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Book Review: Death by Theory: A Tale of Mystery and Archaeological Theory by Adrian Praetzellis

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consumer goods that we find in archaeological assemblages, we too often are content to discover when a certain object was made, and to deduce to what purposes it was put. Rarely do we think about what was going on in the minds of those that designed, created, marketed, and sold the millions of things we have collectively excavated over the decades. Blaszczyk's thought-provoking book provides an alternative way to think about these consumer products, and thus is of great interest to an archaeological audience.

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DEATH BY THEORY: A TALE OF MYSTERY AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL THEORY by Adrian Praetzelis 2000, Altamira Press, California. 174 pages, \$59.00 (cloth), \$17.95 (paper).

Reviewed by Diana DiPaolo Loren

Intrigue, suspense, romance, deception, exotic locations, and archaeology? Can one book capture it all and still make archaeological theory comprehensible to students? Yes, and Adrian Praetzelis has done so in this

important contribution that presents archaeological theory through narrative. This is a tale of mystery set on an island in the Pacific Northwest where archaeological theory as well as current issues and debates within archaeology are explained through character dialogue. Clearly there has been a need for such a volume. There are few books on archaeological theory written for undergraduate students. Large-scale volumes on archaeology often used in introductory courses tend to compartmentalize theoretical approaches in chapters dealing with regions or methods, while more advanced theoretical works adapted for introductory classes are often incomprehensible to students. And aside from *In Small Things Forgotten* (Deetz 1996) and *What This Awl Means* (Spector 1993), there are few popular books on archaeology that are written for a broad audience of archaeologists, students, and interested lay people. In *Death by Theory*, Praetzelis has provided both: a book about archaeological theories that is accessible to a broad audience.

In this book, characters espouse different theoretical approaches. Our protagonists are Hannah Green, a professor of archaeology at Ennui State University and aunt of Sean Doyle, a recently matriculated student with a B.A. in anthropology who is in search of a job (and, as it turns out, so much more). Hannah and Sean are contracted to work on a highly suspect dig, where they meet an interesting array of archaeologists. Through the volume, Hannah spends much of her time explaining or lecturing on the history and workings of archaeology to Sean and other characters. She also laments over the progress of her own book on archaeology theory (entitled *Archaeology from A to Z* to be published by Lascaux Press) which, like the author's, is a book on theory structured using mystery writer Sue Grafton's alphabet murder series. Other characters and their approaches include Alasdair, the materialist; bd starr, the ecofeminist; and Terry, the Marxist, just to name a few. Through their dialogue, theories are discussed, deliberated, refuted, and argued from various standpoints and positions. By presenting theory through characters in the book, Praetzelis hopes that the readers will see how "theoretical models are like these colored lenses,

for they help us see patterns in the archaeological record that would otherwise be invisible. Different lenses are useful for seeing the various elements in each image" (p. 152). One very minor point is that several of the characters were downright unlikable (such as Alasdair, the annoying graduate student) and students may have a hard time finding credence in an approach espoused by such a character. Buttressed by some very clever cartoons (drawn by Praetzellis himself) that illustrate and explain various theories, however, the final approach is a very effective method for teaching theory.

Praetzellis presents each theory more or less in historical sequence; for example, the book begins with a chapter entitled "'A' is for Artifact" that outlines some of the basic premises within archaeology, followed by chapter entitled "'B' is for Binford" and then "'G' is for Gender." Each chapter summarizes the historical influences of a theoretical approach while outlining key authors and ideas. The intent here is to explain to students that archaeological theory has a long and involved history, each movement or approach is in response to and/or influenced by preexisting theories. For example, in Chapter Three when Sandra Beech (another student working on the project) is poorly graded for not knowing the history of New Archaeology, here Praetzellis lays out the emergence of New Archaeology from previous cultural historical approaches. And in Chapter Four, Praetzellis goes on to outline not only the work of Lewis Binford (humorously illustrated as "Lew and the Eskimo" on pages 48–49) but he also highlights the work of Walter Taylor in the 1940s and his influences on New Archaeology in the 1960s. Missing from some of these chapters, however, were some of the infamous characters and debates that impacted the growth of theory within the discipline, including Gustaf Kossinna and the Ford/Spaulding debate. Also missing were some of the philosophical underpinnings of various approaches, such as the influence of logical positivism on New Archaeology.

