowledge. (75)

Ickstadt’s responses do not contradict Richardson’s demonstration of James’s affinity with Stevens or Friedl’s brilliant analysis of James’s imagery of stuff and water as “indispensable bridges between the mute and true (‘unbegriffliche’) presence of reality in or as perceptual awareness on the one hand and later conceptual articulation on the other” (62). Rather, in league with both, they contextualize and complicate James’s movements of thought between available but insufficient models. Joseph Margolis’s argument, which places James in a line with Kant and Hegel, naturalizing idealism and rendering Hegel pragmatic, pursues, if I understand his rather foreshortened reflections correctly, a similar line: James is characterized through his methods (playful and musical in Richardson, perceptual and emerging from images in Friedl, intuitive and introspective in Margolis) more than through concepts or statements.

Given this emphasis on process and emergence, at first glance the task of the three following contributors seems paradoxical. Helmut Pape delineates James’s idea of truth, Kai-Michael Hingst turns to his concept of man, and Ulf Schulenberg asks which pragmatist ideas led to its revival in the 1980s and 1990s. Yet all three are completely aware of the necessity of understanding their respective concepts in a dynamic way in order to do justice to pragmatism. A case in point is Helmut Pape’s essay (my favorite in this section), which literally renders the idea of truth “psychodynamic” in illustrating how individuals attain truth, which “happens or occurs at a specific point in time and that requires specific individual experiential and representational processes” (88). Pape shows that James was never interested in, say, the truth that water boils at 100 degrees Celsius but rather in how a child (and by extension an adult with more abstract truths) validates, assimilates, and corroborates the idea that water, at a certain heat, dissolves into scalding hot steam. Kai-Michael Hingst, who does display a systematizing passion that James would have found slightly amusing, convincingly demonstrates that James’s idea of man cannot be separated from practice; in other words, living means doing (in its widest sense), and, since there is no absolute certitude, life must be understood as a “venture” (101) rather than a state. Finally, Ulf Schulenberg prepares the reader for the third section by looking at James as a public philosopher, a practical mind in the context (even though, of course, not exclusively) of progressivism and the reform movements at the turn of the century. Schulenberg suggests that there has always been a modicum of (leftist) romanticism involved in pragmatist philosophy: in its affinity to the “strong poet” (115), in its religious and prophetic aspects, in its tendency toward boundary crossing (art, literature, and theology come to mind), its future-orientation and forward-thinking. Thus, the logical consequence for pragmatism, Schulenberg asserts, was a swerve towards “a kind of cultural criticism [such as in the work of Cornel West] in which the meaning of America is continually questioned and debated” (120).

The third section of the book explores some of the exchanges between pragmatism and cultural politics. Patricia Rae’s essay on George Orwell as a companion in spirit to James lucidly discusses Orwell’s pragmatist modernism in writings such as Homage to Catalonia, The Road to Wigan Pier, “Notes on Nationalism,” “Looking Back on the Spanish War,” and even Nineteen Eighty-Four. Georg Schiller explores the capacity of James’s radical empiricism to translate, for instance, the mystic experience of a Sioux medicine man and the meaning of stories in an indigenous society “without reducing [them] to the familiar within European American frameworks” (156). Thus, Schiller refrains from explaining or assimilating concepts; he rather shows how American Indian modes of thinking can be better understood with the help of notions of experience, relationality, and processes of emergent truth as James described them. In a discussion centering on African American revisions of pragmatism, Miriam Strube shows (very cogently and productively) how pragmatism can help overcome the troubling tension between ideologies of color-blindness on the one hand and essentialism on the other. Strube advances from Alain Locke through W.E.B. Du Bois and Cornel West to Paula Moya; in a daring but ultimately convincing move she co-opts Moya into the camp of pragmatism.

The forth section brings in additional disciplinary orientations and debates from Barack Obama’s political philosophy (Trygve Throntveit) through the function of belief and hope,
Jamesian “overbelief” (185) in healing (Andrew Flescher). It explores the dissolution of the natural/artificial dichotomy in environmental ethics (Robert Main) and the undertheorized role of process in scientific theories and practices of research, which may un hinge the opposing positions on underdetermination in the field (Michael Anacker). In all four papers, Jamesian thinking allows a redescription of problems and practices, which might otherwise be left suspended between stifling binaries.

In this manner Rohr and Strube’s volume enlarges the circle from basic strategies in James’s thinking to some of the most often discussed and debated ideas extracted from pragmatism to questions of cultural sense-making and on to current issues in politics, medicine, ethics, and science. Readers will agree more with some essays than with others (especially when they touch political matters like Throndveit’s) and, depending on prior knowledge, find some more charged with jargon than others (I was a bit put off by Margolis’s demands). Taken together, they form a fine collection, often cross-fertilizing each other. And perhaps, if, by some chance, the book finds its way into the shelves of European philosophy departments, some may be infected by James’s fascinating and “unstiffening” (27; 128) processes and methods of thinking.

