

# Review of Kristina Bross, *Future History: Global Fantasies in Seventeenth-Century American and British Writings*

Auger, Peter

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*Future History: Global Fantasies in Seventeenth-Century American and British Writings*. By KRISTINA BROSS. New York: Oxford University Press. 2017. xvi + 227 pp. £47.99. ISBN 9780190665135.

*Future History* is ostensibly about how anglophone writers imagined that seventeenth-century English trade, conquest, and acts of conversion would lead to worldwide domination, emphasizing that South-East Asia and the Americas were linked in these global fantasies. Its chronological scope is the period between the Amboyna massacre in 1623 and John Dryden's play *Amboyna* (1673), with the Interregnum as its 'center of gravity' (p. 5). The title is borrowed from an anonymous tract whose millenarian logic is fortified by belief in *translatio imperii*, an ineluctable transfer of power from East to West. This work and four others – Thomas Gage's *English-American* (1648), Henry Jessey's *Of the Conversion of Five Thousand and Nine Hundred East Indians* (1650), a chillingly abstract image of the Mystic Fort massacre in John Underhill's *News from America* (1638), and Dryden's play – are central to five chapters that investigate the English colonial mentality.

Yet Kristina Bross's study is too theoretically engaged, sensitive to archival contingencies, and empathetic to the nameless simply to point out transoceanic currents in old ways of thinking. The chapters make some attempt to show how these fantasies enabled and justified what actually happened. More central to Bross's purpose, however, is the book's stated goal to challenge the idea that 'people in earlier times were atomized', and 'to puncture that assumption by tracing a rather idiosyncratic literary history that encodes the personal and discursive connections among early modern English writers and travelers' (p. xv). 'Puncture' echoes the meditation, a couple of pages earlier, on Roland Barthes' twinned concepts of *studium*, meaning 'ostensible subject', and *punctum*, 'that which "pierces," "pricks," or "bruises" the viewer and is particular and personal to that viewer', and "'is an intense mutation of my interest'" (p. xiii).

Such puncturing is integral to the book's method and structure. Each chapter has a

lengthy coda that tugs at a single investigative thread, following it to create links with figures who are marginalized in the surviving sources. The first coda asks how Bross's home institution, Purdue University, came to possess an annotated copy of William Lilly's response to *Future History* and extemporizes about notes that one 'Elizabeth Wilcocks' may or may not have written. This discussion's placement daringly raises the question of how far this copy's current whereabouts may have guided the whole book's structure. Another coda is haunted by the medical violence of the physician Stephen Bradwell's advocacy of 'the *Water-Torture* in Amboyna' (p. 156) as a treatment, and its parallels with abuse at Abu Ghraib prison in the early 2000s. Another envisages an evangelizer witnessing an Algonquian basket-maker 'receiving his gifts of clothing, some of them at least, only to unravel them for their materials' (pp. 121–2).

This book has moments that drift away from the main subject, change direction unexpectedly, and depart from what we can securely know. They are there on purpose. Bross explains that her approach 'makes visible the constructed nature of both archival collections and the scholarly narratives – my own included – that depend on them', and 'opens up a space for speculation and for the recovery of voices and experiences that have often been overwritten or ignored' (p. 19). By the final chapter (on Dryden's *Amboyna*) the representation of women has become the primary topic of both the main analysis and coda.

*Future History* is not just for students of seventeenth-century American and English thought, but holds appeal for anyone interested in how we might write more inclusive histories given the limitations of our archives, in how scholarly endeavour perpetuates the blood-soaked prejudices that supported their creation, and in the value of speculative criticism. The book invites reflection on how archival research is made possible because of a human impulse to store details of events and lives that are relevant to our world-view. My own fantasy is that some of the missing voices, aware of life's transitory nature, saw how power and vain delusion might stir this impulse.

Dr Peter Auger, University of Birmingham

[p.auger@bham.ac.uk](mailto:p.auger@bham.ac.uk)

Department of English Literature, School of English, Drama and American & Canadian Studies,  
Room 154 Arts Building, University of Birmingham B15 2TT