

THOMAS DIKANT, *Landschaft und Territorium: Amerikanische Literatur, Expansion und die Krise der Nation, 1784–1866* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2014), 250 pp.

“The geographic fantasies pursued in U.S. literature,” Jennifer Rae Greeson has written in *Our South*, “have not been simply ‘super-structural’ window dressing for the real operation of power in the United States.”<sup>1</sup> This idea—namely, that “geographic fantasies” or aesthetic discourses of landscapes on the one hand, and discourses of territorial politics on the other hand, are inextricably linked in U.S. literature—also lies at the heart of Thomas Dikant’s *Landschaft und Territorium*. For such a double focus on aesthetic and juridico-political aspects of representations of the land in U.S. writings, perhaps no other time period in American literature furnishes as many fruitful examples from different genres as that of the massive territorial expansion of the United States during the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. Dikant thus situates his study between the Ordinance of 1784 and the publication of Melville’s *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* in 1866, dedicating each of his altogether four analytical chapters to texts from one canonical writer of that time span: Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Cooper’s *The Pioneers*, Emerson’s “Nature” and his *Poems*, as well as Melville’s aforementioned poetry collection. The introductory chapter employs Petrarch’s famous “Ascent of Mount Ventoux” as a starting point for an informed discussion of the two central concepts of the book, “landscape” (representing an aesthetic approach to the land) and “territory” (as a shorthand for a political interpretation of the land).

Especially in the case of the former term, however, such a heuristic separation of the aesthetic and the political dimensions of “the land” is not unproblematic, as the author himself acknowledges when he points out “[d]ass es sich bei der Repräsentation der Landschaft um keine unpolitische Darstellungsform handelt und dass das Betrachten der Landschaft eine Praktik ist, der politische Implikationen innewohnen” (22). Likewise, drawing on Robert David Sack’s concept of territoriality, Dikant establishes that the “territory” is

the result of various practices of control over a geographic area—prominent among which are, amongst others, aesthetic representations of landscape (cf. 27). Rather than mutually exclusive categories, then, “landscape” and “territory” constitute concepts that feed into each other.

Perhaps the best arguments against an oversimplified juxtaposition of “landscape” and “territory,” though, are Dikant’s illuminating readings of Jefferson’s, Cooper’s, Emerson’s, and Melville’s texts, which, individually, show how exactly the aesthetic and the juridico-political are intertwined in the case of each writer and, collectively, trace shifting emphases of landscape depiction in U.S. literature from the Early Republic to the Civil War. One of the great strengths of *Landschaft und Territorium* is the rich historical contextualization that the author provides for the texts that stand at the center of each chapter. In the case of the second chapter, which discusses Jefferson’s *Notes on the States of Virginia*, this context includes the territorial politics of the Early Republic in general and the Ordinances of 1784, 1785, and 1787 in particular. Dikant identifies the *Notes* as belonging to the genre of “statistics” or “beschreibende Staatenkunde” (37), yet also notes that on several occasions, such as his descriptions of Harpers Ferry or the Natural Bridge, Jefferson switches to an aesthetic mode of representation that locates the viewer in the landscape and records his emotional and imaginative reaction to it. It is this affective reaction which fosters an emotional unity among the inhabitants of the land (51), a unity that, according to Jefferson, includes Native Americans (due to their ability to perceive the landscape aesthetically; 70), but excludes African Americans (due to their lack of this ability; 72).

The so-called “Marshall Trilogy,” a series of Supreme Court decisions under Chief Justice John Marshall that all related to federalism and Indian law, provides the background for the chapters on Cooper and Emerson. The first case of the trilogy, “Johnson v. McIntosh” (1823), involved two men who purchased titles to the same land directly from Native Americans and from the federal government, respectively, with the court ruling that tribal lands could only be obtained through the government. Cooper’s *The Pioneers*, published in the same year as that decision, solves an analogous case differently, “nämlich indem der Erbe desjenigen, der den indianischen Landrechtstitel

<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Rae Greeson, *Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2010) 11.

besaß [Cooper's Oliver Edwards], ins Recht gesetzt und zum Eigentümer wird" (108). More importantly, however, Dikant identifies Cooper's picturesque landscapes as both synecdochic and chronotopic: on the one hand, *The Pioneers's* regional New York landscapes stand for the nation as a whole; on the other hand, for Native and Anglo-Americans alike, these landscapes implicate a temporal dimension. But whereas Chingachgook only sees memories of the past, the Anglo-Americans see a process of "civilization" that is bound to repeat itself in the future: "Aus der in *The Pioneers* vollzogenen geschichtlichen Logik ergibt es sich geradezu zwingend, dass sich auf all dem *vacant land* [...] die Erfolgsgeschichte der Besiedlung wiederholen wird" (109).

In chapter 4, the longest of the study, the second and third cases of the "Marshall Trilogy," "Cherokee Nation v. Georgia" (1831) and "Worcester v. Georgia" (1832), as well as Emerson's protest against the policy of Indian Removal, serve as a starting point for a discussion of Emerson's conceptualization of landscape and the way this conceptualization informs his notion of land ownership. Focusing mainly on *Nature*, Dikant stresses that one of the consequences of the specifically Emersonian concept of the sublime is that "die alltäglichste Kulturlandschaft als potenziell erhaben aufgewertet, ja geradezu sakralisiert wird" (137). Any landscape, according to Emerson, may induce feelings of the sublime, but not in anyone: following his analysis of *Nature* with readings of Emerson's "Hamatreya" and "Ode, Inscribed to W.H. Channing," Dikant shows how in these poems both individuals and the collective (nation) view the supposedly "sublime" land primarily in terms of the territorial (167). The poet emerges as a privileged individual, whose "territory"—Dikant's metaphorical use of the term in this case may be a little confusing—is autonomous and transcends material ownership of the land.

The last chapter also discusses poetry, turning to the, according to Dikant, selective and fragmented representation of the Civil War in Melville's *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of*

*the War* (1866). Indeed, while some of Melville's poems depict the war in mediated form (e.g., through ekphrasis, as in "The Coming Storm"), others focus on specific battles, military operations, and, concomitantly, the land where these battles took place. In the latter cases, Dikant argues, Melville constantly inverts and ironically undermines pastoral conventions: "So wird an der Pastorale, die von Anbeginn in einer kontrastiven Relation zum Kriege konstruiert ist und in der sich immer schon das Politische sedimentiert, sichtbar, dass dies kein konventioneller Krieg ist, der sich in den hergebrachten ästhetischen Konventionen normalisieren oder gar als pastoral naturalisieren ließe" (199). In poems such as "The March to the Sea," where the violence of war is directed straight against the land, neither the territory nor nature can serve as the basis for national unity anymore, let alone for a national future. What is inscribed into the landscape instead are the war and its violence, which stand for the destruction and the fragmentation of the union (219).

The epilogue of *Landschaft and Territorium* continues to look at Melville's poems, foregrounding his wish to reintegrate the defeated South into the Union (224). Dikant wisely closes his study at this point: in postbellum U.S. writings, specifically in popular travel writings about the South by Northern journalists such as Edward King, the question of landscape and territory would be inextricably linked with U.S. imperial expansion,<sup>2</sup> and examining this kind of literature would require going beyond Dikant's focus on the territory of the nation-state (31-32). For the texts discussed in *Landschaft and Territorium*, however, Dikant's approach, as his study convincingly shows, yields insightful and nuanced new readings even of well-established texts. The only real drawback, then, is the fact that *Landschaft and Territorium* is written in German (elegant German, nonetheless) and that the book may therefore not get the international attention it deserves.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Greeson 13.