Review

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Fulford, Tim and Peter Kitson. *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780-1830* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

IN RECENT years, the relationship between Romantic literary representation and colonial politics has emerged as an increasingly important and problematic topic of scholarly investigation, and at its best moments the conversation that has developed around these questions remains richly provocative. Tim Fulford and Peter Kitson's recent collection *Romanticism and Colonialism*: *Writing and Empire, 1780-1830* is a fine contribution to this conversation, offering a remarkably coherent set of essays written by some of the most significant voices in Romantic historicism.

One of the pleasures of this collection is the conversational dynamism that it achieves. This aspect of the volume's tone is initially set by the three essays on texts and contexts with which Fulford and Kitson begin the project, effectively setting the stage for the discussions that follow. In these introductory pieces, they cogently summarize both the development of colonial studies within Romanticism and the tangled intersections of discursive fantasy and administrative practice that occupied imperial British culture from 1780-1830. However, as Fulford and Kitson promise in their introduction, the volume also deliberately resists homogenizing impulses at the level of scholarship (9), presenting a wide range of essays which mutually inform, revise, and, in several instances, correct each other.

At the same time, these heterogeneous essays also cohere surprisingly well; despite the divergent perspectives it offers, *Romanticism and Colonialism* presents a focused treatment of the subject it sets out to explore. This unity is achieved in part, of course, by the collective focus on colonialism and race that organizes the volume by topic. However, a critical investment in historicism grounds both Fulford and Kitson's project and the individual contributions to this collection, generating a sustained theoretical argument for the continued expansion of Romantic studies.

According to Fulford and Kitson, the contents of this volume present what Henry Louis Gates has called a loose canon, comprised of prominent Romantic-period writers, poets and novelists supplemented by less familiar writers, propagandists, and natural philosophers from the margins of the traditional canon and beyond (9). The balance between these variously privileged texts is achieved in several of the individual essays with very productive results. Among the many fine contributions, the most memorable bring new cultural artifacts into contact with traditional Romantic texts and contexts in a manner that revises the shape of the field itself.

Notably, Timothy Morton's essay on Blood Sugar is an example of Romantic historicism at its most illuminating. Here, Morton considers how Coleridge and Southey were influenced by the rhetoric of guilt and abstinence that characterized discourses on slavery, trade, and sugar consumption in the 1790s; he ultimately demonstrates through a series of readings that the study of literary and cultural representations of consumption and the commodity provides fresh ways of considering Orientalism and colonialism (104). Beginning with what he terms the aversive topos (87) of blood sugar, Morton maps the tropological connections that associated the production and consumption of tropical luxury goods with contemporary analyses of colonial expansion and exploitation. His subsequent argument about Coleridge's 1795 lecture on the slave-trade focuses on the ideological effects of figurative language that Coleridge's text enacts. Finally, working from Marx and Zizek, his essay concludes with a particularly elegant reading of Southey's 1797 sonnets on the slave-trade, which Morton argues reflect the fetishistic aesthetics of capital (106).

Among the numerous non-canonical genres addressed in this volume, travel writing emerges as particularly significant, and it figures prominently in several essays. An analysis of Beckford's *Account of the Island of Jamaica* (1790), for example, provides a central point in Morton's argument. Lauren Henrys essay on Blake and Wheatley uses eighteenth-century travel accounts on Africa (79), James McCusick's essay on Coleridge and pantisocracy considers Keates' *Account of the Pelew Islands* (1788), while D.L. Macdonald focuses particularly on Monk Lewis's *Journal of a West Indian Proprietor* (1834) and the gothic tradition. The most sustained consideration of this topic, however, is Nigel Leask's fine essay on the strategies of absorption and containment in Romantic exoticism, which presents an important and much-needed interdisciplinary perspective on these materials.

Leask's chapter considers the relationship between Romantic poetics and the visual representations of the Tropics which emerged as part of a wide-spread cultural interest in exploration. Leask is particularly interested in images that perform totalizing gestures and combine objective and subjective representation (166). His two most important visual examples are Humboldt's encyclopedic Portrait of the Tropics (1807), which combines scientific observation with Humboldt's own affective response (165), and the Romantic panorama generally, the illusionism of which depended, of course, upon the viewers absorption into the images represented. Drawing from a wealth of scholarship by art historians and post-colonial theorists, Leask presents an insightful reading of Byron's and Southey's orientalist poetry that explicates how costume and correctness function within these works as absorptive representational strategies.

Finally, a number of chapters address Romantic constructions of race and ethnicity. Among these selections, Alan Richardson's analysis of Bristol abolitionist poetry from 1770-1810 is a particularly thought-provoking

contribution, and it reflects the sort of richly demanding essays that Fulford and Kitson have collected in this volume.

In this piece, Richardson brings together theoretical questions about race as a critical term, research on the specific cultural and political contexts of the Bristol abolition campaign, and the poetry of four local writers—Chatterton, More, Southey, and Yearsley. Surveying these literary representations, Richardson ultimately suggests that 'the rhetoric of canonical Romanticism privileges naturalizing and nationalizing tendencies and [a] passion for ethnicity, help[ing] to precipitate the emergence of modern racism' (146) and racial categories. While Romanticism remains a movement focused on revolution and the rights of man, Richardson also points to its concomitant complicity in the construction of the imperial bourgeois subject.

As Fulford and Kitson note in their introduction to the volume, *Romanticism and Colonialism* attempts to represent the diverse transformations and encounters that comprised British imperialism in the Romantic period, rather than considering Orientalism exclusively. However, as they also observe, the works collected here are all, in some sense or another, after Said (11). And this is my one reservation about the volume: it is, in fact, largely focused on the Eastern Other. Although Fulford raises the issue of Irish colonialism in his introductory essay (37ff), the subjugation and exploitation of Native American, Celtic, and (to a lesser extent) other European peoples—in both the North American and the home colonies—receive scant attention in the subsequent chapters. These are important and frequently under-represented facets of the British imperial and national project in this period, and one would hope to see more work on these subjects in future studies of Romantic colonialism. Meanwhile, Fulford and Kitson's volume presents a remarkably rich and substantial discussion on Romantic Britain and its imperial aspirations.