

1 KATHLEEN DONEGAN, *Seasons of Misery: Catastrophe and Colonial Settlement in Early America* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2014), 255 pp.

5 What happened to Englishmen's identities during the establishment of colonial settlements in America? And how did these settlers "become colonial" living in the New World, experiencing crisis, misery, and catastrophe through suffering and acts of violence? In *Seasons of Misery: Catastrophe and Colonial Settlement in Early America*, Kathleen Donegan sets out to answer these and related questions in her examination of early colonial identity in English settlement writings and narratives of the first years, putting crisis and catastrophe at the center of her study's interest. By focusing on colonial individuals and their writing through the framework of catastrophe and misery, Donegan uncovers a history often overlooked in past research. She zooms in on the "present" of the early years of settlement and on formative, "seasoning" (7) experiences, disconnecting them from being solely read in the comprehensive context of the subsequent overall achievement of the colonies. Part of the value of the book stems from Donegan's selection of texts and her excellent close readings—often against the grain—of well-known authors, like William Bradford or George Percy, and less widely read narratives, like John Nicholl's *An Houre Glasse of Indian Newes* (1607). She sheds light on the interplay of the settlers' charter-imposed official duty of establishing a colony versus actual experiences, on the settlers' negotiations with their own sense of belonging, and their transition of becoming "something else" (87) due to everyday circumstances.

35 *Seasons of Misery* is organized as a "lateral study of an intensive period" (16) of Donegan's chosen colonies "rather than a longitudinal study of any one region or a comparative account of regional development" (16). In her in-depth analysis of four early English settlements in the United States and the West Indies, Roanoke, Jamestown, Plymouth, and Barbados, the author thoroughly proves her claim that "it was through early catastrophe that colonial identities were first formed" (20). The book is divided into four major chapters, each dedicated to one of the stated colonies, and framed with an introduction and an afterword. In the introduction ("Unsettling"), Donegan starts with the

overall historical as well as literary contexts of her texts and explains her focus on misery and catastrophe with reference to early American scholars, such as Mitchell Breitwieser or Richard Slotkin. Donegan approaches her material through literary criticism and narrative history to eventually uncover "both the junctures and disjunctures between the inner and material world" (16) on the way to creating "new forms of coloniality" (16).

Chapter 1 ("Roanoke: Left in Virginia") opens up the stage with a contextualization of the three failed attempts at establishing a colony at Roanoke, Virginia's mythical Lost Colony as "a coda to the forced expulsion that ended England's dream of inhabiting a New World Eden" (22). Although she refers to well-known texts by Thomas Harriot and John White, Donegan puts her major focus on the—unheeded—disordered narrative of the first English colony's governor Ralph Lane¹ about the years 1585 and 1586 to trace "a mark of catastrophic discourse in the earliest literature of English colonists" (25). As particularly insightful in this chapter proves Donegan's adaption of Mary Louise Pratt's "contact zone" into a "chaos zone" (34) as a tool to analyze passages of disorder and confusion (Lane's narrative features a number of those) or as Donegan calls it, "writing of incursion" (35) with "incursion" describing the respective time between contact and permanent settlement in Roanoke (34).

In Chapter 2 ("Jamestown: Things That Seemed Incredible"), Donegan states that "studies of the settlement must always identify the turning point between the horror of the early years and the subsequent history of colonial development" (70). For Jamestown, she argues that this shift from misery to functionality needs particular attention to grasp the complexity of the early settlement's development (71). Claiming that crisis stimulated the process of "becoming colonial," Donegan moves away from an overall "narration of recovery" (71) by reading George Percy's accounts—as the main textual representa-

¹ Ralph Lane, *An Account of the Particularities of the Employments of the English Men Left in Virginia by Richard Greenevill under the Charge of Master Ralph Lane Generall of the Same, from the 17. of August 1585. until the 18. of June 1586. at Which time They Departed the Countrey; Sent and Directed to Sir Walter Raleigh.*

1 tive— against John Smith’s to reveal stories
 2 about hunger, violence, atrocities, and death
 3 in the colony’s early years. For Donegan’s
 5 purpose, Percy’s texts especially serve as a
 new kind of writing about the early settlement
 as it causes on “material crises such as starva-
 tion, siege, and massacres and *also* on repre-
 sentational crises such as faltering codes, lost
 identifications, and the struggle to describe
 staggering events” (72). Her close reading of
 the texts convincingly show how the colony
 10 has been created on the foundation of its own
 various catastrophes, like the Starving Time,
 and how settlers gradually become colonists
 as a result of their “confrontation with, and
 eventually through identification with, their
 misery” (87).

