

Young, Alfred Fabian. *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution*. (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1999. Pp. vii + 262. Introduction, Afterward, Notes, Acknowledgements, Index.)

Alfred Young's book *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party* is essentially a collection of essays compiled into chapters for a biographical approach to cultural history. Young divides his work into two parts. The first details the life of George Robert Twelves Hewes. Hewes is a shoemaker by trade and important to Fabian for the class struggle that he sees as a determining factor on the memory of the tea party.

Young weaves Hewes' life from two separate biographies. One was written by James Hawkes the other by Benjamin Bussey Thatcher. Both biographers interviewed Hewes in his old age. Both stories are told as completely as they can from Hewes' own recollection.

Young looks at these recollections and biographies to point out strengths and weaknesses of their authors. Hawkes works seem dry and come more from the "as-told-to-me-by" genre. Thatcher, on the other hand, according to Young could not resist embellishing the language, this rendering Hewes' memories more poetic than they may have been. Both works rely heavily on Hewes' own personal account of his service that was written up as part of the application process for the government pension service for veterans. Essentially, Young views that body of work as a war memoir of sorts.

Throughout the first part of this book Young asserts that not only what Hewes remembers, but also *how* he remembers it, is important. The moment of history, as well as how that moment was perceived and stored within his memory

are integral pieces of Hewes' fabric of history. Some of the instances that Hewes recollects are very unlikely to have occurred according to Young.

Hewes recalls taking an active role in the Boston Tea Party. This fact is confirmed by Young's research. Hewes also recalls working on the same chest of tea as John Hancock, a well-known man about Boston. Young claims that given the nature of the event and the desire for the perpetrators to remain anonymous that it is highly unlikely that someone of Hancock's status and position within society would have been an active part on board.

This one memory, however, forms the crux of Young's interpretation of Hewes' history, and the importance of memory, even if that specific memory is flawed, or untrue. At that instant, real or imagined, George Hewes became an equal of John Hancock. The two men who were separated by class, occupation, wealth and status, were working together in the cause of liberty, they had become associates.

This idea, this thought and memory of Hewes was, according to Young, "what the revolutionary events of Boston meant" (57) to Hewes. Breaking open that chest of tea at John Hancock's side, or, rather, with John Hancock at *his* side was "the way he [Hewes] recorded it in his mind at the time" and "the way he stored it in his memory." (57)

Outside the events of the Tea Party Young paints a square and balanced, if not full portrait of George Hewes throughout his life. Young gives accounts of Hewes' youth, courtship and marriage, as well as his revolutionary antagonisms and military services. Working this way Young has laid the groundwork in the first part of the book for the perspective with which to view the events of the second half of

the book. Understanding Hewes' actions, thoughts and memories, gives the reader a more solid, single point of view on an article of history much better than watching those ideas form along the way interwoven in the narrative of the event itself, autonomous of its participants.

Writing in this manner, and in this order, Young allows the reader to gain Hewes' perspective before revealing certain recollections as true, false, or undetermined. Whether the memories turn out to be real or imagined they are still important. The thoughts reveal some reasons behind actions or in some cases inaction, as in Hewes' militia volunteering and subsequent abstainment from the draft.

Other times however there are suppositions. Young writes them in sparingly, but many of the ones included are never laced together through footnotes or bibliographical explanation. This lack of evidence for certain suppositions, usually involving crowd sizes or participants, leave the reader taking more of Young's word for events than some may feel comfortable with.

The short biography of Hewes paves the way for part two of the book. In the final half of the book, Young wrestles with the memory of events and validating evidence of those events. By providing Hewes' eyes as the set framework for the events Young works from within and without to ascertain when December 16, 1773 went from being "the destruction of the Tea in Boston Harbor" to the "Boston Tea Party."

