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Ecopoetics, no.6/7, 2006-2009. Ed. Jonathan Skinner. Bowdoinham, ME: Periplum Editions, 2009. 324 pp.

Elizabeth Schultz

I'm far more interested in the weeds, the things growing in the cracks, the things not quantifiable or qualifiable and what their relationship is to a larger picture that we may not be able to understand in terms of aesthetics.

mIEKAL aND

Early poets half shaman, half sibyl, spoke for this flow of our transformations into animals, kinds of weather.

Mei-mei Berssenbrugge

Instead of speaking of poems as "green life," I propose them to be mushrooms—as the fruiting bodies of a broad social mycelia.

Gary Snyder

Beginning with its first issue in 2001, *Ecopoetics* has grown fatter, fuller, and sassier with each issue. This most recent issue, comprising 324 pages, includes a special feature on Australian ecopoetics, edited by Michael Farrell, as well as interviews, essays on poets, poetic essays, poems written in circles, in multiple fonts, on the horizontal, in translation, black-and-white and color photography, photographs of art in nature, ekphrastic poetry, "a radio play in one act," a class assignment, the reproduction of a child's handwritten field notes. The language of these poems is in English, Spanish, beetle; they draw on scientific information, historical documents, astute observation of nature, newspapers, personal experience; they appear in traditional poetic forms, haiku, prose paragraphs, journal and diary entries; they interface with photographs, drawings, graphs, calligraphy. This issue of *Ecopoetics* includes a variety of weeds and mushrooms growing in the cracks of human culture, in general, and poetic aesthetics, in particular; indeed, the success of this issue lies in its diversity of expression, a diversity which collectively questions, explores, and expands the understanding of ecopoetics itself, its subjects and its praxis.

Ecopoetics has insisted from its first issue that ecopoetics be inclusive, opening up space to embrace place, opening up nature to include human nature. In his introduction to issue 6/7, *Ecopoetics* editor Jonathan Skinner, links the challenges for the contemporary environmental movement—"complexity, interconnectedness, fragility, and time"—with contemporary ecopoetics. However, the work in this issue addresses the planet's degradation and exploitation through imagery, allusion, form, and celebration rather than by statistics, prescription, and exhortation. *Ecopoetics* encourages us as readers and writers of ecopoetics to perceive global as local, ourselves as organisms, and poems as transformative. Although individual poems in *Ecopoetics* continue to represent nature, referencing a range of creatures and elements, the compelling energy of *Ecopoetics* emerges from living and breathing poems, created by processes beyond printed technology and exercising influence beyond printed technology.

By including a feature on Australia, *Ecopoetics* goes global. However, with few exceptions these Australian entries are grounded in particular Australian places: "the red pulsating land before me" (Alf Lord), "Somewhere among shifting sandhills / there is a fold, / a slit where the mind's eye grafts in dimensions that have no horizon" (Simon West). Several poems evoke desiccation and the yearning for water: "this sunburnt and arid desert continent" (John McBain), "Hedge fragile white in a southerly. / Tinder touchwood dry tender would touch" (Jill Jones), "see me for what I am, ploughing dry ground" (John Kinsella). Australia is, however, connected the world at large as Kinsella links the continent's farmers with "wheat markets in Iraq and India," Lucy Dougan thinks of a friend in Spain, considering that he "scout[s] the landscape / for shy traces of the local" and concluding that both of them are "listening for rustlings, tending weeds / and working quietly at the edges." Other entries in *Ecopoetics*, while evoking disparate world cultures, also focus on the specificities of locale. Translator Luis Aguilar-Moreno comments on Cuban Jose Marti's "War Journal," noting that it "bursts into nature," freed from line breaks to explore the wildness of a Caribbean landscape and of war. In the poems of Mexican Angelica Tornero and Antonio Ochoa, whose works appear in English across the page from the original Spanish, a specific sensual world is deeply felt as it also is in "Highest Rainforest" by Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo of Madagascar. While the linguistic experiments of Alec Finlay and Stuart Mills, both of whom are English, allow them to name natural images, their general allusions to field and garden are trans-Atlantic. North Americans, Alistair Noon and Kate Schapira, however, explicitly evoke Wuhan and Xiantao, China, in their writings—Noon through reference to myth, history, and contemporary environmental destruction,

