

***Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-Century United States.* By Russ Castronovo. Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press. 2001. xv, 351 pp. Cloth, \$54.95; paper, \$18.95.**

***Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity.* By Sharon Patricia Holland. Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press. 2000. xi, 235 pp. Cloth, \$49.95; paper, \$17.95.**

What Russ Castronovo and Sharon Patricia Holland agree upon in their recent works is that *death* describes a space and *the dead* a population, each of which is much larger and more conceptually significant than current scholarship typically suggests. Whether we should see the location and condition of death as productive or inert, however, is a question the two authors answer quite differently. Examining the dichotomy between the living and the dead in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, respectively, Castronovo and Holland together impress upon scholars of American literature the urgency of attending to the idea of death in a range of discourses.

In *Necro Citizenship*, Castronovo considers the ways in which United States citizenship was constructed as a desirable “death,” an erotically charged state of eternal freedom. He argues that U.S. citizenship in the nineteenth century was a condition that encouraged depoliticized passivity and created social corpses. Grounding his analysis in such cultural sites as the literature of slavery (abolitionist and proslavery), the hygienic campaign against white male masturbation, the phenomena of mesmerism and spiritualism, and Fourteenth Amendment law, Castronovo demonstrates how death, literally and metaphorically, came to symbolize a negatively articulated liberty, an “absolute and unconditional” freedom that obviated the wearying responsibility of participating in democratic struggle (31). A person exchanged his or her history, memory, and embodiment, if possible, for the luxury of forgetfulness, along with the handful of rights guaranteed by the U.S. government to its citizens.

Such an exchange, however, was not always possible. One of Castronovo’s many persuasively argued points is that the abstracted, disembodied shield of citizenship offered sufficient protection for the white male, but it was seldom large enough to cover the hyperembodied, deeply historical identities of emancipated African Americans and others with less privileged identities, who either had to trim away the excess or remain largely vulnerable. When the national discourse focused on the white male body, he adds, using the masturbation panic as a touchstone, it tended less to reinscribe the white man as the representative body of the body politic and more to divert attention away from other less manageable problems. Rereading such important texts as Douglass’s *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance*, Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and Harper’s *Iola Leroy*,

Castronovo traces the gestures toward an idea of citizenship back and forth between literary works and extraliterary cultural manifestations.

Early in *Necro Citizenship*, Castronovo observes that proslavery novelists and white and African American abolitionists all used the rhetoric of U.S. freedom, though the concept did not offer the same promise to all. For example, he argues that Patrick Henry's ultimatum of "liberty or death" translated into "liberty *and* death" for nonwhite, nonmale figures, as demonstrated in the accounts of escaped African Americans lamenting the isolation and alienation that characterize their existence in the "free" North. Castronovo makes a point of clarifying that his observation that such narratives metaphorically equate freedom with death is not intended to negate historian Orlando Patterson's formulation of slavery as a state of social death severing the enslaved figure from family and community ties. It is here that Castronovo's work and Holland's intersect.

In *Raising the Dead*, Holland suggests that African Americans (and other marginalized subjects, especially queers and Native Americans) continue through the twentieth century to figure as socially dead, serving a necessary function in the U.S. national imaginary: "to ward off a nation's collective dread of the inevitable" (38). Drawing on the work of Benedict Anderson, Holland identifies the dead as the silenced subjects on behalf of whom the emerging nation speaks. Fear of death not only structures the role of African Americans in the nation but also shapes the work of cultural critics, who avoid looking too closely, she argues, at the marginal dead space between groupings such as the nation, the discipline, and the community, within which intellectual projects have traditionally been defined.

Holland's concern is that scholars begin to confront the dread-inspiring spaces of the dead, to recognize that there are voices speaking in these places of supposed silence to which we must attend if we are to produce a more accurate account of life in the Americas. Indeed, it is the dichotomy constructed between the living and the dying or dead, and its relationship to other binaries, such as white-black and present-past, that Holland's work is intended to dismantle. Reading the film *Menace to Society* and the novels *Beloved* and *Almanac of the Dead* in the first part of her book, Holland illustrates the importance of works in which the dead speak to an understanding of the subjectivity of peoples whose access to the past has been interrupted by centuries of violence. The second part of *Raising the Dead* looks at those who have been silenced *within* silenced communities: queers in the African American community and the political left. After analyzing Randall Kenan's revision of Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* in *A Visitation of Spirits* and unpacking the announcement by the all-white-male "eclectic thrash band" Consolidated that they would henceforth be "black lesbians," Holland concludes with a chapter in which she offers models for ways in which critics might approach the task of "wak[ing] the dead with discursive interventions" that avoid simply imposing silencing analytical frameworks on marginalized cultural productions (150).

Holland's dead are noisy, knowing, and revolutionary. They speak—to those who will listen—about our past, present, and future as a nation, haunting our collective imaginary, refusing to remain quietly in the grave. By contrast, Castronovo casts the living in the role of troublemakers, marking as corpses those who have accepted the shroud of necro citizenship. His dead, like the eroticized body of the spiritual medium, are lost in a trance of peaceful, impenetrable passivity. Together, these scholars insist that Americanists interrogate the silences our culture has constructed. Their work shares a recognition that the living and the dead are more similar than they are different.

Evie Shockley, Wake Forest University