

come enlightened enough to instruct and then to emancipate their slaves and thus until history's eventual goal would be attained.

In the second part, Spahn delineates Jefferson's historical thoughts over the course of his life using the dichotomy of didactic history versus historicism. Didactic history was based on "a teleological concept of history that emphasized less the factual precision than the universal didactic function of historical studies" (103). Historicism—by contrast—was "a concept that stressed the contingency of history and saw the primary function of historical studies not in teaching timeless moral lessons for the future but in coming as close as possible to a unique reality in the past" (103). In his early life, Jefferson believed in the philosophical history of the Enlightenment and its premise that the importance of history writing laid not so much in preserving the details of the past than in providing a set of "timeless examples following a 'course' predictable by universal natural laws" (106). This didactic approach to history was based on the conception of 'rational' time and the belief in an immutable universal human nature: "the philosophical historians tended to expect the future to follow largely the lives prescribed by the past" (109). Particularly after the United States was founded, Jefferson considered it of utmost importance for the survival of the republic that Americans were taught history such that they could learn from the past and perceive and actively counter erosive developments, such as corruption, which would threaten the republican form of government. Since Jefferson stressed the didactic function of history in this phase of his life, he did not believe that history writing had to stick to the facts. To highlight 'moral rules,' historical works could contain fictitious elements. Consequently, history writing was—to Jefferson—not fundamentally different from poetry.

The developments of the 1780s and 1790s, however, forced Jefferson to reevaluate his attachment to 'philosophical history.' The failure of the French Revolution and the success of the Haitian Revolution seriously called into question the 'magic of example.' Would the successful slave rebellion in Saint-Domingue serve as an example to black slaves in the United States? What did the failure of the French Revolution augur for the American experiment in self-government? As Jefferson needed to differentiate between Europe and America and between blacks and whites, he

began to doubt the universality of human nature and the comparability of past and present. As a result, Jefferson became more skeptical about 'didactic history' with its pretension of being able to predict the future, and he began to stress the need of understanding past events on their own terms. He did not, however, completely give up on philosophical history but rather sought to deal with the failure of the French Revolution by 'Americanizing' philosophical history. He argued that "Americans and Europeans belonged not only to different spatial nations but also to different temporal nations" (197). He thus tried to associate United States history with 'rational' time and continuous progress.

Upon becoming President in 1801, Jefferson again changed his historical outlook and sought to synthesize both the didactic and the historicist approaches to history. As he wished to be portrayed as a classical and exemplary 'great man' by future generations, he once more became intrigued with the moral lessons of history. When Jefferson became aware that he himself was making history and increasingly grew concerned about his own place in future history writing, he began to distinguish between fact and fiction more clearly and took an active part in history writing and collecting historical artifacts, not least in order to counter Federalist interpretations of the American Revolution. All the while, he considered it legitimate to embellish Republican versions of the American Revolution through the 'magic' of a masterful style.

Spahn's study offers fascinating new insights into Jefferson's mind and provides a systematic account of his varying perceptions of time and history. This is an impressive accomplishment given the fact that Jefferson never wrote a systematic treatise on the subject. He mainly expressed his eclectic and often contradictory thoughts in his correspondence. By making herself familiar with the huge bulk of Jefferson's letters, Spahn was able to produce the first book-length study on Jefferson's temporal and historical reflections. She also analyzed in depth the intellectual influences on Jefferson's attitude toward time and history—such as Isaac Newton, John Locke, Henry St. John Bolingbroke, and Laurence Sterne—by frequently referring to Jefferson's literary commonplace book to demonstrate where he received his ideas.

With her extensive study on Jefferson's complicated attitude toward time, Spahn

closed a research gap since only few historians have examined Jefferson's multifaceted thoughts on temporal and historical matters. Spahn, however, does not engage the subject of Republicans' adaptations of classical republicanism or civic humanism in the revolutionary era and their understanding of Whig history. Thus, she omits discussion of how Jefferson's interpretations of seminal events and developments, such as the Federalist program of the 1790s or British foreign policy in the early nineteenth century, were shaped by his partial adherence to this ideology and historiographical approach. While she freely admits that she would not dwell on the "import of his Whiggish conception of Euro-American history" as it relates to Jefferson's perception of political developments because she is more interested in "the larger philosophical and literary background of his perspective on the past" (16), an all-encompassing study on Jefferson's attitude towards history would have to incorporate the question of how the premises of Whig history and the "'classical' republican interpretation of time" (17) influenced his outlook. However, this point should not be understood as criticism but rather as a call for future historians to build upon Spahn's perceptive study, not only in order to further unravel Jefferson's complex attitude towards time and history by including the ideology of classical republicanism into the discussion, but also to use her original insights to better understand how modern notions of time, slowly and with tremendous intellectual difficulty, replaced pre-modern notions of eternity and cyclical history, and to more generally unravel how time was conceptualized in the United States at the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century.