Schapira through transcribing the changing contexts for a riverbank biking trip, a baby, a half-eaten peach. Writings by other North Americans in *Ecopoetics* wander the continent, grasping at strange weeds and familiar mushrooms in both city and country, but seeking to connect and explore with natural and unnatural growth in both places. In his poem, "Jerusalem Everywhere You Go," Timothy Bradford identifies the dangers of amorphous globalization which may dissolve into mere exotic travel, warning, "The Amazon tribes remain as remote as the ruins of Paris / or the sands of the Aracama Desert to the permafrost of Alaska. / They disappear like certain Maya Cities, never to deface the New Jerusalem of Zimbabwe."

Several writers in *Ecopoetics* perceive the origins of poetry in the structures, motions, and sounds of earth and human body. As if familiar with aboriginal songlines, Australian poet-essayist, Louise Crisp, claims, "The only way I know to write is to walk," and Bonnie Cassidy, writing of the Australian poet, Jennifer Rankin, finds Rankin's poems, not in archives, but most profoundly in the ever-evolving and flourishing land where Rankin lived. Visiting this land, Cassidy realizes that "The Mud Hut" about which Rankin wrote is not an architectural dwelling, but the earth itself, which, like her poem "transfers reality like water through a cell." North American poets also find walking a correlative for writing ecopoetry. An essay on John Muir discusses Muir, walker, climber, and observer of minute flower and massive glacier, also as poet correlating the patterns in his writing with his recognition of patterns in nature, "plotting his own narrative sequence as a way of tracing the unapparent sequence of lives shaped by the harmonious force and form of glacier flow." Other poet-walkers, Theodore Enslin and Gary Snyder, are also shown to correlate the body walking and breathing not only to the rhythm and meter of poetic lines but also within a particular place. Snyder points out the physical relationship of heart-beat, breath, pace, verse, and feet to poetic tradition. In his stunning essay on Enslin, which is followed by photographs of Enslin's notebooks and his poems, Matthew Cooperman notes that the poems have "an acute performativity" and "an incantatory quality" making their fabric "of the body." Poet Linda Russo, writing on soundscape and generating sound through poetic word play in her own "Achilles' Helix," discusses the defining particularities of sound in any environment and the importance of its evocation in referencing any environment, despite its ephemerality.

Several writers here suggest that the poems in *Ecopoetics* may be understood in relation to energy: they spring from creative energy, and they generate transformative energy—by experimenting with new poetic forms and language, by making change itself their subject, and by their impact on readers. Thus,

although Forrest Gander evades the question of identifying poetry in any essential way with ecology, he nevertheless relates the creation of coal to the creation of a poem in "The Future of the Past: The Carboniferous & Eco-Poetics," asserting that "A poem, even excavated from its context and the time of its writing, is a curiously renewable form of energy." Kyhl Lyndgaard and Gary Snyder expand upon this possibility in their interview in *Ecopoetics*, with Snyder proposing that "the best literature requires the deepest compost." The imagery in both of their poems implies that fire from deep compost—like poetry—warms the bones or lights the night. In his "Ecopoetics Statement," Benjamin Friedlander succinctly tells us that "Language is a / Dumping ground that // Produces its own / Content."

Among poems in the collection explicitly drawing on nature to illuminate transformation are Karen Leona Anderson's "Snowshoe Hare," Stan Apps' "Pumpkins Please," Mei-mei Berssenbrugge's "Green," Tyler Doherty's "R.I.P.," and John Estes' "Mantlepiece." Several of these poems refer to the transformative qualities of death and to the procreative possibilities of new life forms emerging from death. Thus, in Doherty's poem a Christmas bonsai is recycled among the spring iris, and Estes, perhaps like the gnawing saprophytes in his poem, "can't wait to repossess" the skull of a rotting steer carcass. In their poems, Anderson and Apps suggest the interconnections between humans and other living beings. In precise detail, Anderson's poem observes how humans have changed the environment for creatures, such as rabbits and ourselves, for we are not unlike them—"our blood and waste and water" also "shiver through the woods." The implication in Apps' poem, one of the few in this issue of *Ecopoetics* relying on formal meter and rhyme as well as humor, plays with the sense that we are what we eat, and that both pumpkins and poetry make for good eating. Berssenbrugge's long poem is like a walk in the woods, where shifts in color and form caused by light and wind and spatial juxtaposition change her very way of seeing: "The glow is an inner informational process connecting moment to moment in a kind of spontaneous karmic outline, crow in wind, elms."

