

Monika M. Elbert and Lesley Ginsberg, eds., *Romantic Education in Nineteenth-Century American Literature: National and Transatlantic Contexts*. New York and London: Routledge, 2015. Pp. 290. £90. ISBN 9781138781122.

The essays collected in this volume chart the legacy of Romantic pedagogy in American literature from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth. The book is organised into four sections, each consisting of four essays. The first section is concerned with exploring the way in which Romantic pedagogy was interpreted within the Transcendentalist tradition. Ken Parille and Anne Mallory offer a particularly stimulating discussion of how Bronson Alcott's Pestalozzian theory of education faltered in practice. Alcott's experience of teaching boys convinced him that corporal punishment was a necessary part of their education: a conviction that conflicted with his investment in 'the Romantic figure of the spiritual child' (26). The fraught relationship between theory and practice is one of several themes that recur throughout these essays, and is reflected by the book's engagement with both literary and more obviously didactic writing.

The book's second section explores how Romantic conceptions of art were translated into socially progressive pedagogy. These educational agendas were subsequently transmitted via a number of forms: from the popular serialised novels of E.D.E.N. Southworth (discussed in Joyce W. Warren's essay) to Susanna Rowson's *Spelling Dictionary*. As Lorinda B. Colhoon argues, with its inclusion of words such as 'blockade', 'bomb', 'debenture' and 'emancipate', Rowson's *Dictionary* provided its young female readers with lessons about 'citizenship, property, and power' (75). This section also includes Anne Bruder's essay on Jane Addams, whose egalitarian principles led her to establish the 'embodied pedagogical experiment' (121) of the Hull-House settlement and, later, a museum dedicated to labour. Bruder offers a fascinating account of how the museum's celebration of women's work helped individuals to find solace in an industrial age through the recovery of 'maternal attachments' (130).

The third section of the book addresses the vexed issue of race. Lesley Ginsberg considers the 'tension between Romanticism and reform' (146) with reference to the career of Lydia Maria Child, while Valerie D. Levy examines the abolitionist poetry of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. Bringing matters into the present day, Wendy Ryden suggests that educators perpetuate a form of Romantic ideology when teaching the autobiographical writings of Frederick Douglass. Ryden's polemical essay argues that teachers too frequently universalise Douglass' experiences, transforming him into an emblem of Romantic self-actualisation. Sarah Ruffing Robbins also engages with the shortcomings of Romantic pedagogy, exploring how Elaine Goodale Eastman's private and professional lives were shaped by her engagement with 'the so-called "Indian problem"' (193).

The focus on what the editors refer to as 'the "other" or the child left behind' (7) informs the essays in the final section of the book, which is entitled 'Romantic Pedagogies and the Resistant Child'. The idea of 'resistance' is interpreted variously, but is most pronounced in the contributions from Carol J. Singley and Monika M. Elbert. Singley's essay begins by referring to Ralph Waldo Emerson's brother, Robert Bulkeley Emerson who, 'in today's parlance, might be called learning disabled' (230). However, rather than focussing on the challenge that such children may have posed for Romantic models of pedagogy, Singley's discussion turns to more conventional figures of 'resistance': the troublesome children in novels by Hawthorne, Stowe, Alcott and Twain. Similarly, Monika Elbert considers the figure of the 'empathic disabled child protagonist' (260) in novels ranging from *Little Women* to *Pollyanna*. Both essays offer illuminating accounts of the fiction they discuss, but are

sadly unable to connect theory and practice in the manner of the earlier essays; as Elbert notes, relatively little information about the education of disabled children in this period has been discovered. The book's final section also contains Allison Giffen's excellent discussion of Martha Finley's *Elsie Dinsmore* series. Giffen describes how the Romantic sentimentalisation of girlhood has found new popularity among the evangelical Christian right in the US, before drawing out the disturbingly incestuous undercurrents prompted by the image of the 'redemptive daughter' in Finley's novels (247).

As this overview suggests, the book offers detailed explorations of both canonical and relatively obscure figures. While the essays are consistently thought-provoking, it is a shame that their discussions cannot always be developed in the relatively short space each is afforded. Readers with a particular interest in Romanticism may also feel frustration: while the essays offer an excellent appraisal of the debates that shaped American pedagogy, the version of Romanticism to which they appeal is sometimes rather narrow. Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality' is frequently invoked as a shorthand for Romantic attitudes towards childhood. Similarly, although many of the essays are particularly attentive to gender, they offer little sense of how American authors responded to earlier women writers of the Romantic period, despite the influence that figures such as Maria Edgeworth and Anna Letitia Barbauld had upon their transatlantic counterparts.

Nevertheless, this book does not aim to reassess British, or European, Romanticism: its intention is to examine the history of American education from a range of new perspectives. Its success in this endeavour is enhanced by the careful sequencing of the essays. While each is self-contained, collectively they provide a valuable examination of the way in which Romantic ideas were transmitted, contested, and reformulated in response to the educational demands of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America.

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