Berlin
Martin Klepper

Despite Ernest Hemingway’s discovery of Africa as an adult, he connected the continent to the importance of childhood in the writer’s imagination. For example, his protagonist of the posthumously published The Garden of Eden (1986), David Bourne, writes a short story based on a boyhood event that took place on the continent of Africa. Part of honing his craft is David’s ability to remember exactly how he felt during this trial that “had brought an understanding of age” (551). The transition from innocence to maturity characterizes “An African Story.” In it, young David learns, through the hunt for the elephant, the significance and the price of empathy. What he subsequently takes away from the ordeal is the “beginning of the knowledge of loneliness” (553). Africa was not part of Hemingway’s childhood, but, as he wrote in Under Kilimanjaro, the continent, “being as old as it is, makes all people […] into children.” Africa provided a conduit through which he could explore fundamental shifts in understanding such as David Bourne’s experiences—shifts that, in his work, are typically contingent on the power of place.

Consistently grounded within strong geographical contexts, Hemingway’s fiction repeatedly celebrates the numerous qualities of place and the far-reaching effects it can have on an individual. Moreover, his love of traveling has captured the attention of critics for decades, but some destinations have been more successful than others in securing firm roots in the public perception of Hemingway’s pantheon of place. Until now, not as much consideration has been given to Africa as it has to other countries such as France, Spain, and Italy. Miriam Mandel’s new edited collection of essays, Hemingway and Africa, shifts the current conversation connecting Hemingway and topography in a new direction, one that has been lacking in the standard scholarship.

Mandel’s book is a must for anyone who wishes to begin understanding this segment of the writer’s oeuvre and the two periods of his life spent on the ‘Dark Continent.’ Placing a list of Hemingway’s African narratives and the chronology of his two safaris at the very beginning of the collection provides a visual impression of the volume of creative energy and time Hemingway spent on and in Africa. Prefacing Mandel’s compelling introduction, these two components provide a different qualification for the present study. Though he ventured there only twice, the existence of two distinct and protracted periods devoted to Africa fits into a pattern of repetition that, so Mandel argues, defined most of his professional life.

Mandel’s introduction looks at the peculiar geographical arrangement of Hemingway’s career. Her observations, though not surprising to anyone familiar with the writer’s peripatetic lifestyle, are arresting for the way she organizes them into what she calls “Patterns of Travel” (7). Each country that captured his attention seems to have done so in a similar manner and produced a relative quantity and genre of work. After identifying Oak Park as the anomaly, owing to the fact that Hemingway never wrote about it but, instead, sought to escape it altogether in his fiction, she articulates his dual visits to Italy, France, and Spain. What Mandel strives to make evident is that, for Hemingway, the proverbial joy really was in the journey, not the destination. She suggests that the liminal space occupied in the ‘act’ of traveling stimulated the writer so that throughout his middle age, protracted stays in his destinations become less and less frequent. This leads to the implicit claim that coheres the book: Hemingway’s relationship with traveling and place was analogous to the notion of ‘safari,’ a “Swahili word that means journey” and refers to an act that, by definition, is “composed of movement, travel, and impermanence” (19). In many ways, this metaphor helps the very different, sometimes conflicting, readings of Hemingway’s African texts in this book to coalesce.

The first section, “Knowing what Hemingway Knew,” begins with a short essay and thorough bibliography detailing Hemingway’s reading in Natural History. Following, it is Silvio Calabi’s very practical contribution, “Ernest Hemingway on Safari: The Game and the Guns,” which provides invaluable historical information on Hemingway’s chosen arsenal that indicates he was not a “collector of fine
guns and rifles” but, rather, of “function” and “familiarity” when it came to weapons (100). Offering a perspective on a different kind of genuine knowledge, Jeremiah M. Kitunda’s piece addressing “Ernest Hemingway’s Farcical Adoration of Africa” examines the author’s use of language, local custom, and folklore as a means to evaluate his fiction. As contradictory as he claims Hemingway’s “treatment of African reality and people” is (141), Kitunda’s essay suggests the “farce” in the “African writings is intentional” and not the result of the writer’s ignorance of East Africa or his “disregard for its languages” and “ways” (135).

The middle section of the book, “Approaches to Reading,” is the longest. Beatriz Penas Ibáñez and Suzanne del Gizzo offer compelling readings of Hemingway’s source texts. Ibáñez addresses the Baudelairian “ethic/aesthetic critical concerns” (153) as one way to understand the shift in Hemingway’s oeuvre away from the iceberg principle and toward postmodernism, signified by the African writings. Del Gizzo distinguishes herself from the mass of criticism on The Garden of Eden by focusing not on gender but on “the importance of childhood and empathy” in “An African Story” and the novel as a whole (177). Her essay is particularly striking for the way it opens up a text that has been exegetically saturated by gender and sexuality theory since its publication in 1986. Different from del Gizzo’s work, Chikako Tanimoto’s contribution, “An Elephant in the Garden,” aligns with extant readings of Garden in that it addresses “Hemingway’s need to explore unconventional behaviors, transgressive identities outside his own America” (200; emphasis in orig.). Finally, Frank Mehring applies a Rortian perspective to his exegesis of “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” which allows him to highlight the “moral and ecocritical potential” of the story (228).