Rachel Blau DuPlessis' "Draft 72: Nanifesto" is a poem of imperatives, on the one hand, a list of self-help guides for the individual to create a better personal life, on the other, a list of mandates for communities, towns and nations, for the world at large to reform life on the planet. Some of DuPlessis' imperatives are abstract—"Saturate the imperfect moment with intransigent audacity"; others demand new ways of interacting with nature—"Loop your vines between the trees"; "Respect honey, and even more, the bees." All of her imperatives, so emphatically addressed to readers, imply her conviction that the energy of poetry

creates change and can also create community, transcending national and ethnic boundaries, transcending species boundaries while attending to the particular place and the particular creature. In multiple ways, this issue of *Ecopoetics* embraces a similar ecopoetic dynamic. Matthew Cooperman, in his description of Theodore Enslin's work, gives eloquent expression to this dynamic: "The social contract of poetry might be founded on a principle of conservation: on the transference of energy, here to there, then to now, a movement of energy across space-time that locates, proprioceptively the living body of place and person."

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Sandra Steingraber. *Living Downstream: An Ecologist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment*. 2nd Ed. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo P, 2010. 414 pp.

J. Meredith Privott

While our understanding of cancer as a growing global epidemic has increased exponentially since 1997—or, since Sandra Steingraber's impressive volume *Living Downstream: An Ecologist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment* was first published—little has changed in United States environmental or chemical policy. What has emerged over the years, however, is a mounting intolerance against industry laws and practices that are antiquated, and, in many cases, unconstitutional. As Steingraber's decision to publish an updated second edition of *Living Downstream* (in addition to her work being turned into a feature-length documentary film) demonstrates, US readers—academics and non-academics alike—are listening ever more carefully to the writer and biologist who significantly picked up where Rachel Carson left off.

While Steingraber provides a thorough, yet eloquent scientific investigation of the relationship between environmental contamination (with a focus on chemical waste) and cancer, one of the most impressive features of her work is the seamless weaving of her own personal experience with bladder cancer into her investigation, along with the search for her "ecological roots" (xv) that lie at the heart of her diagnosis. Diagnosed with bladder cancer, a "quintessential environmental cancer" (xii), at just twenty years old, Steingraber was confused and provoked by her doctor's questioning if she had ever worked at a tire factory, or in the aluminum industry. An unusual set of diagnosis questions, and her becoming yet another member of her family to be diagnosed with cancer, Steingraber was decidedly compelled to understand what was happening inside her own body, in her family, and most deeply, in the very place she had been raised. As she explains in the preface to her work, beyond her scientific motivation as a biologist is a "deeply personal stor a memoir set on the east bluff of the Illinois River where I grew up" (xiv). It is therefore Steingraber's combined pursuit of her own ecological roots, and of the "unintended environmental consequences" (xiv) of drastic agricultural and industrial transformations taking place across

the United States, that makes *Living Downstream* an inherently strong work of environmental writing.

The second edition of *Living Downstream* extensively explores six new but clear trends that have deepened our understanding of the link between cancer and the environment over the past twelve or so years, and the careful exploration of these new trends in the second edition work cleanly to corroborate Steingraber's original evidence. As Steingraber asserts in the forward to her second edition, we should now acknowledge: that cancer causation is far more complex than we originally thought; that epigenetics, or the study of how substances alter gene expression, is a necessary field for understanding cancer and its link to the environment; that endocrine disruptors (like atrazine, a notorious herbicide and suspected carcinogen) play a role in the formation of cancer cells; that the *time* of exposure in a individual's life (namely, pre- or post-puberty) is just as important a factor in creating cancer cells as is the *amount* in an exposure; that foreign chemicals should not be studied in isolation within the body, as they occur only in *combination* within the body; and finally, that the precautionary principle should be used as an environmental model in every society, and not just in the European Union (xviii-xxi).