This approach of presenting theories more or less in historical order works well, but the explanation of one of the more important shifts in the discipline—the shift from proces-

sual to post-processual archaeology—occurs in one of the last chapters and is a distinction that would have benefited from further clarification. In this chapter, entitled "'P' is for Postmodern," Praetzellis discusses some of the concerns of post-processual archaeology as well as the distinction between postmodern and post-processual approaches (pp. 138–142). But this explanation occurs in the last chapter, while feminist and Marxist theories—two approaches within post-processual archaeology—were presented in earlier chapters. The advent of neo-Marxist, world-systems, feminist, and post-structural theories in the 1970s influenced the emergence of post-processual archaeology of the 1980s (e.g., Dobres and Robb 2000), and this point is not clearly presented. While the book touches on the better-known theoretical approaches, other approaches missing from the book include practice theory—following the work of Bourdieu or Giddens—as well as symbolic and neo-evolutionary approaches. Since the intended audience of the book is students of archaeology, these approaches deserve greater attention, particularly as they will surely spark lively debate and discussion in the classroom.

The structure of book and its supplemental chapters, which includes a glossary of archaeological and other general terms used in the book (including Ian Hodder, *boychik*, and Purple Haze), are sure to promote classroom discussion. To further encourage such discussion, Praetzellis has also included chapters on further readings (both texts and websites) and talking points. But in addition to these supplemental chapters, previous chapters contain interesting nuggets of information—both in text and illustration—about the practice of archaeology (past and present) as well as current debates and popular misconceptions about archaeology, all of which will foster spirited discussion. For example, there is a clever diagram that illustrates the history of archaeology through headgear (p. 38), and there is a nice dialogue between Terry and Sean regarding the pros and cons of working with native peoples (pp. 95–96).

The setting of the mystery (and I hope I'm not spoiling anything here) at a Neolithic site on a Pacific Northwest island is a case study in the politics of archaeological practice. How

archaeologists work within local communities and with the public while also balancing academic and economic concerns is found in the musings of Hannah and Sean while working on the site. Yet the setting was a little too fantastic (the "International Geographic Society" doesn't visit every archaeological site) and I wish that more realistic examples regarding the politics of archaeological practice had been presented only because such examples place the practice and theory of archaeology into sharp relief, which is often a useful contrast for students.

Finally, through Sean, who is desperately in search of a job, students can get a sense of the options that are available to them in the field of archaeology: graduate school; academia; and CRM. The pros and cons of each were presented, but I found myself wondering why museum, state, or federal positions weren't also presented as viable options for employment. Despite this small oversight, this is a wonderful way for students to consider their options in continuing with a career in archaeology.

What a refreshing book. I heartily recommend it for use in the classroom and in fact, for a general fun read outside the classroom. It is an amusing, clever, informative, and well-conceived book that defines archaeological theories in ways that are comprehensible to students. Kudos to Adrian Praetzelis for taking on this challenge and delivering such an excellent book that is sure to please.

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THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL NORTHEAST by Mary Ann Levine, Kenneth A. Sassaman, and Michael S. Nassaney, 1999, Bergin & Garvey, Westport, CT, Foreword by Alice B. Kehoe, 336 pages, \$75.00 (cloth), \$29.95 (paper).

Reviewed by Alan Leveillee

The Archaeological Northeast is a contributed volume, published by Bergin & Garvey as one of the initial books in a planned series, *Native Peoples of the America*, the general editor of which is Laurie Weinstein. Mary Ann Levine, Kenneth A. Sassaman, and Michael S. Nassaney serve dual roles as authors and volume editors, with additional contributions by fellow University of Massachusetts (Amherst) graduate students, alumnae, and colleagues Mary Lou Curran, George P. Nicholas, Frederick T. Dunford, John R. Cross, Elizabeth S. Chilton, David M. Lacy, Elena Filios, Robert J. Hasenstab, Eric S. Johnson, Catherine C. Carlson, Elizabeth A. Little, and Mitchell T. Mulholland. The book is dedicated to Dena F. Dincauze for her remarkable career as a pre-eminent archaeologist in the Northeast, and