on the concept of terror in relation to the seemingly contradictory notion of Utopia. Focusing on texts published in the past 15 years, she begins investigating those that address the concept of Utopia through language and symbol.

She uses Amy Waldman’s satirical short story *Freedom* to pose questions about the quest for Utopia and its relationship with desire. In an attempt to create a “happy” island nation for released prisoners, those who closely resemble those held captive in Guantanamo Bay, Waldman’s “freedom” becomes an exercise in the manipulation of desire by an autocratic dictator. Her story is set in a globalised world reliant on the commodification of emotion to drive it.

Newman furthers her investigation with a close reading of the imagery in the short stories of Kim Edwards, whose descriptions of “other worlds” are delivered as vivid moments of perfection. However, whose image of perfection is being explored, and what do these notions of perfection rely on? Newman contends that the desire for perfection may in fact be dangerous, owing to its reliance on the satiation of desire.

In addressing Susan Choi’s *A Person of Interest*, Newman explores the links between the writer and the terrorist. This novel is based on the real-life case of American Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber, who conducted a series of attacks on US soil from 1978 to 1995. Kaczynski sought to create a neo-Luddite Utopia in place of what he saw as an over-technologised and processed society. In pursuing his own narrative, Kaczynski can be viewed as a writer, a creator of worlds, but in Newman’s close reading, this association is undone and the “primacy of writing as a creative force” is detached from the destruction of terror.

Later chapters focus on US engagement with the Middle East and the clash of utopian ideals in the work of André Dubus III and Daia Sofer. In considering John Updike’s *Toward the End of Time*, Newman explores the use of dystopia and relates this to colonialism driven by concepts of Utopia. She then moves beyond America with an assessment of Bernardine Evaristo’s *Blonde Roots*, where the narrative fluctuates between a “rational” exposition of scientific racism and the spiritual. And when astronauts and cosmonauts started to enter that realm with piloted spaceflights in the early 1960s, the achievements did much more than simply surmount a technological hurdle. Human spaceflights were, by their very nature, transgressive, profound, profane and transcendental. Moreover, as Kendrick Oliver reveals in his book on relations between religion and the US space programme, examining the role of religion and faith in US culture during that age of technological ascendance tells us something new about that historical era.

Oliver analyses spaceflight and religion in a sophisticated manner, well informed by the scholarly literature of the “new aerospace history”, which examines intersections between space history and other disciplines or themes. This is not a facile recounting of Buzz Aldrin’s taking communion on the Moon or other such well-known stories. Instead, Oliver engages histories of theology and religious practice in a broad consideration of motivations, implications, transformations and reinforcements of religion in the history of spaceflight.

To address these topics, he considers the religious or secular motivations of those doing the work of spaceflight as well as the space-age theologies affected by their achievements. He explores at length the effects that the Apollo lunar landing missions had on the men who made them and on the worldwide audience that watched. Although individual rocket pioneers may have had varied secular or religious motivations for their individual work, NASA — a technological agency loath to engage with social and political issues — operated from a stance that Oliver ultimately characterises as “operational agnosticism”. The agency especially shielded away from religious topics after ardent Madalyn O’Hair’s lawsuit in 1969 over the reading from the Book of Genesis by the Apollo 8 astronauts on Christmas Eve 1968 made the notoriously controversial agency even more nervous. In response, Oliver reminds us, American Christians petitioned the agency (in a campaign that continued well into the 1970s), demanding that NASA protect the freedom of astronauts to express their faith, even during spaceflights. But Oliver is less interested in the happenstance overlap of religion and spaceflight than in the power of each to reveal something new about the other. The transformative religious experiences that some astronauts had, for instance, tell us as much about contemporary evangelicism as they do about spaceflight.

What distinguishes Oliver’s book is his conscientious positioning of his analysis in two different frameworks: the historical understanding of how the US space programme developed and a sociological study of American religion in the 20th century that works to understand the relationship between secularisation, modernity and emergent evangelicism. As usually told, those understood stories don’t sync up. Oliver finds his subject in their intersection in this historical moment. Questions of religion and faith, Oliver concludes, were ultimately central to understanding the American space age, a historical era that although sometimes seen as running parallel with contemporary social and political movements (“detached from its own time”) is actually rich with intersections with that larger story. That, ultimately, is the juxtaposition that interests Oliver most: how modernity and religion coexisted in the American space age.

To support his analysis, Oliver criss-crossed the US, combining research in NASA archives with work at religious archives such as the Southern Baptist Historical Library and the Billy Graham Center Archives. As a scholar of US history, he explores these questions almost exclusively in the context of the US space programme. The atheistic declarations of cosmonauts offer only occasional counterpoints to his main narrative, for instance.

In the end, launching human beings into space profoundly reshaped how we see ourselves: whether or not it sparked transcendent moments of epiphany, the awareness of our fragile existence on the blue marble Earth could not be unknown once it was realised. But if Man has always looked to the heavens, the first efforts to launch people off this planet ultimately occurred in a context in which religion and modernity competed, coexisted and defined an era.

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To Touch the Face of God: The Sacred, the Profane, and the American Space Program, 1957-1975
By Kendrick Oliver
Johns Hopkins University Press
248pp, £21.00
ISBN 9781421407883 and 408347 (e-book)
Published 1 February 2013

‘M’ has always looked to the heavens.” When I was teaching a space history course at undergraduate level, an inordinate number of students wanted to start their human spaceflight essays with some version of that sentence. I’d scribble on their drafts, suggesting that a more specific opening might better support their intended arguments. But at some level, their collective first move into the topic of human beings in space was telling. Man has always looked to the skies, often equating that rarefied air (or lack thereof) with the ethereal and even the

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