Each of the twelve chapters of the text explores a different theme, factor, or element found in the relationship between pollution and cancer (such "Time," "Space," "War," or "Air," "Water," "Fire"), and each chapter provocatively illustrates the challenges now posed by each of the six new scientific findings. What Steingraber most significantly emphasizes throughout her work is just how *elusive* a concrete understanding of the relationship between the environment and cancer is—and really, how elusive that relationship will probably *always* be. The problem—which Carson understood, and which Steingraber profoundly returns to—is that this elusiveness has served as the logic for charging ahead blindly, for complying with dangerous (arguably, criminal) chemical and industrial practices, and for accepting carcinogenic or harmful products as a part of our lives—because there's no proof of harm (yet). As *Living Downstream* details, the reactionary logic of allowing potentially dangerous substances to enter our environments until real harm is demonstrated (a clear recipe for disaster) has shaped the inadequate systems through which we regulate chemicals and their by-products, and their potential for harm. Furthermore, no national or federal cancer registry exists in the US, often leaving states to develop makeshift systems for studying cancer or other environmentally-derived illnesses, which in turn are ineffective in determining where cancer cluster communities may exist.

And yet, though Steingraber thoroughly outlines the inadequacies of current US chemical, industrial, and environmental practices, nowhere in the text does she plead any kind of radical or unreasonable change in policy that could serve as a deterrent for skeptics. She does make a definitive stand against the continued use of non-renewable resources, particularly coal and petroleum; however, as she happily points out, we have finally reached the point where we must find substitutes for those two sources that are responsible not only for climate change, but are also the two main substances that carcinogenic synthetic chemicals are derived from (xxvii). While Steingraber does raise issues of environmental justice very subtly—particularly when she discusses such concepts as "toxic trespass" (34)—some environmental justice advocates may critique Steingraber for not more strongly emphasizing or treating the ethical implications of unjust and disproportionate land use, where certain groups of people (often determined by race and class) typically bear the environmental burden of American society. However, Steingraber fully asserts in her discussion of "ecological roots" and of the precautionary principle in her final chapter, "Ecological Roots," that a "human rights perspective" is really the only tolerable view through which we can begin to change our current systems of regulation (279-80). Furthermore, a full treatment of the relationship between environmental justice, the environment, and cancer is another work entirely into and of itself. Steingraber only asks her readers for a *real* consideration of the link between cancer and environment, and as it is impossible for any reader to finish *Living Downstream* without questioning the very way we live our lives and how we arrived at the problems we now face, she absolutely accomplishes her original goal in writing this work, and in publishing an updated second edition.

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Ian Marshall. *Walden by Haiku*. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 2009. 239 pp.

Shaun O'Reilly

The presumption seems to be growing old, the one that claims we have exhausted any new, exciting, and critically relevant readings of Henry Thoreau's *Walden*. At least Ian Marshall has set out to uncover the secret that, apparently, there is still more treasure there. Marshall's unique take on *Walden* is one that honors the traditional notions of the book while simultaneously pushing the boundaries of its understanding, witnessed in the book by Marshall's actual rephrasing and repositioning of words to create "new work" (poetry) from the prose. He tackles the question in his eloquent introduction, posing, "is it a new *Walden* I present here? No, I would not claim that—but haiku teaches us to notice and appreciate anew what is old and familiar to us" (xxiii). So Marshall's incorporation of this unique poetic form immediately brings innovation to his analysis; he convincingly accomplishes this "looking anew" while taking a glance at old, faithful *Walden* through the importantly beautiful, simple, and natural lens of Japanese haiku.

