

southern, frontier, early American, and other subgeneric variants – or are the trappings of terror so all-pervasive that “the tradition of the American novel” may be considered to be, in Leslie Fiedler’s uncharacteristically cautious phrase, “almost essentially a gothic one”? As the title of Teresa Goddu’s important new study suggests, her answer is closer to Fiedler’s, yet her call for a thorough reevaluation of the place of gothic writing in American literary history is predicated upon a break with many of his overly psychological assumptions. For Goddu the gothic marks the site at which the signs of America’s irredeemably violent past erupt into the republic of letters, and its literary effects are all too vividly real, bringing back to life the horrors of a slave economy and the wholesale slaughter of indigenous peoples. Although she variously refers to the gothic as a “genre” or as a “complex historical mode,” it most often appears as a special kind of rhetorical structure or discourse that permits unspeakable things to be spoken, and this means that Goddu is frequently concerned with texts that possess gothic elements but which would not normally be classified as gothic *per se*. Thus some unexpected examples can be found alongside *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and *Arthur Mervyn*: St. John de Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* with its haunting image of a caged slave whose eyes and cheeks have been picked away by birds, for instance, or John Neal’s novel *Logan* whose mounting scenes of carnage push the assertion of national identity to its limits. Goddu moves from early American narratives to case studies of Poe’s engagement with national ideologies of race; the female gothic and the nineteenth-century marketplace; and the links between Harriet Jacob’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and gothic romance. And in her thoughtful introductory remarks on Richard Wright’s *Black Boy* and her brief closing discussion of Toni Morrison and others, Goddu suggests that African-American writers have displayed an intense, though also deeply ambivalent, predilection for the gothic that is rooted in the difficult, perhaps finally impossible, endeavour to transform a painful history into “a usable past.” But at this point her attempt to build a bridge between nineteenth- and twentieth-century writing suggests that a larger, even more nuanced, *Gothic America* is struggling to emerge from this short and densely argued book.

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Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, £37.50). Pp. 271. ISBN 0 8122 3399 9.

It is possible that in the port towns of the Atlantic seaboard, during the last decade of the eighteenth century, more Americans celebrated the French Revolution than the Fourth of July or Washington’s birthday? The rites and symbols of public festivals both divided and united Americans in their celebration of their country’s revolutionary heritage and new-found republican ethos. Dr. Newman’s impressively researched and elegantly written interpretation of popular culture and political mobilisation is a major contribution to scholarship on the early American republic. His intellectual debt is not to the historians of “high politics” but to the likes of Alfred F. Young, Jesse Lemisch, Gary

B. Nash, and Paul A. Gilje, who have written on the lives of those ordinary and obscure Americans who took part in crowd action or joined parades or engaged in other such demonstrative activities. Newman ably and clearly delineates the continuities and discontinuities in ritual culture from the late colonial and revolutionary periods onwards, and provides a stimulating account of political consciousness during the 1790s: detailed attention is given to how Americans learned to celebrate Independence Day, the French Revolution and French victories in the Revolutionary Wars of America and Europe; its last analytical chapter is concerned with the symbolism and political emblems that informed “everyday discourse.”

Not all Americans, of course, could either participate in or watch these rites, though many could read about them in the newspapers. But, to varying degrees, all Americans were represented in the festivals and street parades, or seized for themselves the opportunity to participate: white, black, rich, poor, male, female, and urban and rural; all claimed or reclaimed public space as a locale for the expression of opinions on some of the great domestic and foreign issues of the day.

Competition to control festivals, and thereby shape ritual culture, was a national partisan issue. It helped to divide Americans into Federalists and Democratic-Republicans. But it was the Democratic-Republicans, the party of Jefferson and the forebears of Andrew Jackson, who came to enjoy a “partisan hegemony” in determining how Americans commemorated the Revolution and the Republic. By 1801, when Americans thought of the Fourth of July they no longer, if they ever did, equated revolutionary idealism with an inclusive republicanism which crossed boundaries of race, gender, and wealth.

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