

Allison M. Johnson, *The Scars We Carve: Bodies and Wounds in Civil War Print Culture*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2019. 208 pages. ISBN: 978-0-8071-7037-3 (cloth: alk. paper).

The title of Allison M. Johnson's study comes from the following sentence: "The scars we carve with steel or burn with powder across the shuddering land, are scars on the dear face of the Motherland we love" (12), a quote from an 1864 article "Some Uses of a Civil War." It is unlikely that someone has ever heard of this article, because it is written by an anonymous author and published in a popular press. Although texts like this are abundant, they never had the chance to enter the canon of American Civil War literature, and thus failed to be remembered across generations. This is exactly the issue Johnson wants to address with her study: by analyzing the Civil War print culture, and "particularly newspapers and periodicals", she argues for "a fundamental shift in the way we define the Civil War canon and propose a critical turn away from scholarly accounts of silence, disembodiment, abstraction, and unstinting patriotism" (3).

Johnson arrives at her proposed "fundamental shift" by identifying significant works written by nonprofessional authors such as "combatants and noncombatants during and shortly after the war" (4), investigating the meanings of these texts, and therefore, expanding the canon. Her interpretation relies on "Paula Bernat Bennet's hermeneutic approach" (6-7) and attempts to "recreate the experience of reading periodical literature between 1861 and 1865" (7). This way of reading benefits from the "complete digitization of periodicals", and thus one "could read poems and political cartoons not in isolation but as pieces of a larger discursive production arising out of a particular historical moment" (7).

The central criteria for her choice of texts relies on a shared literary subject among these texts: the body, and particularly "traditionally marginalized bodies—those belonging to women, black men, and amputees" (5). Focusing on these bodies, Johnson organizes the analysis into four chapters. Chapter one deals with the female body, and primarily the visual representation of Columbia – Lady Liberty. It argues for a place for American women "in the public and political realms" (11). Chapter two touches upon the question of race, and particularly the wounded bodies of black soldiers and the ragged clothes or army uniforms that they wore. It argues "wounds on black soldier's bodies became metaphors of proven ability, heroic sacrifice, and readiness for citizenship" (60), and the Civil War print culture guided

white audiences “to learn how to trace in the scarred backs and unformed bodies of former slaves the path by which slaves become countrymen and citizens” (70). Chapter three examines two left-handed penmanship contests organized by poet and reformer William Oland Bourne, as well as poems, proses, photographs and engravings from or about the soldiers who lost their right arms in the war. It argues that through the missing limbs and the empty sleeves, disabled soldiers found a way to express patriotic feelings and negotiate manhood. Chapter four examines how narrative texts represent women’s reading of telegraphs, casualty lists, among other things. Johnson coins the term “telegraphic wounding” to define “the process by which news of the war invades the domestic space and corporeally marks female bodies, collapses distinctions between public and domestic, soldier and noncombatant” (123), and other terms such as “telegraphic sentimentality” (135), “invisible bullet” (138), and “spiritual-wounds” (12). She argues that telegraphic communication brings battlefield and home front together and thus complicates binary narratives of the Civil War.

Johnson’s book convincingly demonstrates the importance of these non-canonical works and provokes its reader to envision an alternative Civil War literary canon. However, the body as a category does not conveniently frame the book as a whole. For instance, the body of Lady Liberty is definitely not the same type of body compared to the bodies of wounded or disabled soldiers. The representation of women’s spiritual-wounds in narrative texts radically differs from soldiers’ corporeal wounds that we witness from photos, engravings, postcards, etc. An additional section that provides a working definition of the body would have brought these chapters together in a more convincing way.

It is not only the body that is incoherently defined, parts of the book also make one wonder whether the body is as central as Johnson claims. One example comes from Chapter Three “The Left-Armed Corps”. While she does talk about the body, Johnson does it by talking about empty sleeves, missing limbs, and in her own words, these are “poetic objects” (96). She goes on to discuss “the communicative power of the empty sleeve” (100), “personified (...) missing limbs” and their “agency and discursive power” (110). Here it sounds very much like Bruno Latour talking about objects and Actor-Network-Theory, yet it comes as a surprise that Johnson makes no reference to Latour or any other theoretical texts that address the agency of things or objects.

When it comes to theory, two other references are conspicuously absent

from Johnson's discussion of the body. Johnson claims that the importance of the body—particularly the bodies of the soldiers—lies in its resistance of “erasure and forgetting” and these bodies “haunt Civil War literature” (2). The terms “erasure” and “haunt” are both central to Johnson's analysis of the body. In her 1998 edited volume *Spaces of Their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China*, Mayfair Mei-hui Yang coins the term “gender erasure,” and in his 1993 *Specters of Marx: The States of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* Jacques Derrida develops his theory of hauntology. The former focuses on the question of body and female body in specific, the latter describes a type of ontology that resists the reign of temporality, though their choice of cases are not American Civil War literature. Obviously, Johnson is very familiar with the field of Civil War literature, and she carefully develops her argument based on previous studies from this field. The book is thoroughly researched and well-written, however, one might ask, would it be a more promising book, if she also consults theoretical texts that deal with similar subjects but coming from different fields?

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