The book is particularly balanced, with equal explanations and elucidations on the history of *Walden* and the history of the haiku form. One senses the passionate connection Marshall has to each aspect of the book and his appropriate handling of specific ideas and terms draws the two together here in a way that is personally reflective of the author and highly interesting and accessible to readers. In fact, it is difficult to categorize the book as being *solely* related to *Walden*; it is an informative introduction to haiku as much as it is anything else. In some ways, *Walden* can seem to be simply the most perfect template with which to exercise and teach the elements of haiku. With different intentions, but as the same book, this work could easily be titled "*Haiku by* Walden." Ultimately, this balance undergirds the relational and relevant play of Marshall's textual analysis of both Thoreau's masterpiece and haiku form.

Also, one can easily detect that Marshall has done extensive research of these texts. The layout of the book reflects the careful handling of ideas and concepts related to such a famous American iconoclastic text and such a regarded form of poetry. After the effective and enlightening introduction, the book offers the

chapter "*Walden* by Haiku," proceeding chapter by chapter through Thoreau's *Walden*, and offering different haiku derived from each. Here, Marshall uses the space after the poems to share insights into aspects of the haiku form. He is not yet relating how he came to one or another exact wording for a "Thoreauvian haiku," but more illuminating how different aspects of the poetic form function in different ways, and how Thoreau's famous work (and the beautiful phrases therein) intimately connect with the tenets of haiku. So the early parts of this book share Marshall's haiku from *Walden* but concentrate on form, word-choice, and the particular *feel* of haiku as text. His first chapter focuses on these distinct, important elements of haiku poetry, specifically as they relate to the various haiku he has come to, and formed, within chapters of *Walden*.

Marshall states that the "Sounds" chapter of *Walden* perhaps presents the most "haiku moments" (21). As haiku is about sensing what is *outside* one's self instead of continually looking *inward*, Marshall argues that readers can sense this same transition in the successive pages of *Walden*, and that Thoreau is most dramatically making this turn in "Sounds." Thus, Marshall offers his strongest haiku derived from the "Sounds" chapter: "furniture on the grass / white sand and water / scrubbing the cabin floor" (17); "a winter morning / cockerels crow clear and shrill / the earth resounding" (21).

Reading Marshall's creations of Thoreauvian haiku is an interesting practice for those familiar with *Walden*. One's knowledge and intimacy with the prose-origin of *Walden* lends that these new poems do not seem to stand on their own quite as competently as when they are considered together, in the way Marshall offers them, creating a particular portrait of haiku collections. One is not necessarily struck by this or that poem, but perhaps more by the paired, intentional compilation of Thoreau's poetic words arranged on the page together. It is fitting to consider them chapter by chapter (per *Walden*), and the convincing organization speaks to the author's intuitive connection to the original American text as well as his instincts for organizing its poetic form in a manner that adequately compliments both the "old" and the "new."

The second full chapter of Marshall's book now turns to explicate the excerpts from *Walden* that have been "translated" into haiku for this book. Through this process Marshall observes that "the most important ideas of *Walden* generally find expression in the most haiku-like language, language that relies on concrete diction and imagery, with frequent juxtaposition of images" (xvi). So in "part 2" of the book Marshall points to sources and gives commentary on how these passages of *Walden* sparked thoughts and images of haiku in his mind. As much as the previous chapter focused on elements of

haiku, this section focuses on a sort of poetic deconstruction of Thoreau's prose, relating the process of hunting for the passages that might function especially well in this new form and work. The feeling is that including this section was not necessarily a *must* for Marshall, in terms of the creation a book. Perhaps by attaching pictures of the pond to accompany the newly formed poems, *Walden by Haiku* might have functioned well as a coffee table book. But, the ecocritic endeavors to offer a deeper look into his work within this section by detailing every choice phrase for the poetry. And it is this depth of explanation that presents yet another compelling facet to this book, allowing it to function in delightfully accessible and critically important ways all at once. Here Marshall finds an avenue to comment in new and particular ways on interpretations of *Walden*. It is work that needs to be done, and Marshall's fresh form of analysis reflects his critical style, one that consistently counters a more monotonous tendency of some traditional approaches.[1]

Thus, it seems that readers receive exactly what is advertised in Marshall's unique handling of *Walden*. His engaging presentation of prose, poetry, and commentary uniquely fits together to offer something colorful to Thoreauvian studies and to the work of viewing or understanding traditional American literature through a comparatist lens that senses new connections by considering other cultural literary traditions and forms. This book is an excellent example of how to perceive foundational aspects of literary works in new ways, while expertly showing one's work. It will be difficult to argue with Marshall's concoction of originality, textual commentary, and cultural history. And it is hard to ask for more in one ecocritical book.