The penultimate section of the book addresses a topic familiar to Hemingway scholars though a thorny one nonetheless, “Religion and Death.” Despite prevailing critical readings of religiosity in Hemingway’s fiction, such as those offered by H.R. Stoneback, Larry Grimes, and recently Matthew Nickel, among others, such scholarship has not looked extensively at the African writings in this context. Moreover, the contributors to Mandel’s collection expand the definition of ‘religion’ past denominational boundaries. Fascinating for the ways it connects Hemingway’s childhood in northern Michigan with his adult time in Africa, Philip H. Melling’s essay, “Memorial Landscapes,” examines Hemingway’s interest in “primitive modernism” through the lens of his African writings that, he claims, provided a catalyst for the ways in which the writer was seeking to comprehend his own “Indian blood” (239). Melling’s work adds to a rich conversation about Hemingway and place with a type of synthesis and contextual understanding rare in that discourse. Similar to Melling’s essay in its effort to synthesize different influences on Hemingway’s religious beliefs, Erik G.R. Nakjavani’s piece, “Hemingway’s African Book of Revelations,” is a densely packed study of the different forces at work in the existential and spiritual qualities of the author’s life and fiction. James Plath’s “Barking at Death: Hemingway, Africa, and the Stages of Dying” ends the section. Using Elisabeth Kübler-Ross’s famous five-point guide to the stages of death and dying, Plath uses them to assert that the “fulcrum” in the “matter of Hemingway and death” (305) is Africa and the well-known African stories, “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” and “The Snows of Kilimanjaro.”

Finally, Kelli A. Larson dutifully notes “What Others Have Said,” and in her brief introduction to a thorough bibliography, she explains the surfeits and needs among scholarship addressing the African texts. Subsequently, she makes clear the fertile opportunity for “critical exploration” into them (325). One such work, Under Kilimanjaro, enjoys popular and critical acclaim and, as Larson argues, could “bolster” the success of the posthumous texts, especially in the ways it represents an evolving writer (325). In that book, Hemingway wrote that “there are always mystical countries that are a part of one’s childhood.” The Africa of Hemingway’s childhood is an anachronism but an incredibly revealing one for those who wish to understand the unique qualities of his craft.

Georgia Nicole J. Camastra

4 Ernest Hemingway, Under Kilimanjaro: 23.

When Bret Easton Ellis’s novel American Psycho was published in 1991, Washington Post critic Jonathan Yardley called it “a contemptible piece of pornography, the literary equivalent of a snuff flick.” The entire latter part of the text, he writes, “can only be described as repulsive, a bloodbath serving no purpose save that of morbidity, titillation and sensation; American Psycho is a loathsome book.” This kind of reaction—even though Yardley is not specifically mentioned in the book—is Kathryn Hume’s starting point for her study on what she terms “aggressive fiction.” Why should we keep reading, she wonders, “when novelists strive to undermine our values, push gross unpleasantness in our face, omit connectives and explanations that would help us understand, reduce characters to placeholders, and fail to come to any resolution?” By “aggressive fiction,” however, Hume does not exclusively mean fiction of extreme physical or sexual violence; she also includes four other types of “attack” that have the effect of making ordinarily competent readers wish to stop reading—“the achievement of self-supporting independence” that shapes the ending of The Color Purple (61), for instance, but her argument that “complaint is a frustrating genre because in its purest form, it does not offer a solution” (63) seems to fall short of acknowledging the necessity of social criticism, even in excessive form, in order to provide an operational stance of narrative intervention.

The next chapter is dedicated to “modalities of complaint,” which Hume defines as “the relentless articulation of discontent, usually characterized by strong emotive elements” (44; emphasis in orig.). This phenomenon is subdivided into self-centered complaints (e.g., Philip Roth’s Portnoy’s Complaint or Kathy Acker’s Don Quixote), complaints about oppressors (e.g., Andrea Dworkin’s Mercy, Alice Walker’s The Color Purple, or Frank Chin’s Donald Duck), as well as the more empathetic complaint over the plight of others (William Kotzwinkle’s Doctor Rat and Ruth Ozeki’s My Year of Meats). In the author’s defense, she notes the “achievement of self-supporting independence” that shapes the ending of The Color Purple (61), for instance, but her argument that “complaint is a frustrating genre because in its purest form, it does not offer a solution” (63) seems to fall short of acknowledging the necessity of social criticism, even in excessive form, in order to provide an operational stance of narrative intervention.

