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The Wake of Wellington: Englishness in 1852 (review)

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engage with arguments, no less grounded in literary and historical evidence, that value different, real things in Johnson's writings and in literature itself. *Aspects of Samuel Johnson* constitutes a substantial body of work, but it represents only one way of reading Johnson's writing, and it is weakened by its indifference to legitimate alternatives.

Greg Clingham

Peter W. Sinnema. *The Wake of Wellington: Englishness in 1852*. Athens: Ohio UP, 2006. 165 pp. ISBN 0-8214-1679-0, \$42.95.

The funeral on November 18, 1852, of Arthur Wellesley, the first Duke of Wellington, was less a laying to rest than an earthquake, exposing a range of fault lines in Victorian culture and producing aftershocks felt long after the event. These aftereffects are the subject of Peter W. Sinnema's *The Wake of Wellington*, which focuses on neither the illustrious man nor his lavish funeral, but on the cultural repercussions that followed in the wake of his death. The ambition to attend, in effect, less to a sound than to its echo is an excellent one, and at its strongest, Sinnema's book strikes new notes on the Wellington theme. At its weakest, however, it resembles an echo chamber, literally repeating words that have already been uttered clearly in other contexts.

The most dramatic, and disappointing, echoes are of Sinnema's own words. Though unacknowledged, *The Wake of Wellington* repeats parts of Sinnema's earlier book, *Dynamics of the Pictured Page: Representing the Nation in the Illustrated London News* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1998). *Dynamics* includes a chapter on the Duke's funeral, extensively chronicled in the *ILN*, and in many ways the present book is a dilation of this previous work. There can be no objection to the author's recognition that the subject was far from exhausted, and *The Wake of Wellington* benefits from its employment of a broader spectrum of periodical publications, and its expansion of some of its more suggestive but less developed arguments. One must object, however, to the reprinting, without acknowledgment, of parts of the previously published book. Four of the five illustrations from the Wellington chapter in *Dynamics of the Pictured Page* are printed again in *The Wake of Wellington*. Given the tremendous number of other relevant illustrations from which one might draw, it seems a squandered opportunity to extend the range and analyses of visual materials beyond those offered in the previous book. More troubling are the paragraphs transferred nearly verbatim, and without attribution, from *Dynamics* to *Wake*. Wholesale passages reappear like revenants, including, for example, the comparison of the funeral car to Andrea Mantegna's "painted chariot" (*Dynamics* 190; *Wake* 75–76); the review of responses to the rise of

Napoleon III in the year of Wellington's death (*Dynamics* 198; *Wake* 7–8); and, most extensively, the report of the satisfaction of Victoria and others with the spectacle, which concludes the Wellington chapter in *Dynamics* and is revived in the *Wake* (*Dynamics* 200–202; *Wake* 69–71).

Sinnema's overarching concern with the understanding of Wellington after his death as "intimately bound up with Englishness itself" (xiii) also echoes previous scholarship. The majority of studies of Wellington's mid-century cultural prominence—which only intensified after his death—address the ramifications of this reverence of the hero for definitions of English identity. It would be difficult not to, chiefly because the Victorians themselves, or at least a good many of them, were acutely aware of the importance for national self-fashioning of the death of the man called by the *Times* the "type and model of an Englishman" (qtd. 103). *The Wake of Wellington* does add, however, to the critical literature concerning the intense national self-scrutiny occasioned by Wellington's death and funeral, and is consistently informed by a significant accumulation of quotations from contemporary Victorian sources. What comes across from these myriad, generally anonymous, voices is how perceptive the Victorians themselves were regarding the implications of this event. Historians and critics have already discussed, and Sinnema devotes a chapter to, the retailing of Wellington's death, the range and number of keepsakes and curios sold in what constituted the ultimate consumer tie-in. But Sinnema's quotations from an array of contemporary sources indicate how appalled or amused Victorian observers themselves were by the flood of postmortem ducal products, called by the *Age*, a London weekly, "a universal and bewildering array . . . fling[ing] itself, as it were, in the faces of doubting purchasers" (qtd. 49). Later chroniclers have marveled at the unprecedented nature of this discursive and commercial outpouring, but the *Morning Chronicle* recognized at the time that the quantity of printed matter following the death was "without measure or example" (qtd. 62).

The chorus of voices from a rich variety of sources enables Sinnema to calculate the aftermath of Wellington's death from a greater variety of perspectives than previous studies. Two critical angles are particularly noteworthy. The first is Sinnema's discussion of Wellington's "uniquely elevated position in ecclesiastical discourse" (91). Reviewing sermons and obsequies, Sinnema shows how Wellington came to figure for some clergy less as a military commander than a militant "Christian soldier" (90), leading the English not into battle but into church. Rendering the victor at Waterloo "Christ-like" required overlooking his entire military career, his acquisition of significant personal wealth, his Tory impatience (to put it mildly) with the poor, and his long rumored erotic liaisons, but in urging followers of Wellington to follow

him into Christian worship, these ministers were following Wellington's own example. The Duke attended Sunday services, he wrote to a friend in 1849, primarily to model such behavior for his servants, and the church was eager to extend this example beyond the Duke's immediate household staff.

A second fresh approach Sinnema develops has to do with warring definitions of the English or Irish nature of qualities seen to be represented by the Duke. Born at Mornington House, Dublin, and raised among the Anglo-Irish aristocracy, Wellington did not return to Ireland after 1809, and in a codicil to his 1808 will disallowed any child of his ever even to visit "that country" (qtd. 103). After his death a controversy raged between elements of the English and the Irish press, in which Wellington "could be legitimately embraced or rejected by both sides" (104). Members of the Irish press claimed and disclaimed their native son, and Sinnema's probing discussion makes particularly fine use of the journalistic battles waged by and against the *Galway Vindicator* and the *Belfast Mercury*.

Soon after Wellington's death an author in the *Belfast Mercury* observed, "The English are gratified to discover in the Duke those characteristics which they believe distinguish themselves" (qtd. 95). This is the primary claim of *The Wake of Wellington* as well. That Sinnema's argument follows in the wake of a host of Victorian observers does not discredit it, but rather showcases not only one of the prominent meanings of a central Victorian cultural event, but what the lifted voices of the Victorians themselves tell us.

Cornelia Pearsall

Dejin Xu. *Race and Form: Towards a Contextualized Narratology of African American Autobiography*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007. 226 pp. ISBN 13 978-3-03911-003-2, \$47.95

In taking a formalist approach to a range of nineteenth and twentieth century African American autobiographies, *Race and Form* presents an observant and illuminating contribution to the fields of African American, autobiographical, and narrative studies. Its exploration of narrative strategy, construction, and effect works to counter the neglect of such aspects in existing critical readings of autobiography, and in particular, African American autobiography. The volume sets out a clear methodological line, drawing on narratological frameworks evolved in response to fiction, but revising and adapting them for non-fictional life writing, and performing practical analysis of a detailed and perceptive kind. Despite the author's somewhat clumsy use of the term ideology, once one has grasped and accepted his own working definition of an "ideological approach," there is much to be learned from this inquiry into