1 See Marshall's creative use of "narrative scholarship" in works like *Story Line: Exploring the Literature of the Appalachian Trail* and *Peak experiences: walking meditations on literature, nature, and need.*

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The Federalist Papers. Edited by Ian Shapiro, with Essays by John Dunn, Donald Horowitz, and Eileen Hunt Botting. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2009. 579 pp.

By James Kusch

The Federalist Papers (FP from now on) consists of eighty-five letters originally published in New York newspapers between October 1787 and August 1788 under the pseudonym of Publius. The FP were the collaborative labor of three men who sought to gain popular support for ratification of the new US constitution: Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison. Ian Shapiro, the editor of this book, remarks that Publius was a political creation. Publius was named for Publius Valerius Publicola, the consul who restored the Roman republic following the overthrow of the last Roman king, Tarquin the Proud. This new edition serves as a forum for three scholars from the American political science community—John Dunn, Donald Horowitz, and Eileen Hunt Botting—to share their insights about the FP.

John Dunn argues that the FP gave evidence in its time on the future shape of collective democratic thought. He argues that never before had authority been grounded in public reasoning *sans* social or cultural preconditions. Dunn argues further that the FP set a strategy whereby the people were themselves distinguishable from the government. The people were essential for authorizing the constitution, but at the same time were excluded from exercising the power to govern (493). Dunn writes that at the core of agreement on the FP among its authors were two judgments: 1) a peremptory requirement for a strong central government, and, 2) the hope of establishing a stable republican regime that might endure indefinitely. One might argue that the main concern of the three authors was whether the constitution would be acceptable at all. From a 21st century point of view, Jay, Hamilton, and Madison were risk-takers who presented the constitution and its preamble as a done deal. The problem remained, however, how to sell it and how to persuade the body politic that they were in this together with the authors for the duration.

Donald Horowitz writes about how the authors of FP appreciated the need for the constitution to be mediated by the people and explains how the FP brought self-interest into harmony with the common interest. Other historians of

eighteenth-century America such as Gordon Wood and Willi Paul Adams claim, conversely, that the American idea of popular sovereignty was "the decisive achievement of the American political imagination," that occurred at one of the most creative moments in the history of political thinking. Horowitz avers an American skepticism of the FP that persists into the twenty-first century. He claims that the FP have had broad appeal throughout the world in terms of choices which emerging states have made in forming constitutional governments. Horowitz tells us that the FP was a mimetic device for constitutional design which produced various effects in nation-states that he characterizes as diverse or homogenous. A different argument might suppose that the conscious willing of itself into political existence would denote a people as a unified group capable of political action. Horowitz makes the spurious claim that certain debates present in the FP have continued to "play out" in a "third-wave democratization" that began in 1984. This claim is a reach in implying that somehow the authors of the FP held a prescient view supportive of Samuel Huntington's thesis about a "clash of civilizations" (see endnote 24).

The third essay, by Eileen Hunt Botting, takes up questions of representation rights among the largest majority of the time—women. Did the legitimacy of the republic rely on the joint participation of both sexes? She closes her argument by calling for a full public interrogation of patriarchy, hoping that the design of a truly democratic government which recognizes the contributions of all its citizens might serve as an inspiration for modern feminism. But Botting's argument begs certain questions such as, How does a people give birth to itself as a collective subject? Or, who actually has the right of laying down the rules of a new society? How does a body politic declare its will? If "the people" are properly understood, how are they subject to laws? Should they *all* give birth to the law that governs them? Finally, ought the origin of law to be unanimous, since mere majority rule most probably relies on a prior rule or agreement? –as in the case of the FP, e.g., either the Articles of Confederation or possibly Rousseau's *Social Contract.*