15 William Bradford’s statement, “the living
 were scarce able to bury the dead” (qtd. in
 Donegan 118) to fathom the mortality and the
 physical presence of death through the sheer
 amount of bodies in the early years serves as
 point of reference for the analysis of Plymouth
 20 in Chapter 3 (“Plymouth: Scarce Able to Bury
 Their Dead”). The author tracks those deaths
 and their interpretation “either popularly
 mythologized or critically resolved” (118)
 in a selection of texts, among those William
 Bradford’s *Of Plymouth Plantation*, Thomas
 25 Morton’s *New English Canaan*, or an account²
 published under the name of Martin Pring to
 reveal narratives about early settlement that
 are much more complex and even a great deal
 darker than what we are used to from previous
 Early American Studies research. According
 to Donegan, “dead bodies became highly
 30 charged sites of cultural crisis” (18) and deeply
 affected the resident Native tribes as well as
 the newly arrived settlers in their appropriation
 of space, especially in the years 1616 to
 1622, due to the high mortality rates (18). By
 35 illustrating the power struggles of the Plym-
 outh and Wessagusset settlers and the people
 of the Massachusetts tribe in the context of life
 and death, Donegan fully accomplishes her
 goal to “read both the events and the strate-
 40 gies that surrounded these catastrophes of
 colonial settlement without invoking a tragic/
 triumphalist scene of closure” (119).

44 ² Martin Pring, *A Voyage Set Out from the*
 45 *Citie of Bristol at the Charge of the Chiefest*
 46 *Merchants and Inhabitants of the Said Citie*
with a Small Ship and a Barke for the Discov-
erie of the North Part of Virginia, in the Yeere
1610 under the Command of ME Martin Pring.

Settlement narratives of the West Indies at
 a time when Barbados was on its way to the
 sugar revolution are at the center of Chapter
 4 (“Barbados: Wild Extravagance”). Here,
 Donegan broadens her scope from conti-
 nental North America to the West Indies to
 also highlight “the central place of the Carib-
 bean in the colonial Atlantic world” (18). The
 chapter starts out with a—rather longish but
 perceptive—introduction to the settlement
 history of the West Indies through a close
 reading of John Nicholl’s *An Houre Glasse*
of Indian Newes as the earliest report about
 English settlers in the West Indies (161). Do-
 negan identifies “[e]xcess and ungovernabil-
 ity” (16) as reference points for her striking
 reading of Richard Ligon’s *A True and Exact*
History of the Island of Barbados (the chapter
 also includes two illustrations of the 1657 edi-
 tion). As, in the years before the full establish-
 ment of the plantation complex, catastrophe
 “lived [...] not only in the staggering mortality
 rates but also in the natural, social, and eco-
 nomic worlds that were considered to be ines-
 capably immoderate” (19), Donegan creates a
 comprehensive overview of life in the tropics
 alternating between excess and crises, bodily
 distempers and sexual desires, and structure
 and violence.

The afterword (“Standing Half-Amazed”)
 addresses and answers a couple of essential
 questions concerning Donegan’s work. Most
 importantly, she explains why she “trace[d]
 the workings of catastrophe through the col-
 onizer” (203) through four major points: the
 settlers’ own description of being “in states
 of misery” (203); the necessary use of critical
 analysis of catastrophe and crisis to prevent
 the narratives from serving “national ideol-
 ogy” (204); to recognize the mutual relation-
 ship between “suffering and violence” (204)
 in the context of settlement; and to become
 aware of the differences in “the literature of
 colonization writ large and the more specific
 features of a literature of colonials” (204). Do-
 negan concludes her persuasive study by once
 again highlighting her major argument: the
 interdependence and coexistence of violence
 and suffering in the early settlements provid-
 ed the breaking foundation for the process of
 becoming colonial (212).

With *Seasons of Misery*, Kathleen Donegan
 takes us on an—at times—surprising and
 shocking journey to an early America that we
 have not yet seen so clearly. The lens of catas-
 trophe and misery provides the key to more

1	<p>fully understanding colonial identity transitions. With examples like Plymouth's dying men leaning armed against trees as protection of the settlement (chapter 3, 137), or Ligon's description of slaves trying to extinguish the sugar cane fires (chapter 4, 200), Donegan opens a new perspective on the interplay of misery, catastrophe, trauma, and crises of the early settlements by uncovering narratives of hardship, atrocities, and chaos. She not only convincingly analyzes a variety of well-selected narratives of the four different settlements but also broadly contextualizes them to</p>	<p>support her argument. Donegan's approach to reading colonial narratives through the framework of catastrophe, misery, and crises in the early settlements emerges as very productive. With its emphasis on colonial identity formations and its contribution to settlement history, <i>Seasons of Misery: Catastrophe and Colonial Settlement in Early America</i> represents an original, valuable, and thought-provoking study in the field of Early American Studies.</p>	<p>Stuttgart</p>	<p>Veronika Hofstätter</p>
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