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The publication of *Ars Americana, Ars Politica* (2010) brought Peter Swirski in the limelight and paved the way for a back to back lecture with Noam Chomsky, under the auspices of the UNE’s Center for Global Humanities. Following in the footsteps of *Ars Americana*, his next book, *Utopia and Social Engineering* (2011), also received critical accolades and solidified his position as a prominent persona in the field of American Studies. In a similar way, Swirski’s most recent publication, *American Political Fictions: War on Errorism in Contemporary American Literature, Culture, and Politics* lives up to his reputation as a scholar who not only probes deeply in contemporary American politics and culture, but also does not shy away from controversial topics that debunk the workings of the various political structures.

More specifically, *American Political Fictions* is obviously informed by the same agenda, as Swirski’s attempt to uncover hidden truths is easily discernible page after page of witty and thoughtful commentary on popular political art, spanning roughly a 30-year long period starting in the 80s until the present. His interest in exposing “America’s erroneous conceptions” of itself is stated right from the very beginning (4) as he ponders on broken promises by both Republicans and Democrats for a deliverance that never came to fruition. Obviously well versed in both political and literary theories and contemporary developments, Swirski engages in an in-depth and rigorous discussion that sheds light on the
myths lying at the heart of American politics by focusing on diverse art and media such as novels, music, film and television.

Actually, the wide scope of the book allows him, as he rightly admits in the Introduction (14), to successfully redefine the term political as well as the traditional concept of fiction itself. At the same time, he broadens the meaning of “American,” by including Scottish Alistair Beaton’s A Planet for the President. The first political fiction he looks at is Joseph Heller’s Picture This, a novel-as-history, or a history-as-novel, as Swirski aptly suggests. Swirski obviously finds Heller’s work very effective in its juxtaposition of ancient and modern history with that of the American empire. Indeed, the analogies between the ancient Greek imperial democracy, the Dutch corporate regime and the “imperial hybris” (21) of the American state are too prominent to be ignored. In his intuitive reading of Heller’s rejection of fictions produced by empire builders, Swirski also emerges as a fervent opponent of such feel-good stories and histories and is eager to shed light on the “hypocrisy that has not changed an iota in twenty-five centuries” (46). In this context, he does not hesitate to put two and two together and speak openly for the crimes enacted by the American empire builders, such as Bush and Cheney who should be held accountable, according to Swirski, for thousands of deaths since March 2003 (47).

In the same vein, Swirski examines Tim LaHaye’s and Jerry B. Jenkins Left Behind in chapter 2, Alistair Beaton’s A Planet For the President in chapter 3, Rap songs in chapter 4 and Sorkin’s political drama television series The West Wing in the final chapter. What emerges from all these chapters is Swirski’s iconoclastic tactics as, chapter after chapter, he demystifies various myths of American democracy and American empire, exposing the blind spots as well as the hypocrisy of an empire based on a creation of convenient heroes and villains with its effacement of as many contradictions as possible.

Overall, Swirski’s choice of texts seems to be informed by his belief in what he calls “mass political education,” and its profound power to influence potential voters and thus determine the future of politics. It is this power that can bring together popular art, and political, literary and cultural analysis. As Swirski fittingly observes, “politics does make strange bedfellows” (14) and he takes a strong stand against the ostracism that the academy enacts at the expense of popular, aka lesser, works of art that are accused of entertaining instead of elevating, of stirring emotion instead of reflection, of mixing together fact and fiction. In his attempt to defend popular art in American Political Fictions, Swirski laments the fact that “popular creators come under fire for allegedly pandering to the lowest cultural denominator” instead of being appraised for fighting political apathy (16).
It is this point that turns the book from a mere pessimistic analysis of the failure of contemporary American politics to a reflection of possible solutions. Fighting political apathy is then at the forefront of Swirski’s agenda. His polemics are not these of a detached, bitter, cynical observer, but of an active, engaged critic who is interested in exploring solutions and opening up new possibilities as he approaches popular political art as a basic expression of American democracy.

Swirski’s elaborate prose with its sarcastic undertones and innuendos is aimed at the connoisseurs. The witty title anticipates, even before we open the book, the outspoken, often sarcastic, tone that his readers have come to expect, as he overtly or covertly criticizes politics and practices that pose as democratic. All in all, *American Political Fictions* offers a profound analysis by a deeply engaged and erudite scholar who examines the literature of politics in an entertaining and yet sharp and caustic manner. This refreshing combination is justified by the fact that, as Swirski also explains, some things are too serious or dangerous –I would further add–to be tackled differently. Thus, the reprints of political cartoons, the insightful innuendos and the satirical comparisons, the audacious accusations and the scathing criticism, are the tools of an artful commentator who can probe deeply into the heart of his subject matter, namely American politics and American culture.