this evidence historians of the Middle Period should look forward to its appearance more in hope than in expectation.

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Peter Balaam, *Misery's Mathematics: Mourning, Compensation, and Reality in Antebellum American Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2009, $95.00). Pp. 186. ISBN 978 0 415 96807 2.

Antebellum Americans were obsessed with mourning. Popular literature and public rituals of the period placed more attention upon the mourner than on the deceased. Urban church graveyards gave way to rural cemeteries, such as Boston's manicured Mount Auburn Cemetery. Their landscaped settings appealed to the grieving sentimentalist's concern with appearances, including orderliness, communal grieving, high morals, and civic pride. Peter Balaam deftly shows that not everyone, however, bought into the superficial shows of mourning. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Susan Warner and Herman Melville resisted genteel displays of bereavement. Juxtaposing biographical details with analysis of their work, Balaam examines the somewhat unconventional attempts these authors made to rectify the "disequilibrium of loss" (7).

Ralph Waldo Emerson's nearly inconsolable grief over the loss of his five-year-old son, Waldo, is well known. Balaam examines the role played by Charles Lyell's popular and influential work *Principles of Geology* on Emerson's efforts to come to terms with loss and pain. Emerson found solace in Lyell's idea of the earth as a place of endless, dynamic change balanced by destruction and creation. From this "emblem of compensation" (27) Emerson developed a "geological theodicy" (27) that viewed loss as part of a natural, beneficial order, rather than as an inevitable part of life. These ideas find their expression in the elegiac "Threnody" and the essay "Experience."

The chapter on Susan Warner's moralizing novel *The Wide, Wide World* substantially deepens and revises past critical work by Jane Tompkins and others. Balaam interprets protagonist Ellen Montgomery's struggles as a reflection of Warner's involvement with neo-Edwardian New School Calvinism and a response to the exaggerated expressions of sympathy commonly found in novels of the day. Ellen does not so much demonstrate "feminist resistance beneath the novel's surface piety" as learn that the compensation for mastering "the art of losing" (154) is godly virtue.

The book's final chapter is a fine renegotiation of Herman Melville's engagement with grief and mourning. Melville's exposure to loss came early, with his father's fiscal ruin and sudden death. Balaam examines Melville's interests in the picturesque to show how *The Piazza Tales* may be read, in part, as a parody of Catherine Marie Sedgwick's popular picturesque fiction, particularly the moral perfection gained by her female heroines through the suffering of others. Melville undermines conventions of the literary picturesque with images of grieving women who cause his narrators to shift from objectifying others to objectifying themselves, resulting in "mournful reckonings of self-estrangement in intersubjectivity" (16).

Geology, New School reforms, and the picturesque aesthetic: one finishes the book with the understanding that these disparate responses to grief are complex resistances to nineteenth-century Protestant and societal norms of grieving. Balaam's fresh perspective on mourning in this period reveals that for these authors, at least, "grief is something harder and stranger and, ultimately, more important than their contemporaries necessarily knew" (9), making this densely written study an excellent companion to Karen Haltunnen's now classic book on American nineteenth-century sentiment, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*.

Fordham University ELIZABETH CORNELL

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Noel Polk, *Faulkner and Welty and the Southern Literary Tradition* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008, $50.00). Pp. xii + 207. ISBN 978 1 934110 84 3.

Noel Polk's latest volume is another collection of essays of the kind that has, along with his vast textual and bibliographic work, been the hallmark of his career as a major scholar of United States southern literature and culture. This book is different, however, for these essays do not just unravel original readings of William Faulkner's and Eudora Welty's texts; they are also powerful essays on large issues. With this volume, Polk takes a step toward becoming not just a scholar but an essayist.

Before elaborating on that assertion, let me take a moment to address the scholarly content of the book. It is difficult to summarize, partly because a group of essays naturally lacks the kind of coherence found in a monograph. Furthermore, the title is tenuously appropriate – the book does discuss Faulkner and Welty and even the southern literary tradition somewhat (mostly to show how fraught the idea of such a tradition is), but the title implies a comparison of the two writers within a tradition which the book does not bear out, with the exception of the first essay of the same title that argues that Welty does not just copy Faulkner but presents her own unique vision of the South that requires particular insight for the reader to see. The fact is that the book is more a Faulkner one than a Welty one: eight of the twelve essays are on Faulkner only, with no mention of Welty, and Polk ranges over much more of Faulkner's canon than of Welty's.

Certainly the scholarship is there, and it is original and excellent, focussing on small and often unnoticed details to draw out large readings of texts. Polk offers lucid readings of Welty which serve primarily to show that her engagement with place is much more complicated and less clichéd than scholars' tendency toward overly simplistic readings of her extra-fictional comments on place has allowed. The Faulkner essays are richer: Polk's recognizing meditations and comments on communism in *The Unvanquished* is provocative; his locating homosexuality as a central ghost haunting the McCaslin ledgers in *Go Down, Moses* is illuminating; and his reading of Quentin's ideas about his sexual orientation when he sees Shreve's genitals tightly framed in his own pants is brilliant. If there is a binding thread in the book it is Polk's gentle yet insistent pointing to things that scholars miss in their zeal to apply the latest hot theories to Welty's and especially Faulkner's *oeuvre* while in the process perpetuating the same readings, with their blind spots, that have persisted