considering the austere character of the Dutch statesman. Nevertheless, this piece is still useful for its lucid summary of the voluminous correspondence between these two figures.

Most of the remaining chapters are pieces more appropriate for an introductory textbook than a pricey collection of academic essays. Some interesting points are still made, for example, by Alan Guy, who underscores Marlborough’s indebtedness to the military reforms of William III, while Michael Hochedlinger provides an amusing take on his career as a prince of Holy Roman Empire, a title for which the duke started to campaign well before his first great victory in Blenheim (p.260-64). Nevertheless, these appear in the backdrop of narrative surveys in which Marlborough is relegated to second place, although no other author goes as far as Jaap Brujin. His ‘The Anglo-Dutch Navies in Marlborough’s Wars’ mentions the duke only twice: first, because his brother George Churchill sat on the admiralty board, and second, because he, together with the other allied commanders, had appreciated the contribution of sea power to the overall war effort. On the other hand, the detailed biography of Marlborough by John Hattendorf largely repeats the 2004 Oxford DNB entry by the same author. More generally, the volume contains a number of repetitions and inconsistencies. For instance, the outbreak of the War of the Spanish Succession is covered in David Onnekink’s introductory chapter, Bernhard Kroener’s take on the German Reich and Hochedlinger’s piece on Habsburg Austria. Guy and Ostwald cite Marlborough’s service as a young ensign in Tangier as his first military experience, while Hattendorf argues there is no concrete evidence to prove Marlborough ever made it to Morocco. Some contributors refer to the battle of ‘Blindheim’, while German-speakers Kroener and Hochedlinger employ the more familiar anglicised ‘Blenheim’. All this could have been prevented with more active editorial guidance. Ideally, the editors should have also given the collection a clearer focus: either as a showcase of new studies of Marlborough’s activities or as a readable synthesis aimed to appeal to the general public.

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In 1728 the self-described ‘well-bred gentleman’, Royal Society fellow, Virginia politician and man of ‘knowledge’ and ‘wit’ William Byrd II served as senior commissioner of a surveying expedition to redraw the disputed boundary line between Virginia and North Carolina. In the years following the expedition Byrd constructed two artful narratives of the surveying process: The History of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina and The Secret History of the Line. These texts (and the relationship between them) have long intrigued both historians and literary scholars, who have appreciated their historical information, their colonial perspective, their humour and wit, and their narrative elements. Kevin Berland’s extensively annotated new edition manages simultaneously to explain away many scholarly assumptions about the Histories and to open to further scrutiny their evocative layers of authorial creation, inter-textual possibility, colonial history-making, socio-cultural commentary and storytelling. His edition promises both to enrich students’ understandings of Byrd and to reinvigorate scholarly work on the Histories.

Despite centuries of scholarly interest, Byrd’s Histories have been poorly edited: Berland describes a history of editors who ‘have treated the texts with a surprising lack of care’ and thus returns to the Westover manuscripts to correct transcription errors created and replicated in previous editions (p.52). This fidelity to the manuscripts alone justifies Berland’s project, but the edition’s value lies also in its treatment of The History of the Dividing Line, in particular, as an accretional narrative that incorporates unacknowledged material from a range of sources (p.xi). Like other eighteenth-century authors, Byrd ‘used extraneous material plentifully to bolster his authoritative declarations’ (p.21). Berland’s thorough outline of the Histories’ compositional history makes clear that Byrd worked on these texts for years after the surveying expedition, often ‘in his library with one or
more books open before him’ (p.x). Moreover, Byrd did not linearly derive the History from the Secret History, as scholars have assumed; instead, Berland contends, Byrd developed the two texts in parallel for entirely different audiences: The History for a public audience, and the Secret History for a select audience interested in libertine and satirical traditions (p.46). Byrd’s lengthy compositional process included note-taking, official reporting, epistolary communication, narrative framing and ‘extensive polishing’ (p.48).

Berland has painstakingly traced Byrd’s unacknowledged sources and given readers extensive endnotes, with relevant passages from a range of authors. For instance, Byrd’s comments on the practicality of intermarriage with Indians in the History echo both Board of Trade documents and Robert Beverley’s History and Present State of Virginia (1705). Readers can now easily compare Byrd’s prose with such possible sources and draw conclusions about textual and epistemological exchange in the colonies and across the Atlantic. Other historical annotations thoroughly explain Byrd’s obscure references and terminology. In Berland’s notes people such as the disreputable minister Richard Marsden and plants such as yaupon holly become not immaterial details but nodes in a dynamic colonial matrix. Berland dexterously situates people, places, plants, events and words in a historical, literary, epistemological and spatial ‘deep map’ of Virginia, North Carolina and the Atlantic world (p.xi).

Could Berland pack anything else into this ‘map’, this scholar would like to see more attention to Indian agency in Byrd’s colonial environment. For instance, Berland does not elucidate the importance of the Mehereems, Weyanokes and other indigenous communities in the boundary-line dispute. The increasing visibility of Native material practice and literacies compels us to work towards more comprehensive inclusion of indigenous communities in our maps of colonial texts. Nevertheless, Berland’s Histories exemplify the rigorous reading and research practices necessary to such an endeavour and provide the crucial groundwork for further exploration.

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Thomas Keymer’s newly released edition of William Beckford’s novel Vathek quite objectively ranks as one of the finest scholarly Orientalist texts that Oxford University Press has recently produced. In spite of Beckford’s talent and interesting reputation, this fact is mainly owing to the painstaking detail with which Keymer has systematically elaborated on the author’s own copious notes to the text, as well as to an informative introduction that draws the reader’s attention to diverse aspects of the novel, ranging from the homoerotic to the fantastical. Although rather obscure when it comes to mainstream university curricula, Vathek has long been regarded as both a Gothic masterpiece and a seminal work from the perspective of eighteenth-century history. Very loosely based on the historical figure of Al-Wathiq ibn Mutassim (a late eighth-century caliph), the book recounts the spiritual and moral downfall of a proud and decadent potentate who eventually lands precisely where the reader wishes him to: in the infernal realm of the Muslim version of Satan, Iblis. In the Quran, Iblis is described not as a fallen angel but as one of the Jinn (genies), and Beckford’s attempt to portray a character that comes close to the Islamic concept of satanic evil outshines those of other notable writers who were intrigued by genies, such as the Bronte siblings. Yet, in spite of all one’s attempts to maintain a straight face while absorbing Vathek’s adventures, one cannot help but be amused by the caliph’s descent into madness and retribution, for it is the novel’s excess that captured the attention of Beckford’s contemporaries, and which makes it a thrilling read for postmodern academics and laypeople alike. Indeed, Keymer’s reference to the ‘gleeful panache’ (p.xii) of the book aptly underscores the darkly humorous and rather wild machinations of Beckford’s audacious tale.

While perusing the endnotes, I was impressed by several aspects of them, too numerous to recount here. However, special mention must be made of Keymer’s sound understanding of the