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## John Ragosta, Religious Freedom

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introduction but fades in the chapters themselves. While I applaud Kilcup's nuanced readings of texts and her resistance to (simply) celebrating ideologically fraught literary works, her contribution lies more in extending ecocriticism into new temporal and generic areas than it does in critiquing the field.

In such an ambitious and multifaceted study, some categories are sure to be underexplored. For instance, in her third chapter Kilcup explores how Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* attributes "character, individuality, loyalty" and "even ... subjectivity" (163) to a nonhuman animal (a dog). A more thorough reading of *Our Nig*'s nonhuman animals might have engaged directly with scholars like Cary Wolfe (who is briefly mentioned in the footnotes) or Donna Haraway (who does not appear in the fifty-six-page bibliography). The relatively minor example in this chapter points to a related, global issue in *Fallen Forests*: some of the longer, more explanatory footnotes would have enhanced Kilcup's discussions in the main text.

Of course, no scholar can include every relevant reference; omissions are inevitable in a book of this scope. *Fallen Forests* is a well-researched text (as its seventy-eight pages of notes and extensive bibliography indicate), and it succeeds in demonstrating the rhetorical complexity of an impressive array of literary texts. When Kilcup does engage directly with contemporary scholars like Kimberly Ruffin and Stacy Alaimo, that engagement is well timed and useful in developing innovative readings of the study's key texts.

The best work in American studies urges scholars in a range of disciplines to conceive of familiar topics – in this case, topics like consumption, embodiment, emotion, agency, gender, and resource wars – in more complex ways. Kilcup's work does exactly this. *Fallen Forests* reminds scholars of American literature, ecocritics, ecofeminists, rhetoricians, and many others that we must leave room for nuanced readings of texts, that we must attend not just to familiar categories like gender and class but also to age and to genre, and that unearthing the roots of ecofeminism and environmental justice can be full of historical – and rhetorical – surprises.

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John Ragosta, *Religious Freedom: Jefferson's Legacy, America's Creed* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013, \$39.50). Pp. 293. ISBN 978 0 8139 3370 2.

"Author of the Declaration of American Independence / of the Statute of Virginia for religious freedom / & Father of the University of Virginia": with these words, Thomas Jefferson famously wished to be remembered on his tombstone. In his new book, John Ragosta presents an in-depth analysis of the second of Jefferson's self-ascribed legacies, his vision of religious freedom. Making a strong case for the continuing relevance of this vision, Ragosta aims at correcting two major misconceptions. First, he demonstrates that the long line of commentators who have reductively identified Jefferson's position as that of an enemy of religion have tended to rely on a "false dichotomy" (3–4) between a "Christian nation" and an entirely secular one. Yet Jefferson's concept of religious freedom worked differently: "While Jefferson demanded a firm wall of separation of church and state," Ragosta argues, "he neither feared nor opposed a flourishing religious society beyond that wall" (30). In a second and methodologically somewhat more complicated step, Ragosta seeks to resituate this

Jeffersonian vision at the center of the interpretation of the First Amendment. Deeply critical of recent attempts to marginalize Jefferson and the Virginia experience in this context, he maintains that Jefferson's notion of religious freedom was crucial both for the genesis of the Amendment itself and for more than one and a half centuries of Constitutional history afterwards. It is because of this doubly important place in American history, Ragosta concludes in a move that may be described as Jeffersonian in more than one respect, that we should continue to turn to Jefferson's vision in our approaches to the relationship between church and state in the twenty-first century.

*Religious Freedom: Jefferson's Legacy, America's Creed* begins with a careful reading of Jefferson's religious reasoning (no contradiction in terms, for Jefferson). In its claim that his ideas on the separation of church and state actually emerged from his deep religious beliefs, the first chapter provides the ground for the book's larger argument for the continuing attractiveness of Jefferson's legacy in today's America. In its thorough investigation of the sources and its nuanced modes of explanation, moreover, Ragosta's examination of Jefferson's religious views is emblematic of the quality of the following chapters, which evolve in roughly chronological order, from a discussion of the Virginia experience (building on Ragosta's 2010 book, *Wellspring of Liberty*) and Jefferson's and James Madison's roles in the history of the Virginia Statute for Establishing Religious Freedom and the First Amendment (read as a "broad restriction on the power of the federal government" (130)) to the impact of Jeffersonian views on the debates about religious freedom in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The first chapter may also be useful here to suggest two possible shortcomings of *Religious Freedom: Jefferson's Legacy, America's Creed*. In his emphasis on the consistency of Jefferson's vision, Ragosta may sometimes overstate his case. Can we be certain, for instance, that Jefferson "believed" in divine intervention and should therefore be classified as a theist rather than a deist (23–24)? It does not seem compelling to go that far, not only because of Jefferson's virtual excision of supernatural events from the Bible, but also because a striking number of his statements on the topic were made on occasions when the move to downplay his personal agency by a conventional appeal to an active providence served identifiable political ends, whether in his inaugural addresses or in his arguments on slavery. Jefferson was under little pressure to decide for or against "supernatural interference" on theological grounds, but he certainly recognized a rhetorical opportunity when he saw one.

