

Josiah Blackmore. *Moorings: Portuguese Expansion and the Writing of Africa*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

Josiah Blackmore's *Moorings: Portuguese Expansion and the Writing of Africa* deals with Portuguese textual constructions of African bodies from the first Portuguese incursions onto the continent in 1415 through the rounding of its southernmost tip by Vasco da Gama in 1497. Blackmore's project reflects on the arc traced by more than a century's worth of textual considerations of the Portuguese expansionist, imperial process in Africa, beginning with official chronicles of Gomes Eanes de Zurara from the middle of the fifteenth century and culminating with Luis de Camões's 1572 epic *Os Lusíadas*. He argues that Zurara's narration of Africa laid the groundwork for European imperial discursive encounters with non-European spaces and people and the exploitation of the latter (xv), while Camões sought to rekindle the dying embers of that imperialist fervor. Though these imperial writings did on some levels beget the Africa/Europe binary that had solidified into racial boundaries by the nineteenth century, Blackmore's nuanced study seeks to undo the notion of "empire" as a clear European domination over non-Europeans. He convincingly argues that this encounter was mediated by a gradual process of "mooring," a term that evokes nautical movement and passage through space as an exercise of imperial power, as well as the action of simultaneous cultural estrangement and familiarization (literally, Moor-ing).

The first chapter situates the reader in an Africa that is concurrently familiar and strange to early modern European eyes. The figure of the Moor is mobilized as the personification of that strange intimacy, a shifting entity whose name "is alternatively denotative and connotative, precise and imprecise, historically accurate and imaginatively construed" (2). The Moor, like his geographical space, is thus a conveniently empty signifier, whose body could be endowed as desired with the

connotations and opinions of the pen that sketched it. By the time of the first Portuguese campaigns into Africa, those bodies and spaces had been filled with the continuation of Reconquest discourse, this time as a penetration into geography beyond the confines of the Iberian Peninsula. Blackmore argues for the value of incorporating Saidian ideas into studies of imperial practice outside of Edward Said's vision, though he chooses to use K. David Jackson's term "Orientalness" to describe the Portuguese encounters with the East as ideologically driven but distinct from a Saidian world view. The physical and cultural proximity of Iberia and Africa undoes the distance necessary for a traditionally eroticized Orientalist view of Africa and instead falls into a messier paradigm of cross-cultural and proto-racial relationships. Africa, in this vision, is at once a space and destination and a mere stop on an Indies-oriented itinerary. Absent the possibility of a Saidian Self/Other binary, a clear black/white racial divide disintegrates into a geographically oriented gradient whose colors are seen as signs to be read and interpreted.

The second chapter of *Moorings* moves into an examination of Portuguese empire as inextricably bound to its nautical historiography, through the lens of Zurara's *Crónica da Tomada de Ceuta* (1450) and subsequent textual predecessors to Camões's *Os Lusíadas*. African bodies in Zurara's texts serve a navigational function for Portuguese sailors as they fulfill their Christian manifest destiny of domination over an infidel adversary in their nautical itineraries along the African coastline. By textually rendering bodies and spaces, these writings constitute a frame that seeks to contain and control them through a "schema of observation and knowledge" (73). Nevertheless, Blackmore contends, the very act of imperial expansion, by creating and occupying places of strangeness, disrupts the stable orthodoxy of *patria*. By gaining familiarity with Africa over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Portuguese banished the possibility of being able to view Africa as a diametric Other.

In the final chapter, “The Monster of Melancholy,” Blackmore collects the threads of argument from his previous chapters to arrive at a close reading of Camões’s portrait of Adamastor in *Os Lusíadas*, the monstrous and persistently corporeal anthropomorphosis of the liminal space of the Cape of Good Hope. Between the West/Atlantic and East/Indian Ocean lies Adamastor, the personification of the moment of mutual interpenetration of Africa and Europe. Blackmore identifies the moment of the turn around the Cape of Good Hope as when the European gaze loses its power as the basis of epistemological authority. Camões’s representation of Adamastor, Blackmore argues, is imbued with Portuguese respect for and self-recognition in Adamastor, for the intrepid boldness of the actions that led to his eventual banishment to the Cape of Good Hope. The slippage created by this recognition of self in an Other within an epic poem committed to the glorification of Portuguese imperial expansion disrupts the ineluctability of that project and drives home the ambiguity carried in the one hundred and twenty-five years of textual production glossed by *Moorings*.

Moorings provides a remarkable, illuminating vision of European encounters with Africans that leaves the reader with no doubts about the importance of these texts to a broader understanding of European colonialist enterprises. The author deftly makes his way through a century and a half of discursive empire building, leading his audience past pitfalls of simplistic binaries to what one hopes is an embarkation point for more similarly adroit and elucidating studies. The depth of textual analysis leaves the early modern literary scholar satisfied, while Blackmore’s intervention into the ongoing conversation about the formation of racial categories during the Age of Discovery should prove enlightening to a wider academic audience.

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