

Lindholdt, "Making Landfall"

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Book Review

Lindholdt, Paul. *Making Landfall*. Encircle Publications, 2018.

For a student of early America, the experience of finding oneself awash in fragments of an elusive whole is a familiar one. Hints of a decisive but under-documented event emerge from one source and the name of a principal actor from another, but, just when it seems the setting will come into focus, it melts under the scrutiny of the mind's eye. The difficult task of sharpening one's comprehension of the fuller picture is sometimes best met not only with an ability to perceive the historical unity of facts encountered in disparate sources, but also with a talent for immersing oneself in the alien spirit of the colonial Americas. In such instances, a rigorous intellectual appreciation of the historical past can find inspiration in a capacity for the imaginative work required to envision the topographic, linguistic, spiritual, environmental, mercantile, and other contexts of early American events and personalities.

The texts collected in the first volume of Paul Lindholdt's poetry, *Making Landfall*, demonstrate powerfully the author's capacity to unify scholarly expertise in several areas with exactly the sort of imaginative process I describe above. Indeed, while Lindholdt's academic work on regional and early American history, including his critical edition of John Josselyn's seventeenth-century *Two Voyages to New England*,¹ make evident his talents as a scholar of early America, the sensitivity to the rhythms and idiosyncrasies of American nature demonstrated in his several books of ecocriticism, including the memoir *In Earshot of Water: Notes from the Columbia Plateau*² and the monograph *Explorations in Ecocriticism: Advocacy, Bioregionalism, and Visual Design*,³ are just as much on display in *Making Landfall*. As a consequence, the volume offers poems spoken by a remarkably diverse array of early American voices, contextualized by sensitive reflections on the flora and fauna that surround and often serve as a sort of emblematic counterpoint to the ambitions of the colonists whose tales fill most of the book. Along the way, Lindholdt offers profound critiques of early American autocracy, a sense of what was gained and – more often – lost as the fledgling enterprise of American colonialism grew into its first maturity. Indeed, the poetry offers a vibrant, if not infrequently unsettling, evocation of the many challenges and disappointments European settlement of North America entailed. Taken as a whole, the many carefully crafted poems of this book display not only the author's prowess as a poet, but also his

¹ John Josselyn and Paul Lindholdt, ed., *John Josselyn, Colonial Traveler: A Critical Edition of Two Voyages to New-England* (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 1988).

² Paul Lindholdt, *In Earshot of Water: Notes from the Columbia Plateau* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011).

³ Paul Lindholdt, *Explorations in Ecocriticism: Advocacy, Bioregionalism, and Visual Design* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015).

deep scholarly understanding and powerful emotional apprehension of such topics. As a consequence, *Making Landfall* may be productively read not only as a strong book of poetry, but also as an interdisciplinary inspiration to scholarship in a variety of fields, from history and literary studies to zoology and ecology.

Lindholdt's book is divided into five sections. Each offers a somewhat different perspective on his subject, but all are deeply informed by the poetic tradition. The first, introduced with an epigraph from John Berryman's masterpiece "Homage to Mistress Bradstreet," opens with the poem "Traveler to the Colonies." This poem brings the reader across the Atlantic from Gravesend to Pascataway, a journey presented in terms deeply informed by earlier poetry from both sides of the Atlantic. In addition to echoes of Berryman, the text offers in its pairing of "flame" and "froze" at the end of lines nine and ten an evocation of Robert Frost's famous "Fire and Ice"; the storm-tossed seas of the first stanza recall portions of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's eerie "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"; and the speaker's assertion that "I shall build a cedar cabin" is shaped by W. B. Yeats's "Lake Isle of Innisfree," whose speaker likewise plans to cap a journey with such a modest home, when he will "a small cabin build there." Perhaps most importantly, a late reference to "Hell's Gate" not only situates the poem in a particular New World location, but tacitly positions the collection as a whole as a descendant of Dante's "Inferno," anticipating Lindholdt's especially damning take on many of the early American personalities whose names and actions are the subject matter of the book's subsequent poems. Later poems in the first section are spoken by early American colonists familiar to students of New England history and, unsurprisingly given the poet's earlier work, cleave closely to primary sources, including Josselyn's *Voyages*. This is most evident when the language itself is a blend of that of the sources and the author's own voice, as when one speaker describes Thomas Wannerton as downing "a pint of kill-devil rum in one fast draught." (Compare Josselyn's "a pint of kill-devil alias Rhum at a draught.") Some poems in the first section highlight the duplicitous sales pitches of those who motivated individuals and communities to undertake the crossing ("Promoter of the Colonies") or tensions among Euro-Americans, including two poems about Thomas Morton ("Thomas Morton" and "Famacides"). Morton established the community of Merrymount, home to a Maypole celebration that was viewed by nearby, and more Puritanical, communities as simple debauchery. The resulting events were long ago explored in Nathaniel Hawthorne's story "The May-Pole of Merry Mount" (and Lindholdt's poems on the topic do mention a hawthorn tree that becomes a motif in the book), but *Making Landfall* distinguishes itself by emphasizing the legacy of puritanical rigidity via a view of the defamed man's destroyed home from the perspective of one of his descendants. Other pieces in the opening section give voice to the Native American past ("Song of Salmon" and "King Philip") or assess the impact of colonial settlements on the natural world, as when a hunting dog disrupts the nest of a young mother partridge in the poem "Brooding Season":