After establishing her thesis around the Horatian “author-reader contract” (1), a tacit agreement by which literature should provide both entertainment and information, Hume displays a wide spectrum of ways in which this contract is broken in her selection of “contemporary fiction” (14)—novels published, for the largest part, between the 1960s and 1990s. With exemplary glimpses at novels such as Ishmael Reed’s The Terrible Twos, Robert Coover’s John’s Wife, Fran Ross’s Oreo, Mark Leyner’s My Cousin, My Gastroenterologist, or William Burroughs’s The Ticket that Exploded, she looks first at three ways of producing the effect of narrative speed—an “aggressive” tactic, because in the novels, according to Hume, “events are hurtling by too fast for real understanding” (14). The mechanisms of speed include multiplication (of plot elements or characters, for instance), subtraction (of realist details or connector narrative), and the use of what the author calls “phantasmagoria”—“the creation of puzzling anomalies for which no explanation is given” (26).

The next chapter is dedicated to “modalities of complaint,” which Hume defines as “the relentless articulation of discontent, usually characterized by strong emotive elements” (44; emphasis in orig.). This phenomenon is subdivided into self-centered complaints (e.g., Philip Roth’s Portnoy’s Complaint or Kathy Acker’s Don Quixote), complaints about oppressors (e.g., Andrea Dworkin’s Mercy, Alice Walker’s The Color Purple, or Frank Chin’s Donald Duck), as well as the more empathetic complaint over the plight of others (William Kotzwinkle’s Doctor Rat and Ruth Ozeki’s My Year of Meats). In the author’s defense, she notes the “achievement of self-supporting independence” that shapes the ending of The Color Purple (61), for instance, but her argument that “complaint is a frustrating genre because in its purest form, it does not offer a solution” (63) seems to fall short of acknowledging the necessity of social criticism, even in excessive form, in order to provide an operational stance of narrative intervention.

“Conjugations of the Grotesque,” the study’s third chapter, first offers a wide range of definitions of the grotesque itself (from Bakhtin to Harpham), before analyzing the interrelated phenomena of bodily grotesque (with the examples of novels such as Katherine Dunn’s Geek Love or Chuck Palahniuk’s Invisible Monsters), of “grotesque worlds” (85)—which focuses more obviously on social issues (including James Morrow’s Towing Jehovah, Gerald Vizenor’s Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles, and Cormac McCarthy’s Blood Meridian)—and of modified or “normalized” grotesque (108), which operates, for instance, by making the grotesque useful or valuable or by displaying characters’ positive responses to grotesque
situations. "The writers in this chapter," the author concludes, "all side to a greater or lesser degree with the anti-orderly values, which significantly differentiate contemporaneous grotesque from that of the medieval or Renaissance periods" (114). Again, the chapter diligently collects examples and functions of grotesque elements; yet some of the finer points of cultural difference would have deserved a little more attention. It is surprising that, even though the analysis of Gerald Vizenor's *Bearheart* acknowledges the concepts of "totemic irony" (104) and the Anishinaabe author's criticism of victimry, it also posits that what "makes his worlds grotesque is that they represent for him white cultural values, themselves repulsive and astounding from a Native American standpoint" (102)—which ultimately reduces the ironic and tricksterish qualities of the text to a binary stance.

The final two chapters are the study's shortest; they deal with forms of narrated violence (chapter four) that aim at effects of terror (e.g., Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*), horror (e.g., Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*), and revulsion (e.g., Dennis Cooper's *Frisk*). The distinctions in these chapters are well-argued (especially in contrast to genre horror, which usually stabilizes social and political norms), and especially the analysis of Ellis's *American Psycho* is appropriately located among previous positions of criticism. It is interesting that the author seems to be much more patient with Ellis's narrative excess than with Acker's or Dworkin's lamentations; and in more general terms, the latter half of the study seems to make stronger and more convincing points than some of the rather cursory treatments of novels in the first two chapters.

Exemplarily looking at some forty fictional texts, Hume collects enough representative material to make a case for the phenomenon of "aggressive fiction"—a trendy theme also touched upon by Jennifer Doyle's recently published *Hold it Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art*. The analysis of these novels in relation to one another is certainly original and the book deserves credit for both its transparent structure and its meticulous analysis and classification of the various narratological functions and effects. Obviously, the condensation of a wide field such as the "contemporary American novel" into 172 pages demands certain sacrifices, and the choice of texts should have been rendered explicit to make readers wonder less about conspicuous absences and imbalances. Not only Canadians would frown upon the categorization of Douglas Coupland as an American novelist, only three novels are actually from the twenty-first century, and while six novels by Kathy Acker are discussed, Don DeLillo and Ronald Sukenick are missing entirely, as are most contemporary Native American writers—and there would have been plenty of "aggressive" material in Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* or Alexie's *Indian Killer*. While exclusions such as these are forgivable for a study of this scope, it would have been useful to include more theory on affect (Melissa Gregg's 2010 *Affect Theory Reader* would have been a good starting point)—especially considering the study's essential focus on readers' reactions and emotions.

