

might be described as science fiction without really making a seamless transition from the discussion of legacy that was explored in Chapter 2). My only reservation here is an oversight to clearly define popular culture at the outset, leaving the reader to presume such definition is loose, mainly relating to the cornucopia of media and literature of the broad mainstream rather than via the associative discourses relating to cultural industries, lived realities and the dominant ideology. In truth, the author tends to lean heavily (though not exclusively) towards the depiction of death in television and film; a visual cultural appraisal thus dominates and, to be fair, is not unwelcome. It is a rather fascinating discourse and this book does it justice.

## References

Miles P (2019) *Midlife Creativity and Identity: Life into Art*. Bingley: Emerald.

Douglas Winiarski

### **Darkness Falls on the Land of Light: Experiencing Religious Awakenings in Eighteenth-Century New England**

University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2017, £38.33.pbk (ISBN: 978-1-4696-5227-6), 632 pp.

**Reviewed by:** Anne Taylor, *Yale University, USA*.

*Darkness Falls on the Land of Light: Experiencing Religious Awakenings in Eighteenth-Century New England* is an exceptional example of how historians apply cultural sociological theory to answer complex empirical questions. This Bancroft Prize winning book by Douglas Winiarski is a page-turner, and its accessibility and narrative style welcomes non-specialists. It is particularly relevant for cultural sociologists who are interested in comparative-historical questions, as well as religion, politics, and social movements.

This examination uses a micro-historical method to examine the religious culture and practices of the first Great Awakening, a Protestant revivalist movement that engulfed the trans-Atlantic world in the 18th century. Rather than focus on the ministerial leaders that are usually studied, like Jonathan Edwards or George Whitefield, Winiarski argues that it was actually the radical converts, including lay people and itinerant preachers, who generated and cultivated the revivalist movements and schisms. To illuminate the cultural framework motivating these “Whitefieldarians”, as he calls them, Winiarski embraces the cultural-linguistic turn in history and sociology, and employs Geertzian thick description to hermeneutically reconstruct the culture, language, and practices of New England Congregationalists. Focusing on the symbols, codes, idioms, metaphors, and tropes motivating radical converts, this book argues for the centrality of culture in generating revivalist power by focusing on meaningful action as a text that acts as an independent force in its own right. As the title alludes, Winiarski flips the metaphor of an awakening as illuminating light on its head, instead calling the era a “dark night of the collective New England soul” where the traditional boundaries were transformed from “inclusive communities of interlocking parishes and families into exclusive networks of

gifted spiritual seekers” who challenged the old guard of Puritanism and dismantled the standing social order (p. 19–20).

The book is organized into five parts that preserve the mediatory and constructive power of language and culture. He first describes the religious-linguistic structure of the era, focusing on the binary relationship of the traditional Puritan “Godly Walk”, which taught piety as a life-long disciplinary practice, and the radical “New Birth”, which emphasized immediate, ecstatic conversion experience as the true sign of salvation. In the second part, he reconstructs how Whitefield’s discursive practices encouraged New Englanders to abandon the godly walk, and in the third section, he describes, through an account of the simultaneous possession of Martha Robinson by both God and Satan, and a Connecticut magistrate’s quest to uncover her plight, how “the charismatic elements of this emerging paradigm impelled many revival participants to engage in dramatic acts of ecclesiastical disobedience” (p. 19). By examining Robinson’s story, as well as other key events in part four, like the New London bonfires and James Davenport’s radical Savonarola-esque repudiation of what he saw as worldly frivolities (including, famously, his pants), we see that George Whitefield’s converts were not passive observers, but were instead so active so that they chose to push beyond the boundaries of traditional authority and break away into new, separate churches. In part five, Winiarski details the struggles of these separations, both in the old and in the new churches, and makes the claim that it was not until the second Great Awakening of the 19th century that this turbulence finally settled into an acceptance of the new pluralistic order. The epilogue details this progression from 17th-century traditional Puritanism to 19th-century pluralism by following the changes throughout one family – the Lanes of Hampton and Stratham, New Hampshire.

The gaping hole in this book is a thorough review of the differences in meaning structures between white European Congregationalists and both Native American and black converts. While he does point out that they were not majority constituents of the Whitefieldarian movement, and though he does spend a few pages summarizing the experiences of native preachers and African American converts, the presence of these groups in the text is marginal. How did the binary discourse of godly walk vs. instantaneous new birth resonate for these groups? For instance, how did African Americans navigate the new birth binary rhetoric of free/enslaved within the confines of their own enslavement? We do not get enough thick description for the cultural landscape of these groups, and thus, the argument for operationalizing and generalizing the codes he presents is weakened. By incorporating their specific cultural structures, and how the New Birth rhetoric extended and connected (or did not) with them, into this project we would also have a clearer picture of the hermeneutic structure on the whole, and the overall argument would be stronger. Despite this fault, Winiarski’s cultural sociological approach to history should be noted. There is a long tradition of sociologists referring to historical books, and vice versa, and this should be added to that list.

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**Gone Home: Race and Roots through Appalachia**

University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2018, £21.49 hbk, (ISBN: 978-1-4696-4703-6), 264 pp.