Introduction

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The need for a *Companion to Romanticism and Race* stems from the slipperiness of "romanticism" and "race," two terms that are notoriously difficult to define. Arthur O. Lovejoy's oft-cited argument that we need to speak of romanticisms in the plural attests to the fact that, at least since the early twentieth century, the effort to pin down exactly what "romanticism" is has troubled literary scholars, even as we continue to publish books and articles and host conferences and symposia with the word in the title.[1] A period in history that spans variously from 1776 or 1789 (or earlier) to 1832 or 1837 (or later); an aesthetic movement that emphasized subjective, emotional experience over objective knowledge and rationality; a political commitment centered on revolution and the rights of men – all of these understandings of Romanticism illuminate but fail to exhaust its possible meanings.

No less tricky a term to pin down, "race" refers variously to physical characteristics, national origin, religious identity, and ethnicity, among others. In the nineteenth century, "race" still held its longtime association with family line, but it was increasingly informed by scientific usages, where it referred to phenotypically and geographically differentiated peoples. This relatively new conception of race did not displace but intertwined with the "older" sense of race as family line, such that to speak of lineage was also to speak of phenotypic characteristics that implied positive or negative behaviors.[2] Further complicating the issue, as it became more common to talk about the universal rights of man in the Age of Revolutions, race was used to refer not only to social difference but also to common humanity – the "human race," according to the ideals of *liberté*, *égalité*, and *fraternité*, was bound together by rights and responsibilities that knew no borders. Often, even within such liberal discourse, race was used contradictorily to refer to similarity and difference at once, pointing to both shared attributes and irreconcilable distinctions.

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The essays collected in this volume work through various understandings of "romanticism" and "race," addressing how these terms acquire meaning via other concepts taking shape in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as "blackness," "whiteness," "sovereignty," "property," and "freedom." They look for these meanings in literary works by those commonly associated with Romanticism – Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, Byron – and by those who appear less frequently on course syllabi – Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, John Fawcett, Juan Francisco Manzano, Uriah Derick D'Arcy. They look to the philosophical writings of Kant and Burke, the political works of Edward Rushton and Thomas Clarkson, and the scientific inquiries of Cornelius de Pauw and Robert Knox.

The collection opens with Yoon Sun Lee's discussion of how Enlightenment understandings of race shaped ideas about inheritance, such that property ownership came to be understood in racialized terms and race came to be understood in economic terms. Burke's and Kant's writings about heritability thus shed light on the doctrine of *partus sequitur ventrem*, whereby, as Lee puts it, "The children of enslaved women of African counted as property that could be inherited by others, on the basis of a color that had to be ascribed as the material sign of a legal condition."

The question of race and kinship that Lee introduces is taken up in the chapter that follows, where Catherine R. Peters discusses how writers such as the Cuban poet Juan Francisco Manzano reworked the Romantic trope of the revolutionary "common wind" to forge kinship networks among forcibly displaced peoples. In formulating this argument, Peters shifts the conventional focus on the French Revolution as the hub of radical Romantic thought to the Haitian Revolution, where "fraternité" refers not to an abstract ideal but a very real desire to reconstitute those family relations disrupted by the institution of slavery.

Kinship in the Atlantic world is central as well to Deanna P. Koretsky's analysis of the pseudonymous Uriah Derick D'Arcy's *The Black Vampyre*, set in Sainte-Domingue, Haiti. While the Romantic vampire has often been read as disrupting heteropatriarchal norms, D'Arcy's novel, Koretsky argues via Afropessimism and theories of queer futurity, exposes how the supposedly liberatory figure of the vampire upholds the antiblackness at the heart of the Gothic tradition. Koretsky sharply and counterintuitively argues that there is in fact nothing more representative of the human than the figure of the vampire, and that D'Arcy's Black vampire thus threatens the modern sociopolitical order built on expelling blackness from the category of the human.

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Mathelinda Nabugodi traces the shifts in Coleridge's thoughts on race from his early abolitionist writings to his later reflections on beauty and aesthetics. Focusing on his comments about Africans, Nabugodi demonstrates a crucial tension between the Romantic poet's youthful commitment to abolition and the embrace of scientific racism in his later writings. This tension also informs the revisions that Coleridge made to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) when he prepared it for republication in *Sibylline Leaves* (1817). Nabugodi's careful comparative reading of the 1798 and the 1817 versions highlights the way a representative poet's work embodies the contradictions of a Romanticism in which freedom could be imagined as universal even as European superiority was taken for granted.

DJ Lee and Aaron Ngozi Oforlea's chapter approaches Coleridge from a different angle, counterposing his vision of freedom with that of the Black Loyalists who supported the English during the American Revolution. Lee and Oforlea's titular phrase "(not)Freedom" refers to "the fragmentation, resistance, and transgression with which Black Loyalists lived," which is exemplified in the Loyalists' linguistic practices. Whether by mimicking the language of white Europeans or by developing a distinctive lingo that infused poetry into the language of transactions, the Loyalists demonstrated a model of freedom – (not)freedom – that was local and transitory, contextually dependent and always precarious.

Just as the Romantic era witnessed dramatic changes in the understanding of race, so too did it see new ideas about intellectual and physical ability and disability. Essaka Joshua discusses the relationship between disability and race, both where they intersect in literary and nonliterary discourses and, importantly, where they are deliberately opposed. For example, in the writing of the blind writer and staunch abolitionist Edward Rushton, the critique of racism hinges on the idea that racial prejudice derives from sightedness. Rushton thus serves as an important counterpoint to the more widely taught Edmund Burke, whose ableist assumptions about blindness in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* undergirds a belief in Blackness and Black subjects as inherently terrifying.