My major point of critique, however, is less about the book's specific methodology or corpus than about its un concealed hostility towards theory. Theory is not, as the introduction and preface suggest, something inaccessible to "the less sophisticated" (12) and separate from the "readability and enjoyability" of a text (13). Instead, it helps us to define terms and concepts within clear and explicable boundaries, it safeguards scholarship from operating with speculations on authors' intentions, and it forces us to ask questions and leave well-trodden paths rather than to find our particular perspective confirmed. To merely expect "pleasure and instruction, the traditional rewards of the reader-author contract" (164) is a practice that tacitly perpetuates dominant ideologies, and it is precisely the point of much literature—contemporary or historical—to intervene with these practices. Thus, when Hume rather uncritically writes in her introduction that "[p]leasure mostly involves reinforcing values that make us feel good about ourselves" (2), the book's trajectory is misleadingly phrased. This is exactly what Althusser defines as "ideological activity," which is "sustained by voluntary or involuntary, conscious or unconscious, adherence to an ensemble of representations.
and beliefs” (24). As if to confirm this point, some of the positions taken in Hume’s study (e.g., towards William Burroughs’s “having used every drug and combination of drugs invented by humanity” [27]) are intuitively moralistic rather than academically reflected. The point of fiction, however, is the opposite of such “adherence to […] beliefs”: in its exploration of the cultural imaginary, it is a most suitable site for the development of alternative viewpoints. If we sought fiction that simply confirmed our worldview, social and cultural change would become impossible. “The limits of my language,” Ludwig Wittgenstein famously summarized “mean the limits of my world.” If it were not for critical, experimental, or alternative uses of language, Western society would still be writing (to give a random example) about “the admiration, love, and devotion which the negro feels for the children of a beloved master,” (211) as Massachusetts-born writer Caroline Lee Hentz did in her highly popular novel The Planter’s Northern Bride, a “non-aggressive” book by the author’s standards.

In Kathryn Hume’s defense, the final pages of her book make this point as well.

“The degree of discomfiture caused by aggressive fiction,” she concludes, “can free us from our usual mental schemata by making them inoperable. This fiction liberates us from automatic responses” (169). In light of the introductory dismantling of theory, however, this insight could have been placed both at an earlier point in the book and more prominently, it could have been prepared more thoroughly, and emphasized more convincingly. Fiction that “knows otherwise,” to use a phrase by Alexis Shotwell, may be experienced as frustrating simply because it is different—but the process of exposing ourselves to this difference raises our sensitivity toward heteroglossia, enhances our appreciation of diversity, and supports an acknowledgment that the frontiers of our knowledge are fluid, dynamic, and changing. These are particularly welcome effects in transnational American Studies, in which the implicit proximity of alterity and violence that this book suggests should have long become outdated.

Vienna
Birgit Däwes

---


4 Alexis Shotwell, Knowing Otherwise: Race, Gender, and Implicit Understanding (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 2011).

The volume under review synthesizes two highly productive research paradigms that have informed much work in American Studies and, more generally, literary, cultural, and media studies: (1) the awareness that audiences engage actively with texts and other forms of fictional and factual representation; and (2) the awareness that the texts that elicit such participation are now less than ever confined to the borders of the nation state but circulate transnationally and in some cases even globally. Accordingly, the contributions to the volume explore how contemporary American narratives call into being virtual and other kinds of imagined communities—the “transnational public spheres” that form around these narratives, as the editors put it in their introduction (7).

As such, four articles focus on fictional narratives, four on factual ones, all of which are well-written and thought-provoking. Unfortunately, a few articles do not seem to go beyond their origins as conference papers, as they are rather short and do not thoroughly develop parts of their arguments. While brevity is not a problem for papers followed by a live discussion, it is unfortunate for written articles where no immediate dialogue can ensue. Nevertheless, I take many valuable insights from the volume, and the occasional suggestions that I make in this review are a sign of the active engagement it generates on my part.

The first article following the introduction is Rüdiger Heinze’s “‘Authentic’ Narratives and the Rhetoric of Cultural Identity.” Heinze makes the excellent point that literary and nonliterary texts about marked cultural practices, that is, ‘ethnic’ literature, are frequently read too simplistically by literary critics who see them either as providing authentic insights into the minority community in which they are situated or as helping to construct such a community. Heinze, by contrast, suggests that the “audience interpellation” (19) of such narratives is far more complicated and demonstrates this by exemplarily interpreting Julia Alvarez’s How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents and Jhumpa Lahiri’s The Namesake. Interestingly, though, Heinze decides not to explore a central irony. He is certainly right that audiences are usually rather elusive and that a discourse analysis of the discussion a book generates can therefore only be conducted when it is so successful that there is a certain amount of reader responses available. But he does not mention that the texts he discusses would allow for such an analysis, as there is, as he points out, a large body of interpretations that reduce them to their ethnic dimension. Thus, it would have been fascinating had he explored how academic audiences appropriate the texts. Moreover, his contribution would then have been linked even closer to the one by Carolin Alice Hofmann.