Berlin

Jasper M. Trautsch

EDWARD CAHILL, *Liberty of the Imagination: Aesthetic Theory, Literary Form, and Politics in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2012), 328 pp.

The initial chapter of Edward Cahill's *Liberty of the Imagination: Aesthetic Theory, Literary Form, and Politics in the Early United States* (2012) begins with a quote that takes us right to the heart of the book's concern: the inextricable intertwining of politics and aesthetics in a wide variety of revolutionary and

early national American writings. Madison's ruminations on the vagaries of human cognition in *Federalist* 37 testify to just how closely aesthetic and political matters were linked in the minds of many of the era's public figures:

The faculties of the mind itself have never yet been distinguished and defined with satisfactory precision by all the efforts of the most acute and metaphysical philosophers. Sense, perception, judgment, desire, volition, memory, imagination are found to be separated by such delicate shades and minute gradations that their boundaries have eluded the most subtle investigations, and remain a pregnant source of ingenious disquisition and controversy. (11-12)

Cahill convincingly reads these unexpected reflections on aesthetic matters in one of the era's major political treatises as more than a defensive gesture designed to preempt criticism of the outcomes of the Constitutional Convention (which will be, Madison suggests here, necessarily imperfect). For Cahill, Madison's recourse to aesthetic theory allows him to address issues at the heart of the current political process: "questions of social diversity and unity, interest and disinterestedness, agency and subordination, consent and coercion" through an aesthetic discourse that "speaks with both compelling immediacy to and distance from the primary question which lay before the Convention: How much liberty should there be in a republic?" (12-13). From this vantage point, aesthetic theorizing—which was disseminated in late eighteenth-century America via books imported from Britain, prominent domestic scholars such as John Witherspoon, libraries, periodicals, and newly founded literary clubs—becomes visible not as an elite preoccupation but as "a field of inquiry concerning the autonomy of the individual in relation to collective forms of power and authority" (13). As is contemporaneous political discourse, eighteenth-century aesthetic theory is informed by a "dialectic of liberty" that insists on both the freedom of the imagination and the need to curb that freedom so that it does not devolve into "license" (36). It is this dialectic that Cahill traces throughout his magnificent book.

Each remaining chapter is dedicated to one genre of revolutionary and early national writing: poetry (chapter two), landscape writing (chapter three), political treatises (chapter four), novels (chapter five), and literary criticism (chapter six). In discussing poetry of the

late colonial period by writers such as Hannah Griffiths, Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson, and Philip Freneau in chapter two, Cahill shows how intimately their reflections on legitimate and illegitimate pleasures, on pleasures of the mind and pleasures of the body, on self-love and *sensus communis*, are related to the revolutionary cause. Thus, in so-called non-importation poems written explicitly against the British Parliament's Townshend Acts of 1767—which levied import duties on commodities such as paper, paint, lead, glass, and tea—the bucolic pleasures of America were juxtaposed against the morally corrupt refinements of European culture. Written in support of the patriotic boycott of European imports, a poem like Griffiths' "The Female Patriots, Addressed to the Daughters of Liberty in America" (1768) called for the substitution of polished imported goods by simpler, domestic products: "for British paints and dyes, 'the juice of a berry'; for window glass, 'polished Horn'; and for writing paper, the 'Homespun' variety, 'the Tongue,' or even a 'scratch on a Leaf'" (80). In gestures whose middle-class bias belies the projected vision of American pastoral unity, some of these poems—Fergusson's "The Dream of the Patriotic Philosophical Farmer" (1769) is an example—draw on Joseph Addison's essays on the pleasures of the imagination to suggest that the pleasures of the mind are vastly preferable to those of the body afforded by imported commodities. For poems by Freneau such as "The Beauties of Santa Cruz" (1779) and "The House of Night; Or, Six Hours Lodging with Death" (1779), Cahill is able to show that they stage less tropical or pastoral escapes from revolutionary war than probe the possibilities and limits of the imagination as they give expression to a fascination with the sublime terrors of war and slavery. Here as elsewhere, Cahill demonstrates not only his sound knowledge of eighteenth-century aesthetic theory but also superb close reading skills that enable him to propose convincing new readings.

