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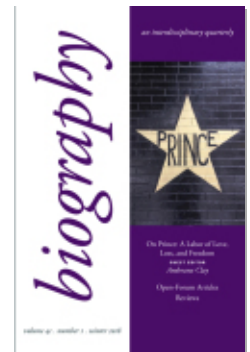
The Private Jefferson: Perspectives from the Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society by Henry Adams, Peter S. Onuf, Andrea Wulf (review)

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REVIEWS

Henry Adams, Peter S. Onuf, and Andrea Wulf. *The Private Jefferson: Perspectives from the Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*. Massachusetts Historical Society, 2016, xiii + 208 pp. ISBN 978-1936520091, \$35.00.

The Private Jefferson: Perspectives from the Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society stars an important collection of Jefferson documents, and they are given fine treatment here. The publication coordinated with the exhibition *The Private Jefferson: From the Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, which opened at the Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS) in 2016 and has been traveling since. Bolstered by supporting text and large images, this catalog is a worthy addition to the Jefferson bookshelf. It features a number of very important papers, including the Dunlap printing and a manuscript draft of the Declaration of Independence, as well as other documents that add depth to the vast pool of Jefferson writings. The documents are not quite reproduced at facsimile level, but the photographic quality is very good, enabling the book to serve as both visual reference and resource for reading featured papers.

This catalog is about three things. First is Thomas Jefferson's private papers—the papers he decided were his personal records and not the state's; second, MHS, the repository that contains the largest collection of these papers; and third, the role of the Coolidge family, descendants of Jefferson's granddaughter Ellen Randolph Coolidge and her husband, Joseph, whose stewardship of the papers and thoughtful relationship of generations of Coolidges with MHS has ensured this collection's survival for use by scholars and other interested readers today.

The meat of the catalog is fifty-four drawings, letters, and other documents in Jefferson's hand. The curators have divided these materials into three broad categories anchored by essays that tell the reader how to think about both Jefferson at the moment he created them and also about how the items fit into broader stories about statehood, vegetables, or the Doric order. The authors of the essays should be familiar to readers of Jeffersonia. Their role here is to paint a backdrop that will let each part of the collection shine,

which, for the most part, it does. In fact, the absences are no fault of MHS: they have done a wonderful job highlighting what the happenstance of history has placed in their archival vaults.

Peter S. Onuf, elder statesman of Jefferson studies, frames his essay, “The State of the World: Thomas Jefferson’s Political Vision,” around Jefferson’s method of drafting and finalizing his ideas. Onuf reminds readers just how much of what comes to us in the formal versions of Jefferson’s writings were concepts he grappled with in conversations and letters with John and Abigail Adams, drafts of the Declaration of Independence, and Jefferson’s extensively marked-up manuscript for *Notes on the State of Virginia* in the collections here. Onuf establishes the role of these drafts, kept as Jefferson’s “personal” copies, as an essential stage in the process of developing not only these important papers but also the truths held within them. Jefferson scholars have mined his draft manuscripts for book and journal articles; Onuf gives an effective summary of the importance of these texts in a five-page essay that features these documents. While slavery is not an organizing element of this catalog, it is intrinsic to all the documents here, as in any study of Jefferson. Onuf anchors the issue of slavery squarely within Jefferson’s quandaries about citizenship and his “republican faith” that future generations would grapple with the corrupt and exploitative institution (15).

In her essay, “Revolutionary Gardens: Jefferson, Politics, and Plants,” Andrea Wulf invites us to look closely at documents relating to Jefferson’s horticultural interests. She moves easily among hobby, science, labor and slavery, and ideas of self-government in exploring how Jefferson thought about agriculture and civil society. She has a fine hand, for instance, when she makes just enough observations about Jefferson’s 1809 garden book “Kalendar,” which lists the planting date and success of vegetables, shown in detail (25), that the reader is drawn to look at this book for what Wulf highlights, but then also takes time to look at what is there that she did not point out. And there is much to see. She invites the reader to marvel with her at the scope and minutia of Jefferson’s various sketches, lists, and measurements.

