

The Grateful Slave: The Emergence of Race in Eighteenth-Century British and American Culture. By GEORGE BOULUKOS. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 288 pages. \$90.00 (cloth).

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English departments in the United States usually line up neatly in American and British camps, though rumblings of transatlanticism are happily beginning to mediate that intellectual divide. Taking a cue from the discipline of history, eighteenth-century literary studies in particular has placed increased importance on transnational spaces, those real and imagined locales in between nations or peoples, which have not been easily incorporated into existing paradigms. The history of race and slavery has regularly traversed the Middle Passage, of course, but surprisingly few literary scholars focus on the varied attitudes circulating in the colonies and the metropole. George Boulukos's book, *The Grateful Slave*, is a substantial contribution to bridging the "transatlantic gap" (12–13), a term that he employs to describe the discrepancies between representations in England and in America during the early colonial period.

Countering Winthrop D. Jordan's seminal *White over Black*, which contends that racial difference was early naturalized because of long-standing prejudices against blackness, *The Grateful Slave* argues that while such differences were largely determined to be unacceptable in Britain, they were "an unshakeable reality in the colonies" (167). Boulukos maintains, contra Jordan, that in the eighteenth century "African inferiority is [paradoxically] discussed far more often by those who deny it than by those who assert it" (103). Drawing on recent work by Nicholas Hudson, Roxann Wheeler, and others, he makes an appropriate distinction between ideas of "difference" and those of "race" to emphasize the instability of these concepts in the eighteenth century.¹

This rich book makes central a trope that might seem at first to be merely incidental to the history of race: the grateful Negro who is deeply etched on our memories in the picture of the kneeling slave in chains, "Am I Not a Man and a Brother." The devoted slave who appeals for mercy but prays for the soul of his master is reminiscent of Harriet Beecher Stowe's troublingly contradictory novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which seems in many ways to be the impetus for this book. Boulukos

¹ Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1968); Nicholas Hudson, "From 'Nation' to 'Race': The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29, no. 3 (Spring 1996): 247–64; Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia, 2000).

finds an inaugural moment for the trope in texts beginning with Daniel Defoe's *Colonel Jack* (1722), in which a plantation is reformed by inspiring slaves' gratitude. From there he moves on to convincing close readings of midcentury religious, philosophical, and political pamphlets (John Wesley, George Whitefield, Benjamin Rush, Edward Long, and David Hume) and to novels including Edward Kimber's *History of the Life and Adventures of Mr. Anderson* (1754), Sarah Scott's *History of Sir George Ellison* (1766), and Henry Mackenzie's *Julia de Roubigné* (1777).

Ameliorative novels closed the gap, Boukulos argues, between "metropolitan" and "colonial" views of race, making possible both abolitionist thinking and the insistence on essential racial difference that "was put forward by colonists as a justification of slavery and racial oppression to their metropolitan critics" (97). For the hero of Scott's novel, for example, the plantation labor market could be construed as one of mutual obligation in which happy, appreciative slaves could be coerced into enabling greater production. Midcentury English novels thus prepared the way for freedom by depicting slaves who were grateful despite the appallingly inhuman circumstances in which they labored. Articulating racial difference became a means for both tempering slavery's abuses and preparing the way for slavery's apologists.

Contributing to the current interest in the history of affect, Boukulos also aims to refine our understanding of the emotional element involved in slaveholders' achieving mastery through their slaves' gratitude; planters felt a nasty suspicion that their slaves might be human. Both an assertion and a denial of a shared humanity, sentimentality could be a defense against taking responsibility for the violence perpetrated and for the suffering inflicted as well as an alibi for encouraging slaves' dependence. For Boukulos, amelioration, in failing to confront the way that slavery was a moral evil, was never an innocent position.

The crux of the book involves the 1770s and 1780s debates when the Somerset case brought these contradictions to public consciousness, again through popular novels and philosophical tracts. By the 1790s, Boukulos masterfully concludes, a transatlantic consensus on racial difference emerged, though Afro-Britons such as Ignatius Sancho and especially Ottobah Cugoano and Olaudah Equiano reveal a metropolitan rather than a colonial identity in resisting cultural assumptions about the necessity of obligation. They figure powerfully as heroes in that all three challenge the formula of the grateful Negro, even though each is implicated in the colonialist schemes for Africa anomalously linked with abolition. Equiano exemplifies the transatlantic gap because racial oppression arguably angers him more than slavery: his personal experience enables

him to recognize the anguish not only of the enslaved but also of free blacks who find that equality eludes them. Thus, Boulukos shows, Equiano's genius lay partly in his clarity of vision when faced with the arcane contradictions of abolition.

Boulukos joins those intellectual historians who have argued that slavery, dating from ancient times, preceded racial thinking and contributed to its emergence, though he is careful not to say that slavery produced racial thinking. Still, this reader worried a little about the question of cause and effect: the metropole—and, in particular, the novels of the metropole—allegedly influenced the colonies and justified their practices, while the colonies adopted the self-serving concept of the grateful slave that, in turn, testified to the humanity of Africans held captive. The transoceanic explanation, he determines, is that the British, learning from their American cousins, believed that different standards applied to Africans.

One might wish, then, for more specific attention to the means of transmission of ideas. Boulukos assumes the expansion of print culture without tracing particular patterns of the exchange of popular periodicals, pamphlets, novels, or plays. He might have bolstered his evidence of intellectual crosscurrents with more specific attention to publication histories and performance records on both sides of the Atlantic. Further, one might ask what could be said about the different social class assumptions in England and in America and how these distinctions were applied, for example, to the exceptional African prince. Broadened references to American Indian slavery would add complexity to our understanding of transatlantic racial thought, and including recent work on Barbary slavery would extend the concept of blackness beyond West Africa. To its credit, the book helpfully contrasts “the untrammelled feelings of grateful slaves . . . with the rational independence of white men, but also with the deeper, more genuine feelings . . . of white women in late-century fiction” (26). How might this insight be widened out beyond masters and mistresses to the slaves they owned? For example, the gratitude of sexually compromised slave women, upon whom reproduction of the labor force rested, was surely put to uses different from that of slave men.

In spite of these caveats, *The Grateful Slave* is an excellent book that contributes significantly to the history of racial thinking and to the literary history of affect. Hopefully, this illuminating study will inspire a related study of those brave, unruly few who resisted the trope of the grateful slave to engage in slave rebellions.