

time (3), deals with both the particular and the universal, by presenting micro- and macro-history – the succession of primary texts and their cultural contexts – in a constant dynamic interplay. This integrative approach, and the sheer abundance of new inquiries into a prime example of the drama canon, make *Wonder of Wonders* an adorable piece of scholarship.

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**Birgit M. Bauridl, *Betwixt, Between, or Beyond? Negotiating Transformations from the Liminal Sphere of Contemporary Black Performance Poetry*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2013. xi + 326pp. ISBN 978-3-8253-5900-3.**

Performance poetry has received conspicuously little scholarly attention considering its popularity. Birgit M. Bauridl's recent book *Betwixt, Between, or Beyond?: Negotiating Transformations from the Liminal Sphere of Contemporary Black Performance Poetry* (2013) seeks to redress this state of affairs by offering an account of contemporary black performance poetry from the "vista point of transnational American studies" (251). As the author points out, the field of performance poetry has so far lacked "a profound theoretical conceptualization and contextualization and a scholarly location not only within literary history, but moreover within cultural history and an investigation against the foil of synchronic culture(s)" (36). This point of departure is a challenging one both in a positive and a negative sense. The gap in the body of research in black studies provides an intriguing opportunity to break new ground by mapping a hitherto scarcely explored territory. On the other hand, the task of delineating the scope of the research is bound to be a demanding one, given the ambiguity of the object of research and the relative shortage of critical studies to build on. The book at hand provides a competent and insightful negotiation of its object of study and manages to avoid the potential pitfalls of such an ambitious endeavor.

The overall structure of the book is logical and proceeds patiently from profoundly executed initial conceptualizations and definitions and their critical assessment through a thorough overview of previous research and

stages of more and more focused discussion and analysis to arrive at the conclusions in the final chapter. Notably, Bauridl adopts an autoethnographical mode in order to mediate the experience of performance poetry to the reader, and this becomes an effective stylistic device that makes the book much more interesting and accessible. She also emphasizes the significance of her first-hand experiences of performance poetry as an indispensable foundation for the study, because “only this experience could make it possible to figure out what performance poetry is, what it wants, what it can do” (4). Therefore, this autoethnographical approach serves the double function of making a theoretical analysis possible while also retaining a degree of readability.

Bauridl sets out to answer a number of important questions spelled out in the introductory chapter, starting by acknowledging the fact that performance poetry is a nonexistent category, “a fuzzy bunch of poetry that relentlessly resist[s] formal categorization” (5). What becomes the defining quality that sets performance poetry apart for other forms of poetry is precisely the aspect of performance and performativity. Bauridl has decided to refer to her object of study as “contemporary performance poetry” in order to delineate the concept in the temporal sense. She is quick to remind us that this term should not, however, be understood as definition per se, but, instead, “as an approach” (6). Through this approach, Bauridl seeks to answer questions concerning, for instance, the relation between performance poetry and poetry slam, the forms of publication and their availability, scholarly attention (especially the ideological gap between academia and the popular genre of performance poetry), and performativity.

The research materials of the study have been drawn from a variety of different sources and origins. Bauridl has aimed at a representative cross-section of contemporary black performance poetry, acknowledging the fact that, given the wealth of material available, the corpus is bound to be limited. The poetry chosen comes from poets of different ethnic, social and geographical backgrounds and encompasses different styles and forms ranging from actual poetry to fusions with music, visual art, and video. The materials have been published on various forms of media: written word in the form of books and online texts, and audio and audiovisual material in the form of CDs, mp3 downloads, DVDs and recorded television shows. The primary materials are supported by interviews of not only poets, but also organizers, scholars, and fans, which sheds more light on the ideological and aesthetic aspects of performance poetry.

In terms of theoretical contextualization, the study is constructed on solid ground, incorporating theories from such varied and sophisticated fields as performance studies (Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida et al) and cultural studies (Paul Gilroy, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., etc). What makes this book particularly interesting is its focus on issues of race, ethnicity, and (trans) nationality. Bauridl's decision to focus on black performance poetry establishes significant connections to performativity and transnationalism, in particular. In parallel with Paul Gilroy's thinking, Bauridl emphasizes the fact that the cultures of the black diaspora inevitably transcend national and cultural boundaries, which enhances the importance of transnationality and transculturality. She maintains that performance poetry "offers a platform and possibilities of appropriation for poets from various national, cultural, ethnic, and economic backgrounds," largely because of its flexibility in terms of form and content (118). Closely related to these issues is the concept of cultural memory, which takes center stage in chapter 3, and especially its traumatic implications in the context of African American history and experience, that is, the involuntary dislocation that characterizes slavery and its aftermath. The concomitant focus on political and social dimensions of contemporary black performance poetry is one of the major achievements of the book. Accordingly, Bauridl argues that these poems may be understood as "voices and means of empowerment [...] for the Other in general, and, in a broader sense, for anybody who is victimized through no fault of his/her own," ranging from "women, homosexuals, to various ethnicities, cultures, and nationalities located within and outside the United States" (255). Beyond that, she stresses that contemporary black performance poetry does not really provide concrete answers, but rather participates and draws attention to important debates and negotiations concerning complex cultural processes.

One of the rather few negative aspects of this book may be at least partly explained as an unavoidable result of its being a doctoral dissertation. That is, the author has meticulously documented a large number of secondary sources in order for the book to fulfil its purpose as a showcase of the width and depth of her academic learning. The downside of this is that the readability of this otherwise well-constructed piece of work suffers at times because of extended footnotes and page-long listings of secondary sources. Another problem is that although the book functions as a very good introduction to a variety of complex theories, its usability is seriously compromised by the lack of an index, which makes quick access to specific

concepts and issues rather difficult. As a dissertation, *Betwixt, Between, or Beyond?* is a solid work, but because of its fascinating subject matter it also contains the potential to reach a much wider and more varied audience. This would, however, require a shift of emphasis from theoretical considerations to actual analyses of poems and performances. Even when read as a PhD thesis, I would have been happy to see more space dedicated to textual and audio-visual analysis of the poetry, but this is a minor complaint. Bauridl's book is a carefully constructed and faultlessly contextualized look into a severely understudied cultural phenomenon and serves as a fine call for further academic discussion.

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**David Greven, *Gender Protest and Same-Sex Desire in Antebellum American Literature: Margaret Fuller, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville*, Dorchester: Ashgate, 2014; 250 pp. ISBN 978-1-4094-6992-6.**

In the densely populated field of gender and queer studies of literature, David Greven's *Gender Protest and Same-Sex Desire in Antebellum American Literature* stands out for both its ambitious scope and its effort to combine readings of canonical 19<sup>th</sup>-century American authors with the history of sexuality and classic and post-Freudian psychoanalysis.

Greven's primary goal is to contribute to the latest developments in the history of homosexuality in the nineteenth century, which have increasingly challenged the Foucauldian thesis of the emergence of a homosexual identity-category in 1870. Alongside a number of other scholars – among them Graham Robb, Alan Bray, Michael Moon, Catherine O'Donnell, and Michael O'Rourke – Greven claims that notions of a queer identity existed well before what he calls the taxonomical epoch. Accordingly, he sets out to detect “an incipient queer desiring presence” in antebellum US literary texts by means of a twofold – and potentially conflicting – line of inquiry, both “psychoanalytically inflected” and “historically minded” (4).

On the one hand, the author relies on familiar, well-documented institutions and ideals of Victorian culture such as the cult of “True Womanhood”, the competing paradigms of masculinity (dominated by the self-made and the Jacksonian man-on-the-make, amply debated in Greven's 2005 study,