As he does throughout, Cahill in his third chapter "The Beautiful and Sublime Objects of Landscape Writing" refuses to reduce writers' uses of aesthetic categories to ornamental expressions (or maskings) of supposedly more real and more essential political projects (such as imperialist land-taking and the imaginary consolidation of the nation). Instead, he probes the politics of the aesthetic—its dialectic of liberty and constraint—itsself before cor-

relating the aesthetic with *realpolitik*. Thus, instead of reading Thomas Jefferson's, John Filson's, and others' eulogies of the American landscape's beauty and sublimity as rhetorical devices designed to mask imperial projects, he argues that

the politics of the western landscape is often written into the aesthetic rhetoric that describes it. In prospects of natural and cultivated beauty, we see representations of moderated liberty and national futurity. In scenes of natural and moral sublimity, we see not only images of individual empowerment and imperial ascendance but also those of resistance, revolution, and chaos. (115).

What distinguishes passages such as these from most earlier studies of landscape writing (and indeed from much Early American Studies scholarship more generally) is not so much that they acknowledge the subversive force of the aesthetic, but that they seek to do justice to the complexity and contradictoriness of its inherent political valences.

Having reached chapter four, we have learned to expect that Cahill's exploration of *The Federalist* reaches well beyond the chapter's initial (and hardly surprising) observation concerning the elitist presumptions informing the essays' rhetoric of taste. Cahill shows that, as a category theorized by eighteenth-century aestheticians as both highly subjective and subject to intersubjective validation, 'taste' allowed Madison, Jay, and Hamilton to stage a reconciliation of their political opponents' insistence that the diversity and independence of the country's constituent parts must be respected and of their own desire for national consolidation. The rhetoric of taste provided the Founders with a "language of unity and variety" (142) that was perfectly suited to their political objectives. Moreover, it allowed them to disparage anti-Federalist fears as the products of an overheated imagination and dismiss their opponents' more detailed criticisms of the emerging constitutional text as expressions of an outmoded (read: rationalist and classicist) striving for symmetry and perfection that no longer suited modern tastes. Against all this, the Federalists pit their alleged 'disinterestedness'—another crucial notion of early British aesthetics.

Chapter five probes the contradictory valence of the imagination in the fictional worlds of Charles Brockden Brown's major Gothic novels, in particular *Wieland* (1798).

Against earlier critics, who read the descent of the Wielands' rural community of sensuous and aesthetic pleasures into religious fanaticism, insanity, and homicide as a republican warning against the destructive powers of the imagination, Cahill insists on the multi-faceted functions of fancy in this tale: "The imagination in Brown's novels is the site of fanatical delusion and deceptive error, to be sure, but also correct judgment, rational speculation, patriotic sympathy, moral beauty, and transformative sublimity" (165). In developing this argument, Cahill's writing yet again testifies to the rich diversity of his critical approach as he situates Brown's novels in their historical contexts, contemporaneous aesthetic debates, and the anti-fiction movement (whose allegedly wholesale rejection of fiction he qualifies in interesting ways).

Cahill's final chapter turns to criticism published by Federalist writers such as Fisher Ames and Joseph Dennie, who extol the power of genius and the imagination as they draw a strict line between the aesthetic pleasures of refined minds and the passions of the rabble: "the nineteenth-century idea of the imagination that we associate with writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson emerges out of [this] earlier aesthetic protest against democratic political power" (202). It is in these pages that Cahill's conclusions concerning elitist uses of the language of aesthetics most closely approximate those reached by critics of aesthetic ideology such as Terry Eagleton and Pierre Bourdieu, though with one significant difference: early American criticism published by Ames and in Dennie's *Port Folio* does not draw on the discourse of taste to secure profits of distinction. Quite the contrary is the case: for them, any 'bog-trotter' thinks he is an expert in matters of taste; it is the creative power of genius that is restricted to the select few. Cahill ends his final chapter with a concise account of how this kind of elitist and anti-democratic criticism began to be modified into a gentler and somewhat more egalitarian variety only with the reception of European romanticism in new kinds of magazines such as the *North American Review*. These observations lead straight into the book's Conclusion, which traces the waning of Federalist criticism and the emergence of a new, romantic type of thinking exemplified by Emerson that both transcends and remains indebted to the dialectic of liberty Cahill has traced with such precision.