In a related discussion, Travis Chi Wing Lau addresses the place of race within Romantic-era medical discourse, calling attention to the disabling forms of experimentation on Black bodies that enabled anatomical research. There is, Lau points out, a key irony in these experiments, as the study of those who were understood to be fundamentally *pathological* led to universalizing conclusions about the nature of the normative, white man. If this sounds like a moment of merely historical interest, Lau assures

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us it is not. Rather, the legacy of the racialized discourse of medicine can be witnessed in ongoing health disparities among differently racialized groups.

Romanticism has been all but synonymous with poetry – the art "more capable than any other art of completely unfolding the totality of an event," per Hegel – and the poet qua "legislator of the world" (Percy Shelley) who "brings the whole soul of man into activity" (Coleridge) occupies a privileged place in Romanticism. Joseph Albernaz and Devin M. Garofalo examine in their respective chapters how, as Albernaz puts it, "the modern category of lyric voice is entangled with processes of racialization." Albernaz focuses on the complaint poem, a subgenre that was especially important to Romantic-era abolitionists, who often ventriloquized enslaved Africans. And yet, Albernaz contends, Romantic poetry, particularly as it is taken up by Black writers, is also capable of refusing the racial logics it has traditionally upheld. In such instances, complaint negates the world as it is and reveals, however briefly, "the collective undersong of *No*, the depthless well of non-sense from which all sense springs."

Riffing on the narcissism of male grooming, Devin M. Garofalo discusses the Romantic impulse to "manscape" – that is, to "read ... a culturally specific conception of the human into the landscape such that it is invisibilized as the world's structuring principle." This culturally specific conception of the human, she clarifies, building on the pathbreaking work of Sylvia Wynter, is that of man as a bourgeois colonialist, a tamer, and a conqueror. He is Hannibal and Napoleon and the Wordsworthian poet all in one. The Romantic nature poem that is the hallmark of early nineteenth century poetry, then, recruits the ecological imagination as it consolidates and eradicates all threats to whiteness.

Nikki Hessell's "Romantic Poetry and Constructions of Indigeneity" understands the Romantic racialization of Indigenous peoples as means of denying these groups sovereignty. The trope of the Indian in representative European texts is, by this reading, complicit with the "desire to own, define, and administer *everything*." By reading Romantic poetry for its recurring tropes, however, we can also locate the Romantic tradition in the work of those generally excluded from conversations about Romanticism. Thus, Hessell reads Romanticism in the works of Indigenous poets Jane Johnston Schoolcraft (Ojibwe) and John Rollin Ridge (Cherokee). This is not merely a matter of expanding the Romantic canon; rather, by centering those whose presence in Romantic literature has generally been restricted

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to object of interest, Hessell shows that those who have been used as tropes are wielders of Romantic tropes in their own right.

The final three chapters look beyond the poetic tradition that has long been emphasized in Romanticist criticism. Atesede Makonnen's "Romanticism and the Novel(ty) of Race" argues that not only did the Romantic novel take up questions about race, but the novel form was itself racialized during the Romantic era. Makonnen studies in particular Clara Reeve and Anna Letitia Barbauld, who attempted to taxonomize various "species" of prose in a mirror of the categorization central to that of eighteenth and nineteenth-century racial philosophy and science. For both Reeve and Barbauld, the evolution of the modern novel is a move away from other forms – tales and fables, for instance – linked to the primitive and the non-European. Thus, both writers link literary development as a mark of cultural, national, and, implicitly, racial progress.

Lauren Dembowitz's chapter focuses on race and visual culture, drawing on Blake's notion of the "bounding line" with its "infinite inflexions and movements" that recast the visual image without relying on the inhumanity and philistinism of mass production. These "inflexions and movements" allow us to imagine new possibilities for familiar images, such as that of the "Hottentot Venus," Sarah Baartman. Rather than write off these images as racist stereotypes, we can, with Dembowitz's Blakean method, attend closely to how the material history of the visual text is imbricated with the history of race, which is subtly transformed with each new iteration. As Dembowitz powerfully concludes, the image compels us to "contend with the ways we are 'intimately connected' with, 'bound up in,' and 'dependent upon' that figure and the real women she overwrites for understanding how racial capitalism lives on in our present."

In the chapter that concludes this volume, Yasser Shams Khan reminds us that race, simply put, is made. It is the consequence of painstaking and deliberate work, whether in the meticulous anthropological taxonomies offered by Kant and Blumenbach, or in the line of poetry, or, as Khan argues, in the representation of racial differences on the Romantic-era stage. Drawing on the notion of "racecraft," which "foregrounds racism as a reality that produces 'race' to rationalize the dispossession of wealth, power, and rights," Khan shows how stagecraft in John Fawcett's *Obi; or Three-Finger'd Jack* (1800) establishes the terms by which racialized subjects come to be understood as fundamentally exploitable.

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The chapters are as varied in their conclusions as they are in their scope: while none is forgiving of Romanticism's sometimes tacit, sometimes explicit endorsement of racist ideologies, each suggests a different solution for combatting these ideologies, whether by reading more widely, or reading more deeply, or even refusing to read Romantic literatures altogether. What binds these pieces together, despite their diversity, is a shared commitment to understanding how Romanticism positions us as critics invested in emancipatory politics, and how we position ourselves in turn.

Notes

1. Arthur O. Lovejoy, "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms," *PMLA* 39/2 (June 1924): 229–53.
2. Indeed, as recent work in the field of premodern critical race studies has shown us, race in its pre-Enlightenment usage (i.e. race *qua* family) was bound up with notions of phenotype, ethnicity, geography, and behavior well before the advent of scientific racism. See, for example, Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); M. Lindsay Kaplan, *Figuring Racism in Medieval Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); and Urvashi Chakravarty, *Fictions of Consent: Slavery, Servitude, and Free Service in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022).

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