Henry Adams, in “The Architectural Jefferson: The Draftsman and His Ideals,” places MHS’s collection of drawings in the context of those held by other repositories. He offers a tidy summary of these four hundred or so architectural drawings, “about half of those that survive,” and points out that the MHS drawings represent the range of Jefferson’s architectural work (27). Most other collections hold drawings of their particular site: University of Virginia holds many of Jefferson’s drawings for the University of Virginia, for instance. The drawings at MHS allow broad comparison among the buildings that Jefferson drew. The catalog includes thirty drawings of five different sites,

counting the garden plans for Monticello. In an especially thoughtful move, the book juxtaposes two different Jefferson drawings for side elevations of the Virginia State Capitol so readers may easily see how Jefferson compared designs for one or two porticos on the building.

Adams sticks to an older, art-historical architectural history that pits architects against builders and measures success in the number of deviations from a source drawing. Adams is best when he describes how Jefferson developed a design using a variety of books and sources. He seems reluctant to depart from older scholarship on Jefferson that played matching games with plates in Palladio, and he seems genuinely surprised that Jefferson drew plans for the Virginia State Capitol before he went to France. Because Adams is so focused on academic design, he mentions slavery only in passing, when in fact most of the drawings he shows are profoundly important documents to understanding slave and plantation life in early America. If Jefferson's drawings about public buildings are important to his conception of a republican society, the drawings for his private holdings are equally important to the social relations of that same society.

Overall, *The Private Jefferson* is a beautifully produced book that lets the reader encounter each document almost as one does in an archive. Documents are shown here as documents—that is, the image shows the entire sheet of paper as Jefferson used it, even if it creates an awkward page because Jefferson turned the paper sideways, or used only a quarter of a side. The editors have helpfully included enlarged details that allow the reader a closer view of the important content of the drawings. Showing the documents like this also reminds the reader how these sources become compromised—and how what survives becomes ever more valuable—as holes, tears, creases and folds, staining, and other ravages of age are here apparent. The images are crisp enough to allow scrutiny with a magnifying lens, as many Jefferson drawings invite a close look at lines or notations.

The catalog portion of the book, 140 pages, is nicely laid out. The catalog is ordered by topics (including the Declaration of Independence, Poplar Forest, books), and introduces each document with a mostly blank page that bears brief identifying information like the title, type of document (drawing, letter, etc.), date, author, collection, indexing information, and size. A very brief, often one-sentence label sets the context for the document, an image of which occupies the facing page(s). The incentive here is to look at, rather than read about, the document. The book does not include transcriptions. That work is taking place in the massive Papers of Thomas Jefferson program that is jointly supported by MHS and other repositories. The List of Items in this catalog is in the front of the book (ix–xi), which names each document

and indicates its page number in the catalog, along with page numbers of any detail images of the item interspersed in the text. This list sets up the one awkward structural aspect of the book. The detail images in the essays are not labeled and so the curious reader needs to flip to the List of Items and back to check dates or title.

The Private Jefferson is indebted to the Coolidges and is a testament to the role of heirs and owners of historic collections and the value they give to all of us when they place collections in an accessible repository such as MHS. How such a significant collection of Jefferson's papers came to MHS reflects the geographical movement of American families across generations. The location of this very Virginian collection within a bastion of New England culture where Jefferson resides with John and Abigail Adams, unites these founders in epistolary perpetuity and invites us to continue their long discourse on what the United States will be.

Biographers of Jefferson are always challenged with how to frame a narrative in which the genius of liberty wrote the founding documents of a nation at the same time as he drew one of the most famous houses in America and chose plant varieties for his orchard and garden, while passing the burden of what to do about slavery to his biological and political heirs. This catalog makes clear that the collection at MHS represents only part of the vast Jefferson archive spread across repositories, from logical places like the Library of Congress and the University of Virginia to less obvious collections, such as MHS, the Huntington Library in California, or Washington University in St. Louis. The cross section of documents in this collection provokes wonder at the range and capabilities of Jefferson's pen and Jefferson's mind. If this book is all we had to frame a biography of Jefferson, this collection would be rich indeed. As such, this text whets the appetite and reminds the reader of other drawings or writings wherein Jefferson grapples with ways to observe, reason, and debate his place—and ours—in the world.

Susan Kern

Michal Ben-Horin. *Musical Biographies: The Music of Memory in Post-1945 German Literature*. De Gruyter, 2016, 173 pp. ISBN 978-3110460933, €79.95.

This book investigates musically mediated responses to the “catastrophe of the Second World War and the Nazi past” in German literature (1). The primary texts, whose respective publication dates span almost fifty years, are treated roughly chronologically. Although a number of authors and texts are discussed throughout this study, its core consists of four full chapters, each