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The View from the Masthead: Maritime Imagination and Antebellum American Sea Narratives

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Hester Blum. The View from the Masthead: Maritime Imagination and Antebellum American Sea Narratives.
The View from the Masthead: Maritime Imagination and Antebellum American Sea Narratives by Hester Blum
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the language of commerce to which it was "wedded," a devil's pact that was unavoidable for a community that wanted the bonds of friendship to miraculously coexist with the scales of hierarchy. Commerce and contract provided a language to make the two appear reconcilable, but as chapter three suggests, reading the tragic death of female friendship in Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797), when friendship and hierarchy (capitalism, sexism) coexist, hierarchy will win, every time. Friendship is reduced to a "ghost" haunting the early American landscape.

In many ways, I found the final chapter on Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* (1826) and Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* (1827) to be the most revelatory. Here the "ghosts" of friendship are brought, temporarily, back to life, allowed to explore fully their possibilities in the cross-racial friendship between Hawk-eye and Chingachgook, a nostalgic fantasy of "interracial friendship that simultaneously appalls and ennobles us" (p. 163). As Schweitzer convincingly reads Hope Leslie, then, the novel is not a utopian argument for inclusion and the radical possibilities of friendship, a familiar reading of the novel, but a rejection of Cooper's nostalgic fantasy of the same. But it is a rejection that works to ultimately clear the ground for future possibility for a more meaningful and honest friendship in and with difference.

In truth, I wished that there were time enough for a fuller consideration in the epilogue of the issues raised in the introduction: the stakes of friendship in the new media age of social networking and digital communities. One senses throughout the book the relevance of the contemporary revitalization of the term "friend" in the twenty first century. And I cannot help but hope that Schweitzer might consider letting herself put aside her impressive and important archive in a follow-up volume to fully meditate on the theoretical and political consequences of this history for the century that lies ahead, a century in which friendship and difference are in charged contact as never before.

Jared Gardner
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Hester Blum. *The View from the Masthead: Maritime Imagination and Antebellum American Sea Narratives*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2008. Pp. xi, 271. Cloth $59.95, paper $22.95.

While recent maritime historians have investigated the complexities in the lives of seamen and their communities, few literary studies attend to the influence of print culture on the lives of mariners and their participation in the rise of a uniquely American literature. Hester Blum offers a much-needed literary and cultural critic's perspective on this important subject.

Blum focuses on first-person narratives written by mariners from the American Revolution to the Civil War, when the sea was America's fount of economic prosperity and source of national pride. She divides the study into two parts: the first recounts the proliferation of sailors' nonfiction writing, and the second analyzes what she calls the "epistemology of maritime narratives" (p. 2). She examines works by well-known antebellum authors, such as James Fenimore Cooper, Herman Melville, and Edgar Allan Poe, as well as noncanonical mariner authors, such as Nathaniel Ames, David Porter, and James Riley, and reveals fascinating implicit interchanges between the relatively forgotten mariner writers and the canonical authors.

Throughout, Blum attends to a type of vision in sailor writing and thinking she labels the "sea eye" (p. 3). The sea eye describes both the mariner's perspective and a theory of representation. The sea eye is the literal view from the masthead that gives sailors their unique perspective on their maritime world, and on a theoretical level, the sea eye exhibits the reciprocal relationship of reflection and labor. Thus in the first half of the book, she explores the perspective of sailor writers by uncovering the rarely researched literary culture within which they participated: the types of libraries found aboard ships, their reading lists, and common characteristics in typical nonfiction sea narratives. Blum thoroughly investigates how sailors' literary experiences affected their experience as observers, laborers, and writers. For example, Blum turns to Barbary captivity narratives and naval memoirs, asserting that the sea eye allowed them to pass along crucial literary and survival strategies to other sailors who might encounter dangers similar to the experiences of the hundreds of American sailors taken captive during the struggles with North African corsairs leading up to the Tripolitan War. Sea narratives thereafter were a representation of a national spirit, and contributed to the popularity in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s of the mariner memoir, a popularity that respected writers of sea adventures, like Cooper and Melville, took advantage of in such work as *Ned Myers* (1843) and *Moby Dick* (1851).

In the second half of the book, Blum shows how some narratives, such as Melville's "The Encantadas" (1854) exhibit a sea eye which reads and interprets both text and landscape differently than other writers of the nineteenth century. Blum's insightful comparison of Melville's reading of the Galapagos and Charles Darwin's *Journal of Researches* (1839) of the Galapagos reveals how Melville and other sailor writers utilize an epistemology, learned from the sea eye, which relies on labor and the imagination for knowledge gathering. In fact, Blum's analysis deftly shows how the materiality of the subject matter requires what she calls "imaginative labor" (p. 145). The last chapter of the book turns toward the quintessential conjoining of the real and the imagined in a sailor's life: his own death. Culling examples from narratives of the South Sea expedition, Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years before the Mast* (1840), doggerel verses composed by common seamen, and other narratives, Blum shows how mariners daily lived with a death that held the potential for the kind of obliteration of identity that only burial at sea could effect. The effect of that reality tuned their sea eye in such a way that they experienced a challenge to their epistemology in non-fiction writing; with no physical ev-

idence of the dead material self, sailor writers experienced a kind of crisis of understanding, a crisis that remains unresolved in their writing. Aside from the chapter being a wonderful contribution to the burgeoning body of cultural history that addresses the culture of mourning in nineteenth-century America, the chapter is emblematic of the kind of analysis Blum exhibits throughout the book; her overarching conceptual framework never limits the textual complexities of her primary sources, and in fact, opens them up in remarkable ways to the workings of theory, imagination, and historical reality, much as she attributes this talent to the sailor writers who populate her informative study.