Since I have distributed my praise of Cahill's excellent book freely throughout the preceding paragraphs, let me mention two more features of *Liberty of the Imagination* that make it an important contribution to Early American Studies. First, although he acknowledges his debt to both major theorists of 'the ideology of the aesthetic' such as Eagleton and Bourdieu and more recent returns to aesthetics by scholars such as Isobel Armstrong and Elaine Scarry, he explores the social and political implications of early American writers' recourse to aesthetic categories in all their complexity rather than simply subscribing to either Eagleton's and Bourdieu's critique of aesthetic ideology or Armstrong's and Scarry's salvaging of the democratic or emancipatory power of beauty. Second, I am impressed by the rich variety of writings from several genres that he explores: from classic literary works such as Timothy Dwight's *The Conquest of Canaan* (1785) and Brown's *Wieland* (1798) to sorely understudied texts such as Fergusson's "The Dream" or "The Philosophical Farmer" (1768) and Ohio Company agent Manasseh Cutler's thoroughly commercial landscape description *An Explanation of the Map Which Delineates That Part of the Federal Lands, Comprehended between Pennsylvania West Line, the rivers Ohio and Scioto, and Lake Erie* (1787). This enables Cahill to make a significant contribution to the ongoing expansion of the canon of Early American Studies.

By way of criticism, let me mention but two minor points. In few instances, Cahill's determination to read aesthetic debates politically seems a bit forced. For instance, when he argues that "the regulatory function of taste was believed to provide a range of public and private benefits that fostered moderate political liberty" (46) and names the following list of benefits adduced by British and American commentators, one wonders how many of them are genuinely political (as opposed to private, sensory, or epistemological): "it improved morals and manners, facilitated sympathy and social harmony, controlled passions, inhibited luxury, consoled misfortune, encouraged learning, exercised the mind, and even heightened pleasure for its own sake" (46). This is not to suggest that morality, sympathy, desire, consumption, education, and pleasure are apolitical notions but to ask how useful such a broad notion of the political—which tends

to inform U.S. American Studies more generally—ultimately is.

In a related vein, for a treatise so alert to eighteenth-century aestheticians' probing of the possibilities and limitations of human perception, it comes as a surprise that Cahill completely ignores Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's original definition of aesthetics as "the science of sensuous cognition" (§ 1, I: 60).<sup>1</sup> His characterization of Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (1750/1758) as concerned with "philosophical questions of taste" (3) misses the mark and betrays the book's almost exclusive focus on early British aesthetics. In a way, this bias is well-motivated since it is British, not German or French, aesthetic treatises that were read in revolutionary and early national America. But a more than cursory engagement with a few of the major continental European aestheticians of the era such as Baumgarten, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller, Charles Batteux, and Jean-Baptiste Dubos would have revealed that the transatlantic republic of letters that Cahill analyzes with such acuity is by no means limited to the Anglophone world. And yet, given Cahill's admirably learned engagement with a great variety of early American texts and an equally high number of contemporaneous British aesthetic treatises, it seems to me that such a charge borders on injustice in the face of the author's important, multi-faceted contribution to Early American Studies, a field that has neglected aesthetic considerations for too long.

Basel

Philipp Schweighauser

ELIZABETH J. WEST, *African Spirituality in Black Women's Fiction: Threaded Visions of Memory, Community, Nature and Being* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2011), 192 pp.

The role of Christianity in African American culture and literature is comparatively well-explored, and it is by now well-known how African Americans ranging from Banner and Tubman to King Jr. utilized Christian traditions and individual Biblical figures (e.g. Moses) in order to advance their cause. The role of African spirituality, however, has been mostly neglected, especially with regard

<sup>1</sup> See Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Ästhetik [Aesthetica]*, Trans. Dagmar Mirbach, 2 vols. (Hildesheim: Felix Meiner, 2007).

to fiction. Where hoodoo culture and conjure elements in literature are investigated, they are usually not recognized as part of a long historical development. Elizabeth West's comprehensive study of African American spirituality and its African roots in literature from the seventeenth century to the Harlem Renaissance therefore fills a crucial gap in African American literary studies.

Although West acknowledges that the spiritual culture of the African continent was and is by no means monolithic, she assumes that certain philosophical and ethical principles are shared by various African traditions: according to this shared African cosmology "all world entities emanate from a 'cosmic oneness' [...]" (1). West claims that "four principles [are] central to pre-Middle Passage African cosmology: 1) the value of memory [e.g. of the ancestors] to both individual and group well-being; 2) the belief that community represents the essence of human existence and being; 3) the view that nature—both animate and inanimate—represents divineness; and 4) belief in the interconnectedness of worldly and otherworldly beings" (11). As these ideas evolved in African American culture under the common denominator of slavery, they were closely intertwined with emerging African American Christianity in whose process black women played a central role. West thus demonstrates that "the centuries-old contention that Africans arrived in America with little if any meaningful culture, and that upon arrival in America they had been effectively disconnected from their past, misrepresents the central influence of African culture in African American life"—nor was their worldview entirely absorbed in a European one, but rather transformed and merged into "Afro-Christianity" (20). In reducing 'African spirituality' to a few core principles and in not differentiating between individual Christian denominations, West runs the risk of overgeneralization. However, this proves an only seeming weakness of her study as her approach is in accord with the literary texts themselves, which do not offer any more detailed differentiation within these opposite categories.

