

Brycchan Carey, ed., *The Interesting Narrative* by Olaudah Equiano. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. 272. £8.99. ISBN 9780198707523.

For the better part of the current century Brycchan Carey has maintained an open-access Olaudah Equiano website that features, among much else, an ever-growing bibliography that both catalogues the various editions of *The Interesting Narrative* (from 1789 onward) and offers a full critical history. Few scholars are better positioned to prepare a new edition of *The Interesting Narrative*, and while Norton, Bedford, Penguin, and Broadview all have editions in print, even in this crowded field Carey has produced what may well be the best edition of Equiano's text for students and general readers.

A few strengths of Carey's edition warrant special notice. First, his introduction laudably balances general overview and scholarly detail. Especially helpful for readers new to Equiano is Carey's structural account of *The Interesting Narrative* as a work that falls roughly into 'five phases,' each corresponding to a significant period in Equiano's life (vii-xvi). Some readers will want to nuance the lines of this textual map, but it nonetheless offers a helpful starting place for understanding this deeply protean work. The pedagogical impulse on display here is also at work in Carey's distillations of the complex political and ideological coordinates of *The Interesting Narrative* in his introduction. Here, for instance, is Carey on the timing of the book's initial publication:

The *Interesting Narrative* was a deliberate and timely political act. It appeared in the late spring of 1789, about two weeks before the British Parliament opened its long-awaited debate into the future of the slave trade, giving Members of Parliament and the electors they represented enough time to read the book, but not long enough that they would forget the horrific details about the Middle Passage and Caribbean slavery that its author had witnessed. (ix)

And here is his sharp précis of the knotty status of capitalism within the text:

As *The Interesting Narrative* had made so eloquently clear, Equiano was the man who had secured his own freedom through 'commercial intercourse,' [and] who had proved his own value to the interests of Great Britain [...] the book itself is a carefully structured argument in support of the one great thesis that free trade was both morally and economically superior to trade based on slave labour. (xvi-xvii)

Such lucid synopses promise to make Carey's introduction of great service to students and general readers alike.

This edition also offers an innovative handling of the complicated contextual terrain of *The Interesting Narrative*. Because several of the people, places, and events mentioned by Equiano recur throughout the text, rather than simply footnoting the first appearance and moving on, Carey supplies an 'Index and Guide' that serves as a glossary for readers to consult as they wish. With much of the contextual information thus consolidated, the annotations themselves remain admirably efficient, briefly glossing archaic words, biblical allusions, lesser-known historical episodes, and so on, without encumbering the reading experience.

Accompanying this host of strengths, however, are a few curious decisions about the selection and handling of the copy text. Since, as Carey explains, Equiano himself supplied corrections and additional materials for the ninth edition (1794), which was the last published in his lifetime, and since Carey does not suggest that this edition is corrupted in a way that would

make the uncorrected first edition of 1789 preferable, his reasons for using the earlier text are not entirely clear. A related complication emerges when Carey points to the care with which Equiano revised *The Interesting Narrative* for each issuing. Such revisions, he writes, show that 'Equiano took a close interest in the progress of his book through the press, and reiterate to scholars the importance of specifying not only which edition but also which copy is being used when providing quotations' (xxvi). Sensible enough, but after specifying the exact copy of the 1789 edition that he is using, Carey notes that he decided to supply an unspecified number of unnoted changes: 'I have quietly corrected some obvious errors, particularly those corrected by Equiano himself in later editions, and I have likewise quietly incorporated the sixteen errata Equiano supplied at the end of the Goldsmith's copy' (xxvi). Most of the questions raised by these editorial choices would quickly vanish if the ninth edition were used as the copy text.

These editorial decisions will not hinder most readers from learning a great deal from Carey's otherwise instructive and resourceful presentation of *The Interesting Narrative*. It is also worth mentioning that this new edition features an overdue correction: rather than using the c.1760 portrait (now thought to be of Ignatius Sancho) that is found on the covers of other modern editions of Equiano's work, Carey's edition rightfully features the author himself on the cover, in an engraving of a portrait that Equiano commissioned from the London artist William Denton. A small gesture, perhaps, but an important one: from his own lifetime to the present day Equiano has been subject to attempts to conform (and at times deform) his image to meet certain expectations or determinations. Just as Carey's edition features Equiano's actual portrait on its cover, so too does it present his work to readers without some of the tendentiousness and idiosyncrasy that have hampered other editions. Carey's edition of *The Interesting Narrative* is sure to become a standard classroom text.

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