Hofmann’s “Seeking Greener Pastures: The Cultural Work of Margaret Atwood’s The Year of the Flood” not only convincingly argues that the novel seeks to interpellate its readers as a “green” audience” (33) but also explores how the novel’s publication was accompanied by a variety of cultural practices that encouraged audiences worldwide to appropriate and transform the text. This, for example, occurred by way of staged readings all over the world during which Atwood performed the function of the narrator while members of the city in which the reading took place interpreted the characters in often radically different ways. Thus, Hofmann discusses a truly active and transnational audience. The same goes for Leonhard Schmieding’s “Taking Beat Street to the Streets in Socialist East Germany” that investigates why the GDR authorities allowed the 1984 hip-hop movie Beat Street to be shown in East German movie theaters and why it became such a success. Schmieding meticulously reconstructs the Ministry of Culture’s decision-making process and shows that the authorities liked the film because it exposed the racism inherent in the capitalist American society. Young audiences, by contrast, loved the film because it allowed GDR hip-hoppers to get as close as possible to their American idols and enabled them to imagine “themselves living in the transnational community of hip-hop culture” (58).

Katja Kanzler’s article “Of Legal Roulette and Eccentric Clients: Contemporary TV Legal Drama as (Post-)Postmodern Public Sphere” shows how the courtroom dramas Boston Legal and The Good Wife invite their audiences to continue the important social and political debates the fictional cases frequently revolve around and, at the same time, self-reflexively negotiate the strategies by which they stage these issues and extend this invitation.
She makes a convincing case that the shows construct their viewers not only as consumers but also as citizens. Yet I would appreciate a discussion as to why TV series are particularly apt to generate public conversations of social and political issues, as they occur in online discussion boards dedicated to the series; in other words, I wonder how seriality contributes to activating the audience, as it seems online discussions of civic issues are often side effects of fans’ sustained engagement with the central characters. Kanzler’s most important contribution to the volume as a whole, however, is the theorization of the concept of the “public sphere,” which is mentioned but never as thoroughly explored in various other contributions as its prominent position in the volume’s title would merit. She argues that both TV shows project a public sphere where “the constructedness and construction of ‘issues’ [by way of representational strategies] need to be as much part of their public discussion as their social and political contents” (65).

While Kanzler stresses the notion of the public sphere, Frank Usbeck primarily employs the concept of community in his article on the cultural work of milblogs, that is, blogs by U.S. soldiers deployed in the ‘war on terror.’ In “Don’t Forget about Us, Because We Can’t Forget You: A Narrative Approach to the Concept of ‘Community’ in American Soldier Blogs” he demonstrates how these blogs are collectively produced and consumed by the soldiers abroad and parts of the American public at home and how they project “a master narrative of the civil society supporting the troops” (101). The transnational dimension returns to the center of attention, then, in Leopold Lippert’s “Transnational Imagined Communities? Retelling the Stonewall Myth in Vienna.” Lippert aptly demonstrates how American historians have integrated the Stonewall riots into a distinctively national narrative, before he turns to the 2009 brochure Stonewall in Wien, which, he suggests, “compellingly incites its readers to ‘feel transnational’” (126). This reading, however, is not entirely convincing. Based on the material from the brochure that Lippert quotes—mostly interviews with veteran activists of the Austrian LGBTQ movement—it seems that while the makers of the brochure invite both their interviewees and readers to feel transnational by connecting to the Stonewall riots, the interviewees actually decline this invitation.

The final scholarly contribution to the volume is Sebastian M. Herrmann’s “Something New and Undefined: Campaign Narration, Anti-Advertising Discourse, and the Public Sphere,” which eschews the traditional reading of Joe McGinniss’s 1969 bestseller The Selling of the President as a documentary account of the Nixon campaign; instead, he reads McGinniss as part of a broader discourse on the dangers of advertising. More specifically, Herrmann shows that the book tries to work against “the image-based signification of television” and attempts to define “the public sphere as a textual space” (133). However, as Herrmann demonstrates, this agenda creates certain ambivalences, especially since the ad men that McGinniss quotes in order to express his positions are, on the one hand, severely criticized for creating deceiving images and, on the other, “elevate[d] […] to trustworthy voices in assessing the status of contemporary society” (150).