Robin Miskolcze
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Edward G. Gray. *The Making of John Ledyard: Empire and Ambition in the Life of an Early American Traveler*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2007. Pp. xiii, 224. $35.00.

John Ledyard—canoeist, short-time Dartmouth student, traveler among the Iroquois of Quebec, Royal Marine, and deserter from the service of King George III—was a solitary voyageur in search of wealth and fame. Although considered by many to be cocky, he put in place the visionary tendency and commercial zeal that later dominated American activities in the Pacific Northwest. Thomas Jefferson, who when minister to France met the young adventurer, liked what he saw in him. Indeed, he thought him a man of genius who had some scientific knowledge and was certainly of fearless courage and enterprise. Jefferson also thought Ledyard had too much imagination.

What gave Ledyard fame and visibility were largely British imperial pursuits. Ledyard had sailed with James Cook on the third voyage to the Pacific, one that opened the secrets of the sea otter trade to China, and Ledyard, at the captain's request had led a small boat party in successful search to encounter Russian traders on the Alaska shore. Ledyard wrote a history of the voyage, and in it he included details of Cook's death in Kealakekua Bay, Hawaii.

Ledyard was keen to lead an expedition in the Northwest sea otter venture but could not find the necessary backers. So he set off on a solitary walk across Russia, destination Kamchatka, where he hoped to find a ship to sail the Pacific to Nootka Sound; his intent was to walk eastward across America to Virginia. Like almost every venture he attempted, it failed. Catherine II of Russia had him arrested within her realms and evicted. Somehow, a newly established British association seeking to find sources of rivers in Africa employed Ledyard's talents. He set off from London for Cairo, then fell ill, and died there—another dream unfulfilled. Thus ended an astonishing life, one that leaves the reader of Ledyard's narratives and various letters quite breathless at the scope and imagination of their author.

Edward G. Gray, in the best biography of this Connecticut rolling stone to date, has tracked down all extant sources, in manuscript form and in print. Ledyard was first the subject of a biography by Jared Sparks (1828) and since has never ceased to be an attractive figure for writers. James Zuk wrote about this American Marco Polo (2005), and Gray has been clear in his statement that while Zuk sought to explain the points of interest that make Ledyard distinct, Gray seeks to explain that of interest that makes Ledyard emblematic. Ledyard may be emblematic of his age, of his times, and of American travelers of that day, but the fact of the matter is that he influenced very few: he put no trading companies in place, inspired no geographical expeditions other than his own, and could not convince Jefferson to give him anything more than paper support. I cannot agree with the author's claim that Ledyard was a colonizer and empire builder. Ledyard may have had aspirations for these roles; he fulfilled neither. But Gray's is the best biography to date. Carefully researched and handsomely written, it takes its place as a reliable and judicious treatment of its subject. Ledyard's flights of fancy have been carefully examined here, and at the end of the day we have a well-rounded and sensible appreciation.

Barry M. Gough
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Edward A. Purcell, Jr. *Originalism, Federalism, and the American Constitutional Enterprise: A Historical Inquiry*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2007. Pp. x, 301. $45.00.

This is a brilliant and novel constitutional commentary in answer to the Rehnquist Court's majority view on "new federalism." The new federalism struck down congressional regulatory acts that violated the framers' supposedly clear and compelling view of limits of enumerated powers. But Edward A. Purcell, Jr., demonstrates that the framers did not have a clear idea of the boundaries of federal and state power. They were "blurred, fractionalized, instrumental, and contingent" (p. 6), in other words, the work of real people in a time of political unrest struggling to fashion an experimental form of government. What is more, the boundaries shifted throughout our constitutional history.

Efforts to create a definition by sheer intellection have led to a compact theory of the Constitution, dual federalism, cooperative federalism, and competitive federalism, to name a few of the most popular conceptions. At the outset and then in the concluding chapter, Purcell applies this insight to the case law of the Rehnquist Court. "Federalism was by its very nature incapable of reaching permanent equilibrium or serving as a determinative constitutional norm."

This book is also a tightly argued essay on political philosophy. Ranging widely and succinctly over the different branches and levels of government, it marshals historical examples and scholarly writings to show that our constitutionalism works precisely because federalism is not a unified definition of national and state powers. Indeed, one of the signal ambiguities of the federal