This edition of the FP offers familiar primary-source material for the student of eighteenth-century America. Editor Ian Shapiro claims that the three additional essays explore the composition of the FP, discuss recent experiments with democracy and constitution-making around the world, and explain how early advocates of women's rights responded to eighteenth-century debates that were configured with the FP. But there is little that is new about the FP in the three essays by Dunn, Horowitz and Botting. Their arguments are neither nuanced nor do they reflect much of what could be called a critical perspective. One could hope that essays written about the FP might, at a minimum, isolate

the dilemmas faced by the lawgiver/founders at the quasi-mythical time of constitutional creation. These were profound dilemmas concerning self-authorization that can be associated with constituent moments wherein a new power usurps the reigning norm, rule, and authority. There is nothing in the essays that indicates the extent to which democratic politics claims to speak according to self-authorized principles. In brief, the times in which the FP were composed were exceptional times and the authors were exceptional thinkers. The rules they modified with the writing of the FP were less interesting than the exceptions they produced. Political writing that would give attention to the acts of self-authorization in the writing and ratification of *The Federalist Papers* would add much to our understanding of the times and of the thought that the times produced.

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Andrew S. Finstuen. *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich in an Age of Anxiety.* Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 2009. 255 pp.

Andrew Polk

In *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants*, Andrew Finstuen challenges both the scholarly and popular notion of post-World War II American religion as having been shallowly subservient to pervading notions of American superiority and the "American way of life." While not denying that this "captive revival" existed, Finstuen insists that there was an additional theological revival that rivaled, and openly critiqued, the former. He locates the heart of this theological revival in the way the Christian concept of original sin spoke directly to American's deep anxiety over both the physical threats of the cold war and the angst created by America's sudden material wealth. According to Finstuen, the key proponents of original sin—Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich—were able to connect to the American populace on a deep and profound level, giving rise to a vital revival of theological reflection and engagement among the laity. These "lay theologians" thus wrestled with America's place in the emerging world order as they simultaneously grappled with their own, seemingly contradictory, state of existence.

Finstuen divides the work into two parts. The first section recounts the general state of affairs in post-war America and the Protestant Church's attempt to engage America's increasing angst. Finstuen first details the nature of America's "Age of Anxiety," and then proceeds to establish the way his three exemplars engaged that age. The third chapter examines each man's conception of original sin and the way all three differed in specifics, yet agreed that the American, and, indeed, universally human, predicament could be explained by the pervasive element of sin as a fact of human existence. Finstuen's second part then recounts each man's engagement with his popular audience, exploring the way he integrates theology into counsel and the way their audiences integrated the leaders' theology into their own thought and actions. This second section is by far the more interesting and informative of the two, and Finstuen's masterful

amalgamation of primary sources and insightful analysis is sure to impress both his scholarly and popular audiences.

Finstuen's work is not without weaknesses—most notably his tendency to overemphasize the commonality of his three subjects—yet these are far overshadowed by his excellent prose and superb ability to capture both the rational processes and intimate pathos of his subjects. *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants* surely disputes the notion of post-war American religion as wholly captive to American culture, yet its lasting influence will more likely be its challenge to the false dichotomy between elite intellectualism and popular experience. This dichotomy is most often expressed in the academy through the distinction of theology and lived religion or intellectual and social history, depending on one's particular academic discipline. Finstuen convincingly demonstrates, at least in the decades between 1945 and 1965, that the American laity were intimately involved in the process of theological discernment. Future scholars would do well to follow Finstuen's example and pay close attention to the way formal theology was, and still is, received and assimilated by the general populace.

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Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Tocqueville, and the Modern Prospect. By Paul A. Rahe. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2009. 374 pp.

Jonathon W. Moses

In *Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift*, Europe and America have come to suffer under a spirit of uneasiness, discontent and world-weariness. If we are to believe this book's cover jacket, Professor Paul A. Rahe can help us understand the meaning of our modern political malaise by examining the nature of our liberal democracy through the work of Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Tocqueville.

If this is the objective, then the project fails. Indeed, it is doubtful that it could ever succeed, as the world has changed in important ways since Montesquieu, Rousseau and Tocqueville took quill into hand. There can be no doubting the remarkable insight and contribution that these men conveyed to modern thought and our understanding of democracy—but it is folly to expect them capable of clairvoyance, and it is problematic to claim that liberal democracy suffers from a despotic disease. The latter project, alone, would require a monograph of its own to convince more critical readers.