Young deconstructs the memory of the Tea Party following the end of the Revolutionary war. He follows the same natural deconstruction of the same during

post war Boston. What did “the destruction of the tea” mean to Bostonians? Young claims that it was “the largest mass action,” “most revolutionary act of the decades,” and the “boldest most dangerous [action] in Boston at the time;” calling the latter “quasi-military.” (143)

Young then switches his focus from memory to forgetting. He devotes chapters to discussions on the changing of memorial dates, replacing of memorial parades, their participants, and overseers. Important physical memorials are allowed to decay and ruin. Others are erected, looked at in passing, and then removed when the land on which they sat was needed. The houses of important participants in pre-war and war events fell into disrepair or were destroyed outright.

Young briefly chronicles the rise of Bostonian elitism and how they would distance themselves from the “mechanics” and “journeymen” of the common lot. According to Young, progress of Boston’s upper-crust merchants and their kind got in the way of preserving its revolutionary legacy.

Young also attributes Boston’s amnesia to the number of common, working-class people that left Boston during the British occupation of their city. Many of these migrants never returned. As the city grew, more and more people looked for work and fewer and fewer remembered anything leading up to the war.

The year 1825 saw a resurgence of interest in the Revolutionary War. The Frenchman Lafayette returned to the United States for a speaking tour, several battle monuments were dedicated, and the veterans were “discovered.” This [re]discovery of veterans was due in no small part to the passage of the first

veterans pension act in 1818. This first pension applied only to those in “indigent” conditions. Several acts later, all veterans would be covered provided they gave an account of their service to the United States. Young writes that over 20,000 persons claimed this pension.

Young alludes that this resurgence of interest in the Revolution may be in part due to fledgling political ambitions. New party politics were beginning in Washington and each one wanted to claim a direct bloodline back to the Revolution. Some took steps to add to previous symbolism. Young recounts that the words “Law and Order” were carved onto the roots of a bas-relief Liberty Tree. This Young says, “tamed the illegal acts with which the tree was associated from 1765-1775.

At length Young describes that “the veneration of the veteran as hero...political orchestrations of festive ritual...recovery of symbolism of the Liberty Tree and the Declaration of Independence...” and the “sense of loss of the last links to the Revolution set the stage for the ‘discovery’ of George Robert Twelves Hewes and his triumphal reception in Boston in 1835.

The same year Hewes returned to Boston, his second biography was published. Young reiterates that the term “tea party” was not seen in print until the early 1830s. In fact, according to Young, the first time the phrase had been used in a title was for the first George Hewes biography. The second, Young writes, followed suit. Young believes that these occurrences may be the first time that the term that is familiar today was used in a book.

Once Young answers the question of when the popular term took hold, he addresses the last few chapters on the why. He says that while “tea party” or some

variation on the idea of making tea in the harbor may have been used in the vernacular, “proper” and “genteel” people never referred to it as much.

Young even uses Lewis Carroll’s popular 19th century work, *Alice in Wonderland* as an example. He claims that the tea party attended by Alice was much like a score of “pretend” tea parties that were held by children. This commonality of the phrase and its connotation, Young claims, could be used by upper class to denounce the “destruction of the tea” to mere child’s play.

Young discovers that the term “tea party” became nearly as powerful in symbol as the event itself. Party politics exploded in the mid 19th century and by the centenary of the revolution there was still no clear idea between the left and right on what the Tea Party meant to Americans.

That battle continues. Young ends discussing “symbolic acts” and their repercussions, authors, and participants. A photograph shows protestors at the tea party vessels as “two republican congressmen prepare to dump a copy of the federal tax code from the tea party ship.” (196) Maintaining that the result of the Boston Tea Party was radical change via revolution seems to be the only relatively unchanged symbolism of the event.

Young wrote this book in 1999, and his collection of essays each address a facet of a complicated man, and an even more complicated event. He set out to ascertain when “the destruction of the tea in Boston Harbor” became what every American school child knows as “The Boston Tea Party,” and he succeeded.

He also worked hard to determine what it all meant to the participants and their descendants. The only question that remains is how many more chapters

could Young add to his work if it was rewritten today. In the light of the new political movement, with politicians aligning themselves with the “Tea Party Movement” of considering themselves “Members of the Tea Party,” are Americans really any closer to understanding just what the “Tea Party” meant?

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