We'd come in June, brooding season, eggs
still hatching, chicks unfledged,
wrong to have brought Silky-Coat trained
for the chase, lost in the capture and kill.

The second section of Lindholdt's collection, "Line of Descent," extends the themes of the first while supplementing and focusing them via the introduction of some fresh motifs. Particularly dominant here is a dialogic movement between poems about nature, typically featuring birds, and those that give voice to women whose place in the historical record is unjustly attenuated. Among the latter are "Sarah Hawkridge," the poet wife of John Cotton, whose poems were not preserved even though many of her husband's were; the wife of William Bradford (presumably his second, as the poem presents a woman somewhat settled into colonial life), told from the intriguing perspective of an indentured servant infatuated with the mistress of the house; and Mary Dyer, a Quaker martyr and mother of the stillborn child that John Winthrop described as "monstrous," a verdict with theological implications recognized by, among others, John Cotton. Lindholdt again roots his work in the achievements of earlier poems, from the Keatsian "all / we know of earth and all we need to know" to the winged spirits of the women of this section of the collection, descriptions of which dance around Emily Dickinson's declaration that "Hope is the thing with feathers." Too, Berryman remains in evidence: the title of his "Homage to Mistress Bradstreet" shapes Lindholdt's own "Homage to Mistress Bradford," and lines of Lindholdt's like "My legs quake, arms pimple, my neck bends" are indebted to Berryman's "Down from my body my legs flow, / out from it arms wave, on it my head shakes."

The third and fourth sections of Lindholdt's text, "Flowers Washed in Our Wake" and "When Land Grows Fat," turn to more systematic varieties of early American destruction, including again several poems driven by extended avian metaphors. In one of the best such texts, "Tenochtitlan," Lindholdt registers the breadth of European colonial harm in the voice of Cortez, who declares the necessity of destroying Moctezuma's aviary at Tenochtitlan as a way of displaying the conquistadors' power:

their aviaries leapt with flames
I would set. The souls inside—the tender
warblers, sparrows, wrens—

thrust beaks against the mesh
and uttered
cries keen enough to shave me.

It is in such fashion that Lindholdt brings together the environmental and political impact of the colonial project, much in the same way the gendered power imbalances explored elsewhere in the poems unite environmental and feminist critiques. Furthermore, the fourth section of the text shows readers not only the violence colonists enacted against pre-Contact cultures, but also against one another, especially as the persecution of colonists by one another became codified in the juridical practices of early American courts and such hysterical moments as the Salem Witch Trials. A poem in the voice of a magistrate refers, for example, to the gruesome stone-pressing of James Corey (Giles Corey), the only person to be killed in this manner in New England. Like so many of Lindholdt's poems, this one evinces not only his scholarly understanding of the colonial past, but also his sensitivity to topics addressed by the literary tradition: Corey's ordeal has been famously dealt with in works by Arthur Miller and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

The final section of Lindholdt's book provides a fitting conclusion in a number of ways. Several of the poems record the last gasps of alternatives to the hegemony of Puritan America, including a reflection on the Great Swamp Fight (in which King Philip, or Metacomet, fell) in the voice of a preacher who is interested in the Wampanoag chief's story as a lesson reminding the faithful to guard against spiritual backsliding. The final line of this poem, "He regenerates us in his pretty death," not only sums up the casual horrors of early America, but tips its hat to the influence throughout the collection of Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration through Violence*. The final piece, "Epitaph," is spoken in the voice of a man carving decorations on his gravestone – in repudiation of Puritanical suspicion of such images. The speaker recognizes the possibility that the stone will be destroyed in the name of righteous iconoclasm, but his refusal to capitulate, his carefully expressed but entirely evident and justified anger, display for readers what is perhaps the primary virtue of Lindholdt's book: its reminder that the available history is only ever part of the story and that, for scholars, students, and the idly curious alike, the land, peoples, and ideas of the early American past deserve ongoing attention by those interested in recovering its complexities, self-contradictions, and – even – hidden wonders.

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