Professor Rahe's book can be fruitfully divided in two. The bulk of the book offers an impressive reading of these three fundamental thinkers for the modern democratic project. Rahe's grasp of each author's work, their individual biographies, and the context in which they wrote, is impressive, even brilliant. I was mesmerized by the story he tells—his breadth of scope, eruditeness, and grasp of context—along with the rather surprising ways in which he is able to link the lives of these three influential thinkers.

This part of the book comes highly recommended as a text for graduate course work in democratic thought, political theory, or French intellectual history. Indeed, Professor Rahe is able to challenge many conventional interpretations by employing careful, contextually anchored readings from each of the three authors. For example, my own prejudices about Montesquieu—based on an admittedly Americano-centric reading (e.g., by the way he is employed by both Federalist and anti-Federalists alike)—were drawn out in the open by the forcefulness of Professor Rahe's careful reading. In this light Montesquieu ceases

to be the naïve admirer of English institutions, as Rahe points to the role that "terror" plays as the driving principle in Montesquieu's England—a place, Rahe notes, that has an "undeniable kinship with despotism" (37).

From these careful readings, we learn how the modern intellectual project can be understood with reference to a common theme or assumption about humankind. Montesquieu, Tocqueville, and Rousseau are each discussed in light of their willingness to accept a more plastic, or flexible conception of man, where the modern man's state-of-mind is "decisively shaped neither by sin nor by nature as such—but by the form of government under which he lives" (117). Following Rousseau, each author acknowledges the "infinite *perfectibilité* of man" and the democratic state can be seen as a mold by which modern man is formed. For Professor Rahe, it is this focus on the perfectibility of man that is "emphatically modern" (119).

So far so good. From this point of pivot, we might expect the closing chapters of the book to show us examples of how modern liberal democracies continue to embrace such a positive and pliable notion of humankind. In contrasting this conception of human nature against those that emanate from the more fundamentalist corners of the Islamic world, for example, we might begin to wonder whether modern liberal democracy has really veered so far from its roots. Similarly, this point of comparison might have been used to shine light on the way in which different political currents within contemporary liberal democracies employ competing conceptions of human nature to frame their political strategies (as in, e.g., George Lakoff's *Moral Politics*).[1] In this light, it is less certain that our own political world can be characterized as "emphatically modern."

Unfortunately, the closing chapters of the book take a different, more destructive, turn. While the first 220 pages build an impressive and reasonable argument that draws heavily on careful, detached, and contextually sensitive analyses, the closing sixty pages skip across recent history with shocking disregard for the complexity of the issue under study. While I read the first part of the book with great admiration and respect for the author's vigilant study and deliberation, I found myself shrinking in embarrassment over Rahe's cathartic outburst of political rhetoric, remarkable exaggeration, and simplistic readings of contemporary politics.

1 Lakoff, George. *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*. 2nd ed. Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 2002.

For Rahe, Europe today suffers from an obnoxious disease, the main symptoms of which include a long list of worn clichés: stagnation, fanciful visions of social democracy, a haunting agnosticism, a lazy and unproductive work force (incapable, even, of reproducing itself), and a place where "women nonchalantly arrange for the extermination of their offspring as yet unborn" (240). Likewise, Americans are chided for abandoning their religious and moral heritage and for rejecting their spirit of individual responsibility (270). Rahe would have modern man surrounded by tyrannical ambition and servile temptation; despotism lies behind every corner. In these closing pages, I longed for an editor that might step in and save the author from himself.

The biggest part of this book is a remarkable contribution to our understanding of three very influential thinkers in the Western canon of political thought. These chapters describe and interpret Montesquieu's, Rousseau's and Toqueville's contributions to the modern democratic project in a way that is accessible and useful to a very wide readership. This work is to be commended and recommended. But the contribution of the closing chapters, and the attempt to extend the work of these thinkers into the modern era, is more suspect, speculative, and ultimately unsuccessful. It is a shame that this polemical outburst was allowed to taint what is otherwise an outstanding contribution to our understanding of Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Tocqueville.