

slavery. She recounts how black activists like William Cooper Nell, William J. Watkins, and Martin Delany reclaimed their Revolutionary heritage to rewrite American history.

As these brief summaries suggest, *Making Slavery History* represents one of those rare books that can be savored in part and devoured whole. Scholars of the early republic, slavery, and the African American experience will no doubt find much to appreciate. But this book will appeal to generalists as well. Akin to such staples of the undergraduate curriculum as Robert Darnton's *The Great Cat Massacre* (1984) and Simon Schama's *Dead Certainties* (1992), Minardi's narrative masters the art of using small stories to tell large tales. She not only reveals who makes history and how history gets made, she reminds readers why the stories the living choose to tell about the dead really matter at all.

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*New Essays on Phillis Wheatley*. Edited by John C. Shields and Eric Lamore. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2011. Pp. xxvi, 406. \$60.00.)

Taking a cue from editor John C. Shields's prior work, the first six essays of *New Essays on Phillis Wheatley* examine poems that point to classical forms or mythological figures, most particularly from Virgil, that the poet used as models or images. The second set of eight essays is balanced between further historical and cultural research that provides explanations for some of Wheatley's poetics as well as readings of her poetry from modern theoretical perspectives. Scholarship on Wheatley's life and poetry since Williams H. Robinson's *Critical Essays on Phillis Wheatley* appeared in 1982 has illuminated both these approaches to Wheatley's verse, but this is the first collection of essays in thirty years to pursue those two avenues.

Several essays are very good. Karen Lerner Dovell's "The Interaction of the Classical Traditions of Literature and Politics in the Work of Phillis Wheatley" gives a useful, if broad, survey of how the classical tradition informed the political rhetoric of Revolutionary-era America. Furthermore, it considers how several of Wheatley's political poems problematize "commerce" as a classical political virtue in light of the fact that she was herself a product of commerce. Equally enlightening

is Shields's "Phillis Wheatley's Theoretics of the Imagination: An Untold Chapter in the History of Early American Literary Aesthetics," which offers a selection of viable sources for Wheatley's theory of the imagination. Patrick Moseley illustrates Wheatley's use of the Horatian ode, as does Eric D. Lamore, coeditor of the volume, in his interpretation of her rural imagery in relation to the Virgilian *Georgic*.

In the final essay of the second part, Mary McAleer Balkun's, "To 'pursue th'unbodied mind': Phillis Wheatley and the Raced Body in Early America," provides fine readings of "On Imagination" and "On Recollection." She gives ample evidence from the author's poetry that, to Wheatley, race was essentially meaningless because the body could be refined due to the universality of the human mind and soul. Jennifer Rene Young's essay tracing how Wheatley's work remained visible in both abolitionist and pro-slavery arguments between her death and the Civil War is also of interest, though much of the research has appeared before.

My reservations about many of the essays are their minimization of Wheatley's Christianity at the expense of attention to classicism and their attempts to demonstrate without presenting evidence that she knew more of her African roots than an emigrant forced to leave her native land at the age of seven would likely have recalled. For example, several essays state as a certainty that her image of Aurora is a symbol of Wheatley's African mother, yet they offer no proof for such a connection. Devona Mallory, in her essay "I Remember Mama: Honoring the Goddess-Mother While Denouncing the Slaveowner-God in Phillis Wheatley's Poetry," gives a lengthy explanation of the myth of Demeter and Persephone, asserting that the mother goddess "represents" Wheatley's mother, but then admits that Wheatley never uses the image of either goddess in her poetry. Even more troubling is Babacar M'Baye's essay claiming Wheatley as a "Pan-African" by comparing "Senegambian folkloric elements" to some of her poetic themes, providing similarities so broad that they could apply to most literature. Most worrisome is the constant litany of "it could have happened" or "it would be natural" in Zach Petrea's "An Untangled Web: Mapping Phillis Wheatley's Network of Support in America and Great Britain." His exploration of manuscript and epistolary culture in Revolutionary-era America is interesting, but he brings very little evidence to bear that Wheatley was involved in it as either participant or subject.

Leading off the collection is a particularly disturbing essay, Maureen Anderson's "Phillis Wheatley's Dido: An Analysis of 'An Hymn

to Humanity. To S.P.G. Esq.’” Although the poem begins with lines that are clearly about Jesus coming to earth to redeem mankind, the parallel Anderson make to Aeneas as the son of a mortal man and goddess mother is intriguing until she states: “‘An Hymn to Humanity,’ therefore, is not a Christian poem or even a hymn in the Christian sense, but rather an epic hymn drawing on the classical tradition . . . as sung by Dido” (p. 5). An audience familiar with Wheatley might be convinced that this poem is both, even that it may have delighted Wheatley to see the parallels between Aeneas and Christ, but it seems unlikely that Wheatley did not have the redemption of mankind in mind at all. Anderson’s explanation of the sexual content of the story of Dido and Aeneas is also problematic. She spends a good many pages focusing on lines 11–12: “The sire of gods and men address’d, / ‘My son, my heav’nly fair!’” Although God the father seems to be addressing his Son here, Anderson misrepresents line 11 as “fire of gods and men,” which causes her to misread the actors as the “fiery” goddess Venus addressing her son Aeneas. She then uses the mistaken image to argue that Wheatley is channeling the voice of the spurned, passionate Dido. That Anderson may have misread the “s” as “f” because of eighteenth-century spelling, as I first suspected, is contradicted by her citation of Shields’s 1988 edition of Wheatley’s poems as her source. A much more satisfying study of Wheatley’s use of classic and African themes is Eric Ashley Hairston’s “The Trojan Horse: Classics, Memory, Transformation, and Afric Ambition in *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*,” which balances Wheatley’s knowledge of the classics, her embrace of Christianity, and her acknowledgment of the Enlightenment culture that surrounded her.

Very few of these essays use much scholarship beyond 2000, which may explain why several of them seem like old wine in new casks. Also, most of them depend on Shields’s 1988 collection; though this is reasonable considering that Shields coedited the collection, the more updated Penguin volume edited by Vincent Carretta (2001) would have been a more appropriate source. By and large, the essays included in this volume either make too much of connections for which little, if any, evidence is provided, or else they present warmed-over scholarship without any new revelations.

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