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Eighty-Eight Years: The Long Death of Slavery in the United States, 1777-1865

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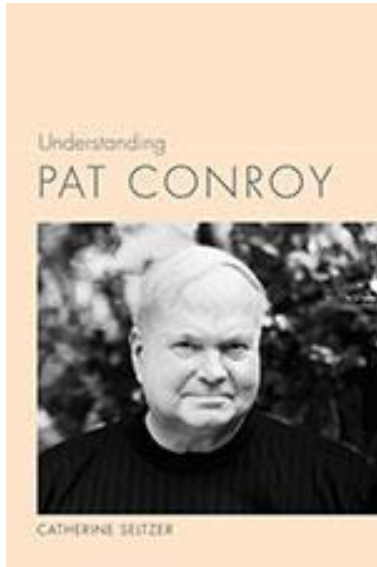
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Understanding Pat Conroy. Catherine Seltzer. Columbia : University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, 2015. ISBN 978-1-61117-517-2 (hard), 978-1-61117-546-2 (pbk), 978-1-61117-517-2 (ebook). 160 p., \$39.95. (hard)



Catherine Seltzer introduces us to young Pat Conroy: As a high school student Conroy accompanies his teacher, Eugene Norris, to Thomas Wolfe’s home in Asheville, North Carolina. Seltzer recounts the story that Norris took an apple from one of the trees on the grounds and said, “Eat it boy.” (p.1) Reflecting on taking the first bite, Conroy said, “I was given the keys to go out and try to write.” Conroy’s explanation of Norris’ comment goes on to show how “from the very beginning I wrote to explain my own life to myself”. From uncovering Conroy’s tree of knowledge and his tree of life, Seltzer recounts the many ways in which Conroy has brought sensitive and intellectual inspirations to his writings.

Through five novels and five books, Seltzer says Conroy returns to his life experiences and says “Only rarely have I drifted far from the bed where I was conceived.” (p.2) His comments on his family life that appear in his writings includes this comment, “One of the greatest gifts you can get as a writer is to be born into an unhappy family I could not have been born into a better one.” (p.2)

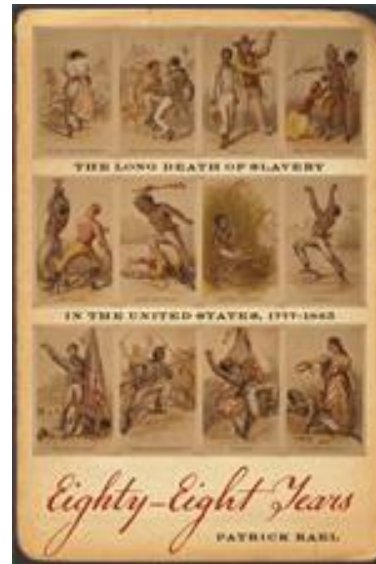
Reading Seltzer’s book, I am reminded of the one bit of advice any student hears from a mentor or teacher, “write what you know about, write what you have experienced.” I don’t think many English teachers are so clever as to give an apple to a talented student but I thank Catherine Seltzer for recounting the tale.

For students and faculty who might want to recommend Seltzer’s book for a reference or for supplemental reading, the author provides Chapters 2-8 as an individual commentary on “The Water is Wide”, “The Great Santini”, “The Lords of Discipline”, “The Prince of Tides”, “Beach

Music”, “My Losing Season”, and “South of Broad”. Notes, Bibliography and Index cover pages 119 to 135. Recommended for school and college libraries.

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Eighty-Eight Years: The Long Death of Slavery in the United States 1777-1865. Patrick Rael. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015. ISBN 978-0-8203-3395-3 (hard), 978-0-82-3-4839-1 (paper). 400 p. \$89.95 (hard).



Often a title will grab attention and produce a moment of disbelief. The recent book by Patrick Rael created that reaction from me. “Eighty Eight Years: The Long Death of Slavery in the United States 1777-1865” by Rael seemed to be an overstatement to this reader who held only a sketchy knowledge of “slavery in the Atlantic world”. Supported by a grant that funded a year of research and writing, Rael’s contributions in this manuscript represent diligence, perseverance, and determination to help readers such as I, to begin to see why it took 88 years to move slavery in the Atlantic world to a place much changed and needed.

A particular piece of Rael’s research was fascinating to me—the establishment in March of 1863 of the Freedman’s Bureau and its place in attempts to provide funds and free lands to support former slaves. Though the 40 acre plots did not materialize (p. 301), the attempt was a government effort to provide assistance to former slaves. Rael’s research covers many topics that will be of interest to scholars and students: “half slave and half free”, “Atlantic slavery and abolition in the era of the early republic”, “caste and resistance in the age of Emancipation”, “antislavery militance and the collapse of party politics”, “the terrible war: secession, civil War and Emancipation”, “one hundred years of Reconstruction”, and “what peace among the Whites brought”. (pp. 62-321)

Author Douglas R. Egerton, asks us, “ Why did it take so long to end slavery in the United States, and what did it mean that the nation existed eighty-eight years as a “house divided against itself,” as Abraham Lincoln put it?” (Back cover entry) Then Egerton goes on to say, “In no other nation was (slavery) so prolonged as in the United States...from 1777 when Vermont wrote slavery out of its state constitution, to 1865, when the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery nationwide.”

Egerton also points out that “African Americans played a central role in ending slavery in the US, “fueled by Revolutionary ideals of self-rule and universal equality,

slaves and free blacks—both on their own and alongside abolitionists—slowly turned American opinion against the slave interests in the South.” (Back cover entry)

This intense work by Rael is highly recommended for scholars and students of history of the South and of the Atlantic region. Notes and Index run from page 331 to page 381. A number of black and white illustrations provide flavor to the text.

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