

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 19th-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,

Men Beyond Desire), and the much-contested separate spheres model, which he reasonably defends not as an ironclad and impermeable structure (a certain overlapping of the male public and the female private worlds has long been acknowledged) but rather as a functional one that fosters rigid programs of homosocialization. With special reference to nineteenth-century health reformers like Sylvester Graham and John Todd (usefully discussed in the first chapter), much emphasis is placed on the “compulsory nature of homosociality” (18) that segregated subjects on the basis of their maleness or femaleness, producing both oppression and forms of gender resistance which often took on homoerotic overtones. On the other hand, Greven laments that the excessive weight on historical materialism in recent approaches to sexual history has obscured the crucial role played by desire in nineteenth-century literature and culture, a role he means to restore by treating desire in the properly psychoanalytic sense of an emanation of the unconscious and of an intrinsically inexhaustible demand.

The first two chapters revolve around the conceptual cluster of phallic imagery. Following his endeavor to not “apply” psychoanalytic theory to pre-Freudian texts but rather to “compare” the findings of the former to the sexual turbulence registered in the latter (4), in Chapter 1 Greven juxtaposes the health reformers’ railings against onanism, Lacan’s notion of the phallus as a signifier, and Margaret Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. The author’s programmatic aim is to show that Fuller’s major treatise, even as it echoes the conservative critics’ rhetoric about the ruinous effects of male (masturbatory) sexuality, anticipates Lacan and Irigaray in its critique of phallogocentrism. The most valuable insights, however, seem those concerning Fuller’s unconventional interpretation of Greek mythology and her empowerment both of the lone woman and of socially and sexually marginal figures like the old maid and the bachelor. In Chapter 2, Edgar Allan Poe’s story “Ligeia” serves as a cue for discussing the concept of the “phallic feminine”, which the author sees as incarnated in the story’s protagonist. Greven goes on to explore this concept through sustained, confident readings of Barbara Creed’s theory of the monstrous feminine in horror films, Freud’s essays on “Fetishism” and “Medusa’s Head”, Lacan’s “The Signification of the Phallus” and De Lauretis’ and Žižek’s rereadings of both Freud and Lacan.

Chapter 3 is probably the most convincing and illuminating, and the one that best exemplifies the book’s thesis about the coupling of “gender protest” and “same-sex desire” in antebellum writings. Greven singles out an

understudied work by Fuller, *Summer on the Lakes*, and provides a thorough context for both the problem of (proto)lesbianism in the nineteenth century and for the autobiographical “Mariana” episode in that book, which is examined in depth. The author persuasively maintains that in the homosocial school milieu portrayed in the story, Fuller focuses on an entire array of deviant gender attitudes, comprising elements of rage, pride, and narcissism: as a striking figure of alterity, Mariana embodies them all. A discussion of Freud’s theory of the narcissistic woman and its feminist rereadings sheds further light not only on the gender nonconformity but also on the finely reconstructed same-sex dynamics of the story, whose significance is expanded by apt references to Fuller’s own homoerotic attachments. The chapter also locates theatricality and mourning as crucial sites for the elaboration of both gender and (homo)sexual identities, recurrent concerns in the book that get special consideration in the discussion of Poe’s *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* in Chapter 4. The foregrounding of Herman Melville’s *Redburn* in Chapter 5, on the other hand, allows the author to elaborate on another frequently mentioned and generative issue, the role of race as a coded discourse for conveying and negotiating gender/sexual difficulties (the latter ranging here from allusions to sodomy to queer desire as registered by the novel’s eponymous hero).

Despite its rich suggestiveness, knowledgeable scholarly discussions, and complexity of framework, the book’s shortcomings are evident in last chapter, devoted to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*. Greven’s challenging argument contends that Hester Prynne’s underrated erotic desire not only makes her a queer figure but confers a “queer potentiality” (198) on the whole novel, countering both Hester’s internalized misogyny and Hawthorne’s own tragic vision of gender. Her commitment to her desire for Dimmesdale is what brings her back to the site of her persecution, Greven asserts against “conservative” interpretations of the novel’s ending (Sacvan Bercovitch’s *The Office of The Scarlet Letter* is the polemical target here). Although the attempt radically to refresh our perception of Hawthorne’s masterpiece is brave, and the correlated argument about Pearl as a pre-Oedipal queer/phallic girl very intriguing, the contention concerning “the lesbian thematic of the novel” (218) appears far-fetched. Assertions such as “the depth of Hester’s obsessive, even frightening sexual need” (202) and the “startling suggestion of same-sex desire” (218) – which are in themselves highly problematic considering Hawthorne’s complex interweaving of different historical perceptions – rest on very thin, if any,

textual evidence. In fact, the whole chapter downplays literary and historical analysis in favor of theoretical arguments (not only critical readings of the novel but also Freud on narcissism and hysteria). Perhaps sensing the risks inherent in the arduous enterprise of using the psychoanalytic lever to name matters that the texts in question convey only in covert, coded forms, Greven had prudently asserted in the Introduction that he did not intend to “privilege desire over history” (29). The impression is that on the spur of the author’s militant investment in his revisionary project, this is sometimes the case. If it succumbs to this temptation, the book is nevertheless rich in fine analyses and brilliant suggestions, which will prove useful to scholars of the nineteenth century.

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Ludwig, Sämi and Nicoleta Alexoae-Zagni. Eds. *On the Legacy of Maxine Hong Kingston. The Mulhouse Book. Contributions to Asian American Literary Studies 7*. Zürich and Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2014. 347 pages. ISBN 978-3-643-90299-3.

For almost forty years, from the stunning debut with *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Childhood Among Ghosts* (1976) to the latest—and last if we believe the author herself—more meditative text *I Love A Broad Margin to My Life* (2011), Maxine Hong Kingston has continued to challenge her readers’ notions of what fictional genres should look like, moving freely between the autobiographical and the imaginary. Her texts are frequently taught in university courses and they continue to garner the attention of scholars and critics worldwide. The collection of essays published under the title *On the Legacy of Maxine Hong Kingston. The Mulhouse Book* (2014), edited by Sämi Ludwig and Nicoleta Alexoae-Zagni, is a recent and most welcome addition to existing Kingston scholarship.

The essays in this volume have their basis in papers presented at the first conference dedicated solely to the work of Maxine Hong Kingston, held at the UHA Mulhouse in Alsace, France, in 2011. In the introduction to the volume, Sämi Ludwig defends the editors’ decision to publish the conference proceedings, and thus going “against the grain of most academic publishers nowadays, who look down on conference volumes. This is why we call it *The Mulhouse Book*. The chronotope is real. Time and place matter.