West examines the literary evolution of African spirituality in black women's fiction from Wheatley to Hurston through truly revealing, thoroughly close readings. For this purpose she builds on George Brandon's three-stage model consisting of "a formative,

a persisting and a transformative period" (21-22). Accordingly, Wheatley's poetry and the religious prose of her early-nineteenth-century successors represent the 'formative stage' as they show the tension between African-rooted spirituality and western Christianity. While Phillis Wheatley's poetry has often been dismissed as 'white-washed' and accommodationist, West highlights her discursive appropriation of scripture and history which based the black American experience both in the Great Awakening and African cosmology. In her use of the sun as an image, for instance, Wheatley "carefully converg[es] her African-rooted reverence for the sun with her adopted Christian concept of an omnipotent God" (39). West also identifies a close affinity between African ideas of divinity and ancient Greek and Roman mythology, so that Wheatley's classical references are not only indicative of her learnedness in western culture but are also expressive of her rootedness in an African worldview.

For black spiritual women writers after Wheatley (Jarena Lee, Rebecca Cox Jackson, Maria Stewart), who were all at least one generation removed from a firsthand African experience, West observes "an emerging African American cosmology that muffles its African voice and assumes the discourse of Christianity" (43) when they try to render African Americans fully human and black Christians as equal to whites. Even unacknowledged African carryovers such as spirit possessions, out-of-body experiences, and visitations from the dead would be couched in Christian discourse, since the belief in vision and prophesy was common to both Africans and Christians. These writers thus progressively subdue the African self in African American discourse while in practice—through oral and ritual traditions—African spirituality would survive.

West shows how in the 'period of persistence,' which reaches from the mid-nineteenth century across the post-Reconstruction era into the Harlem Renaissance, this tendency to silence Africa and replace it by a Christian discourse is persistently continued in slave and spiritual narratives (by Mary Prince, Sojourner Truth) and full-length novels (Hannah Crafts's *The Bondswoman's Narrative*, Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*, Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes*). While these mid-nineteenth-century texts undeniably include elements of African-rooted cosmology, such

as the slave community regard for the dying, the appreciation and reconstruction of community through memory, or the protagonists having visions, these are typically reframed in a white Christian worldview when, for instance, visions are qualified as 'superstition.' This way, at the expense of African spirituality, Christianity serves as the core marker of the protagonists' humanity.

The sentimental novel of the Reconstruction era (e.g. Ellen F.W. Harper's *Trials and Triumphs*) typically propagates white middle-class values, education, and Christianity as the main virtues to promote individual and communal racial uplift; it dismisses emotional and community-based black spirituality—evident in "moaning and shouting" (104) during church service—as inferior to refined and rational bourgeois white Christianity. Later in *Iola Leroy*, Harper shows more appreciation for emotion-filled black Christianity, which proves to be restorative in reuniting families and communities; nevertheless, Harper continues to ignore any connection between black Christianity and Africanity. In contrast to Harper, Pauline E. Hopkins (in *Contending Forces*, *Hagar's Daughter*, *Winoma*, and *Of One Blood*) "gives voice and agency to African American folk belief" and presents "African mysticism as central to the plot development" (111) while still adhering to Christianity. Hopkins thus "weaves a narrative that ultimately unveils African-Christian tensions in African American culture but also demonstrates the delicate coexistence of the two seemingly antithetical systems" (114) and, indeed, presents instances where they merge.

The literary works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson and Jessie Redmon Fauset (*There Is Confusion*, *Plum Bun*, and *The Chinaberry Tree*) foreshadow the 'transformative period,' whose proper beginning is marked by Larsen's and Hurston's Harlem Renaissance novels which expose the role of the Christian church as merely superficial in the lives of African Americans: "[t]he validation of Africanity that emerges in Hurston's [*Jonah's Gourd Vine* and] *Their Eyes Were Watching God* can be read as an outgrowth of the Christian apathy in Fauset's novels and the spiritual despair in Larsen's *Quicksand*" (131). Africanity as the central influence in Hurston's black fictional world proves rewarding particularly for Janie in *Their Eyes*, as by the end of the novel she has fully grasped and lives the reciprocity between the living and the dead—the individual's place

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