

## Book Reviews

*The American Elsewhere: Adventure and Manliness in the Age of Expansion.* Jimmy Bryan. University Press of Kansas, 2017. 393 pp. \$39.95. cloth.

Jimmy Bryan's extensively researched work, *The American Elsewhere*, attempts to define the indefinable—the American adventurer and what Bryan refers to as the “American Elsewhere.” In his introduction, Bryan explains that his book “offers cultural-historical perspectives to the study of US expansionism. The elsewhere of the continent represented shifting mental landscapes within which adventurers reconfigured symbologies and recast narratives that rendered remarkable their selves and their worlds” (15). His primary focus is on travelogues—both fiction and nonfiction—as a method of defining manliness in the early nineteenth century and on tracing the use of the adventurer archetype.

In the first chapter, Bryan tries to define both what the adventurer is and how he or she defined the elsewhere. He begins with a description of Timothy Flint's 1829 novel, *Francis Berrian or the Mexican Patriot*, in which the title character leaves home at a tender age looking for adventure out West. Bryan explains that “Flint's novel features an early telling of the emotional aggrandizement and masculine transformation waiting for peril seekers in the North American interiors” (18). He goes on to say that these kinds of adventure novels helped to redefine the American adventurer. Although adventurer used to be an insulting term to describe interlopers and outlaws, now the adventurer—defined in novels like *Francis Berrian*—was a member of the community removed from such low pursuits. Bryan explains later in this chapter that the adventurer stereotype tended to be young and male but that most if not all adventurers defied this stereotype.

Many adventurers sought the elsewhere to awaken a Romantic impulse that could not be attained through art, music, or a walk near Walden pond. Moreover, Bryan argues that adventurers sought to “exceptionalize” their experiences; they “wanted to believe that their fondness for a dire existence distinguished them from their family and neighbors back home” (36).

Others, in what Bryan called the “reckless generation,” sought adventure because of their circumstances at home. Whether they owed a debt, had family problems, or had other reasons, adventurers of this stripe were motivated to go West for personal rather than spiritual reasons. Many of these rootless men who spurned marriage and family life were seen as a threat to traditional American values. Bryan notes, however, that this definition of the adventurer “underscored the perceived incompatibility between domesticity and masculine freedom” (43).

In later chapters, Bryan’s work delves into the multifaceted nature of the adventurer experience. Again, using a contemporary literary work—Charles Wilkins Webber’s 1839 novel *Old Hicks*—Bryan explains that novels like Webber’s not only explain the origin of the adventurer but also illuminate their emotional transformation. “In this telling the adventurer transforms into not only a rugged backwoodsman but also a more feeling man” (162). Bryan is quick to note, however, that these emotional experiences do not diminish the manliness of the adventurer but rather enhance it.

Indeed, many of the reckless generation lament their inability to express emotion because it was either not socially acceptable, or there was no time to do so. The elsewhere offered an outlet for these men and in some cases a male intimacy not found at home. In Lewis Hector Gararrd’s travelogue *Wah-to-ya and the Taos Trail*, the author explains that men continued their boyhood traditions of sharing sleeping accommodations with other men. “This ‘coupling’ or ‘bundling,’ as contemporaries referred to the practice, occurred among traders along the trail or soldiers on the campaign” (168). Many more of the reckless generation lamented male intimacy that did not exist in the elsewhere. Washington Irving Jr. noted of his journey to Pawnee country that a “rough, untrammled [sic] friendship had sprung up between us” but was saddened once it was over because it was utilitarian, calling it “painful to sever” (168).

Bryan's epilogue traces the legacy of the reckless generation, saying that the adventurer impulse died off slowly in the 1840s with the conclusion of the Mexican-American War and the gradual push Westward leading up to the Civil War. He notes its reinvention through several generations after. Immediately after the Civil War, both North and South sought a common definition of manliness in the adventurer, but it was gradually replaced by the gunslinger and cowboy mythos. During the Gilded Age, the adventurer was reborn as a way to reclaim American exceptionalism. By the early twentieth century the qualities of manliness were being questioned, and again the adventurer trope was reinvigorated by no less than Teddy Roosevelt. Bryan's final paragraph concludes that the adventurer trope is constantly reused throughout American history as a way of justifying American expansion, exceptionalism, or imperialism (294).

The scope and breadth of Bryan's work is both academically rigorous and accessible. Peppered throughout are excerpts from a variety of travelogues and adventure novels to help illustrate the author's main point in a given chapter. Moreover, virtually every chapter includes some amount of historiographic context. For a reader unfamiliar with the historiography of the American West, these were much needed and appreciated sections. The epilogue of the book, however, could have been longer. One hoped for a more in-depth exploration of the influence the American elsewhere and the adventurer trope had on later generations.

The casual reader would likely not enjoy Bryan's work. While it is more accessible than other academic books, theses, or articles, it is quite dense. Any student of the American West would benefit from reading this as well as students of gender studies.

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*Consuming Religion*. Kathryn Lofton. University of Chicago Press, 2017. 361 pp. \$29.00 paperback.

Kathryn Lofton's *Consuming Religion* uses the tools of religious studies to investigate the people, the productions, and, especially, the structures of a variety of popular cultural phenomena. Built on a