

dispensing guidance on problems faced by their followers in the United States, living as they do in an overwhelmingly non-Muslim society (chapter 4, “Shi’i Leadership and America”). He reviews an interesting variety of opinions on matters as diverse as permissible and impermissible types of music, the evidentiary value of DNA, the ritual purity or impurity of non-Muslims, artificial insemination, and euthanasia. The opinions reflect different methodological choices on the part of the *maraji* and thus have a broad significance that transcends the American context.

In sum, a useful book, an original contribution to the burgeoning literature on Islam in America.

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Journal of American Studies, 44 (2010), 4. doi:10.1017/S002187581000191X

John Wigger, *American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, £22.99/\$39.95). Pp. xi + 543. ISBN 978 0 19 538780 3.

John Wigger is a leader in what might be called the Methodist “turn” in American social and religious history during the last couple of decades. The Puritans, it seems, we have always had with us – on both sides of the Atlantic – and Methodism has achieved secular historical notice in its English incarnation from the “Halevy thesis” and E. P. Thompson’s controversial twist on it in the twentieth century. But Wesley’s American followers, despite their meteoric rise to prominence in the early nineteenth century, had been little regarded outside denominational history until relatively recently.

Prompted by the “crossover” attention given Methodism by Donald Mathews, Russell Richey, Nathan Hatch and Mark Noll, a second generation of historians like Wigger, Dee Andrews and William Sutton (all of whom teach in state universities, not in Methodist theological seminaries) has also taken up the challenge. Wigger’s 1998 monograph *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* exemplifies the approach, and so does this splendid biography of Francis Asbury, well-known within Methodism as John Wesley’s primary American lieutenant, but not a flashy figure and rarely given his due in wider circles.

Born, minimally educated, and apprenticed as a metalworker in the English Midlands, Asbury arrived in North America in 1771 at the ripe age of twenty-six as one of John Wesley’s appointed lay “assistants.” He had served in a similar capacity in English Methodist circuits for a scant four years and adapted that itinerant ministry of preaching and organizing in and around Philadelphia, New York and Baltimore, as well as the Delmarva peninsula, Virginia and the Carolinas, and eventually into Georgia, New England and across the Alleghenies. He successfully brokered various deals between the distant authoritarian Wesley and the American Methodists, particularly southerners, increasingly restive for ecclesiastical as well as political independence. Famously electing to stay on through the Revolution, despite the obvious unpopularity of Wesley’s Tory views, Asbury directed the movement’s fortunes from hiding in Delaware when all the other official assistants returned to England, thus earning the respect of the American Methodists. Unsurprisingly,

Wesley tapped him as a “superintendent” (read: bishop) of the fully fledged and independent “Methodist Episcopal Church” created in December 1784. Though outranked by Wesley’s other superintendent and most recent emissary, the Anglican priest Thomas Coke, Asbury asked the assembled preachers in Baltimore for their assent, and received it; he not only knew his colleagues, but understood the developing polity of both the new church and the new nation.

Wigger’s masterful, nuanced portrait is based on deep archival work and contextualized in the history of Asbury interpretation. While not uncritical, his is an appreciative interpretation of the man and the movement. Read Wigger, then, not only for an account of Asbury’s prodigious yearly itinerations of the country and Methodism’s amazing growth under his leadership, but also for the way Asbury interacted with folk in the various regions and subcultures. In particular, note his love–hate relationship with the South – on fire with revival, yet sponsor of slavery and rife with “congregational” ideas and independent-minded folk who chafed at any central authority. Read also for a sense of the bishop’s power, which came neither from scholarly attainment nor even oratorical skill, but from patiently built individual relationships with preachers and laity alike and from disciplined attention to his work and a simple, almost monastic, lifestyle. Clearly valuing the English Wesleyan ethos, he also recognized how North American democratic sensibilities might find “our dear old Daddy” a bit difficult. During his life Asbury succeeded in holding the two poles in a creative tension, but in the generation following his death in 1816 much came undone, regionally, racially, and politically within the church.

Readers may think that 543 pages is more than the subject will bear, but the detail (geographical and even medical as well as social and theological) will convince most that Asbury “redefined the religious landscape of America,” that he built “a large, strictly voluntary religious movement led by non-elites in a pluralistic society” and that “his understanding of what it meant to be pious, connected, culturally responsive, and effectively organized has worked its way deep into the fabric of American religious life” (417). With this study of Asbury and the network of disparate people he superintended over forty-five years we have both the standard biography and a richer understanding of Methodism’s appeal in the new republic.

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Journal of American Studies, 44 (2010), 4. doi:10.1017/S0021875810001921

Brendan Cooper, *Dark Airs: John Berryman and the Spiritual Politics of Cold War American Poetry* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009, £32.00). Pp. 254. ISBN 978 3 03911 861 8.

“Will assistant professors become associates / by working on his works?” All too rarely in the modern university, alas; nevertheless, as the first critical monograph on the poetry of John Berryman to appear since 1987, Brendan Cooper’s *Dark Airs* gestures towards a revivification of Berryman studies sparked by Coleman and McGowan’s 2007 essay collection *After Thirty Falls*. Almost thirty-eight falls after Berryman’s death, Cooper makes a strong case for a shift in the canonical paradigm which separates Berryman and his fellow “middle-generation” writers from their