

fosters at the same time “the reader’s interest, sympathy, in some sense even participation in the narrator’s quest” (41). The reader’s curiosity with regard to the narrator’s loss is ignited by the paragraph’s fairy-tale opening of “long ago,” its intimation of the “many ... travelers” spoken to, and the richly allegorical associations evoked by its references to hound, horse, and dove. As Otterberg argues, Thoreau’s paragraph is thus an example of a rhetorical *obscuritas* that “skillfully constructs a text open to a wide array of interpretive possibilities” (60). However, although Otterberg stresses the ways in which Thoreau’s passage invites the reader to actively participate in its meaning-making process, he refrains from seeing its polysemousness as an illustration of (present-day) ideas of semiotic indeterminacy and the arbitrary nature of language. With reference to Thoreau’s Emersonian Transcendentalism Otterberg sees the animal passage as a parable that carries with it an expectancy of truth; its animals serve as vehicles of spiritual ideals, whose recovery is an urgent and shared concern of writer and reader (54).

Otterberg’s review of the reception history of the animal passage as well as his discussion of Thoreau’s rhetorical use of obscurity are convincing demonstrations of the richness of meaning of Thoreau’s text. As Otterberg is well aware, this richness is at the same time grounded in the readers’ almost irrepressible need to link the triad of hound, horse, and dove to some *specific* significations. Even Otterberg himself cannot resist giving Thoreau’s passage a particularly modern twist by arguing that texts may be seen as “ecosystematic,” analogous in their function to that of biological ecosystems (43, 44). Made only in passing, such an inroad to the reading of Thoreau’s animal passage is open to the critique that Otterberg himself launches at earlier attempts, namely that they are not well enough developed and argued to be fully satisfactory – which is to say that Otterberg’s own interpretive suggestion tantalizes more than it demonstrates and convinces.

This is, however, a minor point in this review and certainly also in Otterberg’s own pamphlet. Otterberg’s study is a pleasure to read precisely because it raises a variety of different perspectives and inroads to Thoreau’s *Walden*. Otterberg’s own notes, occupying a third of his treatise, function as much more than sources references; they are illustrations of Otterberg’s continual *conversation* with previous critics and scholars; as such they represent a treasure chest for Thoreauvians. Otterberg’s slim volume thus testifies to his familiarity with Thoreau criticism and functions throughout as a miniature reception history of *Walden* itself. It may be warmly recommended to anyone interested in Thoreau in general and *Walden* in particular.

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Andrew J. Williams, *Liberalism and War: The Victors and the Vanquished*, London and New York: Routledge, 2005. 262 pp. ISBN 0415359801. £65.00

When Felix Gilbert authored his classic study of early American diplomacy a half-century ago, he framed his argument around the debate between Hamiltonian realists and Jeffersonian liberal idealists. The latter, Gilbert argued, expressed the Enlighten-

ment belief that war was not only wrong, but unnatural. Well, yes, but eighteenth-century liberals did not reflexively reject all warfare. We only need remind ourselves that the American liberal revolutionaries fought for nearly seven years to free themselves of British imperial authority. Yet they remained uneasy. They believed that war should be limited to self-defense or to promote Lockean principles of individualism and constitutionalism. War, in other words, must be an extension of morality.

And yet that same liberal United States of America continued in subsequent decades to fight ... and fight ... and fight. A partial list of America's foreign wars includes the undeclared naval war against revolutionary France, wars against Mexico and Spain, two world wars, nasty imperial campaigns in places like the Philippine Islands and, if American critics can be believed, Vietnam and Kosovo and Iraq (twice), not to mention the many, many Latin American interventions. Nor is it only American liberals who have been trigger happy during the last 300 years or so. According to Andrew Williams in this provocative book, so too have European – and especially British – liberals. If some have come close to embracing pacifism, most have quite comfortably supported wars for liberal ends, “to turn tyrannies into democracies,” according to one observer (p. 2).

In a sense, Williams has written two books. The first is an impressive survey of liberal attitudes toward war from the 17th century to 1945. Here Williams, a professor of international relations at the University of Kent, proves to be an unusually perceptive historian. His range is wide, from Locke to Cobden and Mill, to Woodrow Wilson, to E. H. Carr, FDR, and even the British liberals who shaped Tony Blair's approach to the world. In the second book, Williams is more guarded. Here he tackles numerous topics, some historical, some contemporary. These include debates over war reconstruction, reparations, retribution, justice, international criminal courts, and even the twenty-one truth commissions that have recently promoted reconciliation in countries from Argentina to South Africa.