The volume closes with a short piece by journalist Detlef Kuhlbrodt on the lengthy manifesto 2083 – A European Declaration of Independence by Anders Behring Breivik, the perpetrator of the Oslo bombing and the massacre on the island of Utøya in 2011. Kuhlbrodt stresses that Breivik’s manifesto feels strangely familiar because it “read[s] like a postmodern novel with different layers” (158). Yet I found Kuhlbrodt’s article especially interesting because of its peculiar doubling with Breivik’s manifesto regarding resistance: while Breivik attempts to resist the multicultural ideology promoted through American TV series, Kuhlbrodt attempts to resist the at times humanizing pull of Breivik’s narrative. Accordingly, the piece makes for a beautiful final contribution, as it draws attention to the fact that no matter how much rhetorical effort narratives of all kinds may make to activate an audience in a specific way, the audience is never passive and can always attempt to resist a specific interpellation. All said, the volume is an important contribution to our understanding of the transnational flow of American narratives and the manifold ways in which they do cultural work and are received both inside and outside the United States.

Tübingen Michael Butter


Im Aufbau des Studienbuchs spiegelt sich der Ursprung der Globalisierungsforschung in Soziologie und Ökonomie in den ersten Kapiteln, die zunächst die Facetten des Phänomens und die Begriffsvielfalt zur Globalisierung und ihre Geschichte beschreiben sowie ihre wirtschaftlichen und politischen Auswirkungen und schließlich die die wissenschaftliche Diskussion prägenden soziologischen Theorien zur Globalisierung darstellen. Dabei wird deutlich, dass Globalisierung nicht erst mit der Allgegenwärtigkeit des Begriffs tiefgreifend wirksam ist, sondern dass von um 1500 an entscheidende Entwicklungen des Handels- und Migrationssystems einsetzen, die schließlich zu den heute bestehenden Netzwerken und transnationalen Verflechtungen in Wirtschaft und Politik führen. Deren Prozesse werden meist mit dem Bild von Flüssen beschrieben, die unterschiedliche scapes betreffen, etwa die financescapes oder die mediascapes (Arjun Appadurai). Reichardt betont hier, dass es eine umfassende oder einheitliche Theorie des Globalen (noch) nicht gibt (vgl. 54f.) und diskutiert verschiedene Perspektiven der angelsächsischen Sozialwissenschaften, in denen das Phänomen der Globalisierung bisher die größte Aufmerksamkeit und Theoriebildung erfahren hat. Dargestellt werden etwa die bekannte ‘Glokalisierung’ (Roland Robertson), die Interkonnektivität im Informationszeitalter (Manuel Castells) oder die Beschleunigung und Raum-Zeit-Verdichtung (David Harvey).


Eines eigenes Kapitel ist der Methodik zur Untersuchung solcher Fragestellungen in den Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaften gewidmet. Reichardt stellt auch hier fest, dass es eine klare Methode (noch) nicht gibt, bietet aber eine strukturierende Liste mit Interpretationselementen zu Globalisierungsrepräsentationen an. Diese beinhaltet etwa die Analyse der pluralen Kontexte der Globalisierung, die Untersuchung der Semiotik der Darstellungen oder die differenzierte Kritik der Pers-
pektiven, die die Repräsentationen vermitteln (vgl. 130ff.). Hier zeigt sich konkret, wie der “Ortswechsel des Denkens” (so der Titel des Abschnittes 4.4.) in den Kulturwissenschaften in seinen einzelnen Schritten vollzogen werden kann. Entscheidend ist dabei, dass im Sinne der Vernetzung das ständige Bewusstsein der eigenen Position notwendig ist; die eigene Position muss deshalb bei jeder Interpretation reflektiert werden, wie durchgängig sehr überzeugend in dem Band betont wird.


Frankfurt/M. Sigrun Meinig

This collection of essays, based on a 2010 conference at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society in Munich, displays some of the most recent approaches in environmental humanities by addressing “the connection between cultural values, individual experience, and human decision on the one hand, and environmental change on the other” (1). Its focus on American environments and public debates on issues of climate change, environmental politics and perception as well as its emphasis on risk and disaster are supposed to reflect two things, namely the great frequency and destructiveness of ‘natural’ disasters on the North American continent as well as the omnipresence of representations of such catastrophes in the popular imagination. The contributions cover the disciplinary range from political science, (environmental) history, and cultural geography to media and cultural studies.

The short introduction sketches out the United State’s relationship with the environment in the past and present. Mauch and Mayer argue that natural disasters as well as the representation of such real or imagined catastrophes in the popular imagination “play a powerful role in the general perception of the natural environment and in the production of knowledge” (2). While this certainly makes for an intriguing point of departure, the editors unfortunately miss the opportunity to further elaborate on both the interrelation of the volume’s key concepts—climate, cultures, and catastrophes—and the three sections into which the essays are divided. This is, perhaps, the only drawback in the volume’s otherwise rich ointment: a slightly more substantial and conceptually comprehensive introduction would have easily turned this collection of high-quality essays into a coherent volume.

