

Paul Youngquist, ed., *Race, Romanticism and the Atlantic*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013. Pp. 267. £65.00. ISBN 9780754669272.

In his excellent introduction to this needful volume of essays, Paul Youngquist describes how ‘race hardens into racism just as revolution, so the story goes, gives rise to Romanticism’ (5). It is this crucial conjunction of circumstance that means that any general discussion of Romanticism is undermined by a disavowal of the importance of race. In his virtuoso, interdisciplinary essay on ‘The African Queen’ which narrates the history of the racialised representation in portraiture and caricature of Queen Charlotte, George III’s African descended consort, Youngquist reflects that ‘British Romanticism is white... however broadly this culture gets conceived, it remains all but oblivious to its whiteness. It occludes the blackness at its core’ (81). This volume is a multi-accentual revision of that occlusion. The essays range from Black Loyalists in Canada through the black American boxer Thomas Molyneaux’s transatlantic sojourn to Emma Hamilton’s North African representations. The essayists find black Atlantic resonances even at the centre of Romanticism. In her essay on ‘Black Single Mothers in Romantic History and Literature’, Debbie Lee illustrates that these figures are central in Blake and Wordsworth’s ‘The Black Boy’ (1788-9) and ‘The Mad Mother’ (1798) enabling her to make the case ‘that even the canonical core of Romanticism was a site of hybridity and difference’ (180).

As Peter Kitson elucidates in his essay on Robert Southey and Charlotte Smith, Romantic responses to race are often highly ambivalent and show a problematic attitude to black suffering. Hence, in Southey’s poem ‘The Sailor who had served in the Slave Trade’ (1799) ‘the psychological suffering or possession of the sailor’ as a trauma ‘seems to be worse than that of the actual torture and murdering of the slave, and the concern with the damage that the slave trade does to those who participate in it is fetishized over and above the suffering of those who were its victims’ (119). However, Kitson concludes that despite their limitations, both Southey and Smith contribute works that acknowledge black agency and ‘that black resistance will be the force which will end (the system of slavery in) its present form’ (123), as the ramifications of numerous slave revolts and the Haitian revolution play themselves out.

Gregory Pierrot’s essay on Edward Rushton’s vernacular poetry, discusses his reaction to the Haitian revolutionaries in his poem ‘Toussaint to his troops’ (1806) which does not, like Wordsworth’s famous poem, present the general in jail and defeated, but shows him at the height of his powers, just before battle. As Pierrot elucidates, ‘(W)here Wordsworth steers clear of the material world and invokes L’Ouverture as a disembodied ideal, Rushton grounds him in his social and historical consciousness’ (139). The essay brings this important working-class figure back to the centre of the history of Romanticism. The essay collection as a whole rather downplays black working class consciousness at the time with only passing mentions of the dynamic figure Robert Wedderburn and the culture of radicalism that produced him. Reference to his amazing biography and writings such as the disgracefully critically ignored ‘Cast Iron Parsons...’ (1822) or to the pictorial history of black working class life referred to in J.T. Smith’s *Vagabondiana* (1815) with colourful vagrant figures such as Billy Waters or Joseph Johnson, would have fleshed out the discussion and made free black figures as important as the enslaved Africans which the Romantic writers and their critics so often focus on.

The African Atlantic figures specifically discussed include the canonical black writer, Olaudah Equiano. He is compared to Mungo Park in Marlon B. Ross’s essay and although it is theoretically well conceived, there is little new here to justify using him as an example (we surely have said all that needs to be said about his role as English gentleman) and Ross might have done better foregrounding a different figure such as Ottobah Cugoana, whose more

radical stance than Equiano and status as the only African survivor of Cape Coast Castle whose image we have, makes his story very compelling. Canons of black writing and writers need to be disturbed as much as those of the Anglo-Americans and their texts. One of the strengths of this volume is the variety of texts discussed and Frances R. Botkin's essay on Ira Aldridge's championing of the 'Three Fingered Jack' melodrama is a tour-de-force which illustrates the seminal importance of Aldridge's work on the European stage.

Likewise, there is great work here on the visual culture of Romanticism and the way race plays out in it. Elise Bruhl and Michael Gamer do a wonderful job of tracing the racialisation of Lady Hamilton and Daniel O'Quinn is similarly astute in his discussion of the commodification of Thomas Molineaux in caricatures that foreground the John Bullish heroism of his white adversity, Thomas Cribb. Both are somewhat undermined by black and white, indistinct images that make their arguments harder to follow than they should be. This is a minor caveat, however, as this collection delivers a wonderful variety of incisive essays essential to the remaking of the Romantic canon and its criticism.

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