To a significant degree, this second “book” is a work in progress. Historians may disagree about some important questions regarding the American Revolution or World War I, but at least no one doubts who won those wars. The importance of ongoing (in May 2006) conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and of the “War on Terror” are even less clear. William's judgments about the relationship between liberalism and these contemporary conflicts are necessarily tentative, as the author himself admits.

It is impossible to do justice to the many topics that Williams covers in a single review, but a few generalizations are in order. For one, Williams reveals a mastery of the theoretical writings in his field. Impressive, too, is his generosity in crediting the many writers – most but not all liberals – to whom he owes intellectual debts. A few important writers are missing. Tocqueville deserves notice, as does Raymond Aron. Certainly Reinhold Niebuhr deserves more than one fleeting reference. Secondly, much of his book focuses on American liberals and their approach to war. About this Williams offers no apologies. From 1919 to the present, the international influence of the US has been paramount, placing Woodrow Wilson and his political heirs front and center in Williams' framework.

Thirdly, Williams casts a net broad enough to include many different varieties of liberalism. Locke, Cobden, and Mill, he keeps repeating, were consistently non-inter-

ventionist in respect to the conduct of other states; interventionist liberals like Wilson, FDR, Tony Blair, and even George W. Bush capture even more of his attention. Williams is correct to include as *liberals* many who, at least in the U.S., we usually call conservative, including Bush and his neo-con allies. They profess (not always honestly) a program that rests on Jeffersonian democratic principles and Adam Smith's free-market capitalism. Unfortunately, this very broad definition of "liberalism" occasionally threatens to drain the word of meaning at some points in this book.

Williams treats the issue of the motives of liberals as an important sub-theme. Are most liberals motivated by idealism? Can we reconcile liberal ideals with the goals of the "realists" (some liberal, and most disdainful of a foreign policy structured mainly around altruistic ideals)? Is, for instance, American policy in the Gulf mainly driven by democratic theory? By oil? By fear of horrendous weapons of mass destruction or of a destabilizing Islamic fundamentalism? Certainly the efforts of Bush I and Bush II to create a "new world order" have wedded liberalism to foreign intervention in ways that would have repelled many earlier liberals – not to mention many contemporary social-democratic liberals.

Williams covers a lot of territory, perhaps too much. He assesses the arguments among liberals who supported New Deal-like planning for the international community as well as those who argued a case for economic nationalism. In one of his better chapters, he dissects the bitter debates among World War I liberals who addressed the troubling issue of reparations, as well as their heirs after World War II, who learned the (right?) lessons of history and rejected reparations. Yet Williams reminds us that it was not until 1946 that American liberal policymakers finally rejected the harsh Morgenthau Plan that proposed retribution, not reconstruction. He ably covers other subjects: debates over reconciliation, forgiveness, repentance. Some liberals promote trials of war criminals in pursuit of justice. Others fear such trials will undermine the kind of reconciliation that peace requires. Williams admits that there will be no easy resolution of these issues.

Williams is himself a liberal, but it is often difficult to tell exactly where he stands on some of these questions. Nevertheless, he does offer some judgments that seem incontrovertible. He asserts that almost all the liberal leaders who have advocated war have sought to "hang their more controversial actions on the hat-stand of an unimpeachable moral past" (p. 127). He reminds us that some ethical dilemmas concerning both war and reconstruction will continue to divide liberals. He asks, for instance, whether we should renounce "reconstruction" because it may be a cousin of "imperialism," or if we should feed starving children left homeless by war even if this means an extended occupation. And he is surely correct that the answers to such questions will be "based on the political climate of the liberal states ..." rather than on abstract or objective criteria (p. 130). Williams also argues persuasively that war has become less "top-down" and peacemaking more "bottom up" – hence the excessive (?) attention to popular opinion in the liberal democracies (p. 188).

Most importantly, he confronts liberalism's central dilemma: do we undermine the essence of liberalism when we impose liberal solutions (like democracy) on illiberal states? If so, the results might be ugly, which suggests why this is not a cheerful book.

One historian missing from Williams's bibliography wrote: the willingness of America's Cold War liberals after World War II to defend democracy by anti-democratic methods "manured the soil from which the prickly cactus called McCarthy suddenly and awkwardly shot up" (David Caute, *The Great Fear*).

Some final observations. The first third of this book – Williams's broad survey of liberalism and war – provides the best short discussion of the subject that I have ever read. The remaining chapters are not as compelling. Some chapters need careful editing and are not up to the high standards that Williams set in his earlier book, *Failed Imagination*. Williams deserves better from his editors, especially because his scholarship deserves wider attention than academic studies usually receive.

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