The two essays in the first section, entitled “Climate in America—Past and Current Perspectives,” examine the historical and social dimensions of contemporary environmental politics. Taking his departure from the current debate surrounding the question of whether or not human actions have an impact on climate change, Lawrence Culver’s compelling essay outlines the history of man-made environmental change in the United States. Culver defines the encounter of the European settlers with the arid climate and barren landscape of the Great Plains as a turning point in American environmental history and shows how the westward expansion and the ideology of the Manifest Destiny marks the beginning of a profound anthropogenic interference that has led to an ecological catastrophe or ‘manifest disaster.’ In an essay that ties in with Culver’s historical perspective in a quasi-complementary way, Andreas Falke explains why, even under the supposedly ‘green’ Obama administration, U.S. environmental politics lag behind in an international comparison. Analyzing how public opinion, the political system, the influence of the economy as well as the disaffection with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change all impede a more resolved environmentalist agenda, Falke concludes that a significant shift, at least at the federal level, is probably not in sight.

Section two, “Cultures of Ecology—Cultures of Risk,” contains three essays, which shed light on rather diverse aspects of ecological practice and risk management in the United States. Heike Egner deals with risk research and management and particularly with the role of spatialization in the construction of risk. Drawing on observation theory (von Foerster, Luhmann et al.), she discusses two case studies. The first case study argues that the spatial indexing of risk in the beach community of Camp Ellis, Maine, in fact increased rather than minimized natural hazard-induced risk. The second example, somewhat out of sync with the rest of the essay, is concerned with the role of narration in constructing the nowadays dominant climate-change metaphor, i.e., the ‘greenhouse effect.’ Andrew C. Isenberg’s shrewd essay addresses the issue of environmental restoration by historicizing the so-called Buffalo Commons, i.e., the proposal to reintroduce bison to the Great Plains area and thus reconstruct its original ecosystem. Analyzing how this idea, famously launched by geographers Frank and Deborah Popper in 1987, is built on frontier rhetoric and nostalgic notions about untamed nature, Isenberg traces a history of bison in North America that reveals how much such a grand-scale restoration project implicates problematic notions about, for example, the ‘ecological Indian,’ eco-tourism, or American masculinity. His conclusion is that we cannot simply “order à la carte historical environments” (90; emphasis in orig.) and that a sus-
tainable culture must instead “continually adjust to social and ecological change” (86). In her discussion of Roland Emmerich’s blockbuster The Day After Tomorrow, Alexa Weik von Mossner draws on research in the areas of risk perception and affect studies to describe the film’s environmental significance. She not only argues that imaginary narratives, particularly in popular film, are “much better at engaging emotions” (97) than science when it comes to communicating environmental crises to the public but also that affect is “central to both the perception of risk and to decision making in the face of such an enormous risk as climate change” (99).

The final and largest section contains four papers and shifts the focus towards “Catastrophe—Natural Disasters and the Media.” Sherry Johnson applies critical juncture theory to her analysis of the Cuban earthquake of 1880 and argues that this example from the past can also “offer warnings for the present” (118). While this theoretical framework can explain why the event was soon largely forgotten in Cuba, Johnson claims that it is the task of historians to “tell these stories” (127) to learn their lessons for future calamities. While the Cuban perspective of Johnson’s contribution broadens the volume’s geographic scope, it also inadvertently exposes its otherwise rather narrow, national perspective on the United States. Another welcome exception to this is Gordon Winder’s essay on (pre-Fukushima) Japanese earthquakes and their coverage in the Los Angeles Times, in which he examines the continuities and changes in U.S. and, more specifically, Californian reactions to these catastrophes. Identifying a major shift between the 1923 earthquake in Kanto and the 1927 disaster in Tango, he concludes that the newspaper mainly “built its coverage around the issue of whether Japan was worthy of US aid” (155). Craig E. Colten, then, sees a connection between social memory and resilience in his discussion of the long-term effects of hurricane Katrina in 2005 for the community of New Orleans. Asking why Katrina caused much more damage and fatalities than the significantly stronger hurricane Betsy in 1965, Colten demonstrates how the city leaders’ fatal decisions in terms of land use, structural protection (e.g., levees), residential architecture (slab-on-grade instead of raised houses), and evacuation strategies were all the result of a “degree of amnesia” (172) in the community’s social memory and thus reduced resilience. Starting with a critique of the discourse of ‘cleaning up’ the oil spill of the Deepwater Horizon in 2010, Stacy Alaimo, finally, deploys a neo-materialist framework to contest the dominant cultural imagination of the ocean as an alien and immaterial space immune to human influence. Her essay is a very fine example of how research in the environmental humanities is not at all self-contained but can make an important contribution to our societies’ understanding of “the substantial interchanges, interconnections, and flows between industrial practices, scientific knowledge, and cultural fabrications, as well as their effects on […] environments” (187-88). As such, Alaimo’s essay proves to be the perfect conclusion to a rich and thought-provoking volume that attempts to bridge the gap between the natural sciences on the one hand and the socio-cultural and historical dimensions of our notions of nature, natural disasters, and environmental change on the other.

Gießen

Michael Basseler