Another aspect of Jefferson's worldview that might have been treated with even more care than Ragosta devotes to it is the relationship between Jefferson's vision of religious freedom and his conception of historical progress. This would also have been important for the discussion of originalism in the concluding chapter, which is dominated by terms that are essentially Jeffersonian, also in Ragosta's own prose. In an argumentative overlap that often becomes a problem in Enlightenment studies, Ragosta draws a Jeffersonian circle in which a "break with history" can usher in the need to "start with history" (213), describing the task of today's historians as a matter of distinguishing "principles" (a favorite term of Jefferson's) from the contingent realm of "history." Jefferson's vision of religious freedom, thus understood as a (trans-historical) "American/Jeffersonian principle" in Ragosta's conclusion, appears at the center of a "truly exceptional American doctrine" (217), as America's greatest "contribution" to universal civilization and as "a beacon for others to emulate" (221).

Since Jefferson's exceptionalist narrative of American progress was fraught with highly problematic implications, it remains questionable whether a revival of his self-serving historical claims really helps illuminate the many important insights on religious freedom that Ragosta's valuable book has to offer.

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Christopher Hanlon, *America's England: Antebellum Literature and Atlantic Sectionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, \$65.00). Pp. 256. ISBN 978 0 1999 3758 5.

England was divisive. This, in a nutshell, is the argument of Christopher Hanlon's book about the ways Americans put English culture to use in the antebellum period. Neither a dominant culture that Americans rejected to confirm their "independence," nor a culture that they embraced with devotion, England instead provided material that fueled the contentious rhetorical debates leading to Civil War. Northerners and southerners, Hanlon argues, referenced and appropriated "England" to bolster their disparate causes. To describe this, Hanlon coins the striking term "Atlantic sectionalism" (x). In doing so he redresses a blind spot in transatlantic scholarship: "what is missing," he writes, accurately, "is a mindfulness of how sectionalism both shaped American apprehensions of England and configured itself in relation to these apprehensions" (x). Hanlon traces such apprehensions and configurations through the writing of canonical northern figures such as Hawthorne, Emerson, Child, and Douglass, as well as their less canonical southern peers, including John Pendleton Kennedy, William Gilmore Simms, and Henry Timrod.

A number of discussions stand out as Hanlon examines English medievalism, English aesthetics, transatlantic communication networks, and globalization. He astutely traces the American appropriation of the Saxon-versus-Norman rivalry that defined nineteenth-century ideas about twelfth-century England. New Englanders such as Emerson saw themselves as descending from sturdy, bold, and independent-minded Saxons, while southerners claimed the conquering, aristocratic Normans as their ancestors. Hanlon shows that the plight of the Saxons provided a historical touchstone in debates over slavery, as many figures – from Frederick Douglass to Lydia Maria Child to the (fascinating) novelist Henry Herbert – posited a homology between chattel slavery in the South and the enslavement of Saxons under Norman rule. Another strong discussion is a reading of John Pendleton Kennedy's plantation fiction *Swallow Barn* as an experiment in the picturesque. Originally published in 1832 and revised in 1851 during heightened sectional tensions, the novel harnesses this English aesthetic category in its romanticized portrayal of slavery, in order to "domesticate the wilderness, exalt the perspective of the viewer, and subordinate that which is under view" (111). Hanlon is also very good on the poetry of Henry Timrod, which he situates in the context of the South's global ambitions. He is perhaps at his best, though, in a chapter connecting Preston Brooks's assault on Charles Sumner in the Senate chamber in 1856 to the construction of the transatlantic telegraph cable, which first proved successful in 1858. The chapter makes a number of surprising connections between these two seemingly unrelated events, starting with the material that made them both possible: gutta percha, the rigid natural substance of Brooks's cane and the material that insulated the transatlantic cable. It is a powerful case study