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## Review of *Romanticism and Masculinity* by Tim Fulford

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inheritance of the order of Greece and Rome has led to an American museum consciousness (of which Jefferson is an early, prominent representative) which focuses more on the ancient mysteries of nature than lost cultures. But the dinosaur has long broached the walls of the American natural history museum. Evolution's greatest failure, the dinosaur has nevertheless discovered in the mass media of comic books, films, and theme parks a post-modern habitat uniquely congenial to its survival and, in a multitude of kitsch collectibles and brand icons, fabulously successful evolutionary forms which guarantee that survival into the new millennium.

Mitchell argues that the dinosaur is an image of modernity itself, a metaphor for both the monstrous predatory forms of modern capitalism and the incipient obsolescence which haunts its products and technologies. Proverbially a superlative figure of raw power and ruthlessness, the "dinosaur," in current usage, has come also to signify an "obsolete business strategy, the unsalable commodity, or even the unemployable worker whose skills are no longer needed in a

'survival of the fittest' economy" (12). In the same way, our contemporary predilection for smaller, fleet-footed prehistoric species, such as the velociraptor, at the expense of the lumbering brontosaurus, is an evolution in popular taste analogous to the concurrent socio-historical shift from the industrial gigantism of the Ford and Carnegie eras to the more dynamic and adaptable company structures now demanded by the global post-industrial marketplace. Whatever the shape of the metaphor, says Mitchell, Dinosaurs 'R' Us. With its lurid cover, bite-size chapters and graphic variations on comic-book illustration, *The Last Dinosaur Book* imitates the pulp literary genres it examines. As well as an intellectual carnival ride through the history of a pop culture icon, the book is as an interdisciplinarian thrillseeker's delight. Mitchell's sophisticated but eminently readable transmutation of paleontology into iconology stands as an exemplary evolutionary strategy for that most melancholy dinosaur, the academic humanist, in its struggle against extinction in the Age of Barney.

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**Tim Fulford, *Romanticism and Masculinity: Gender, Politics and Poetics in the Writing of Burke, Coleridge, Cobbett, Wordsworth, DeQuincey and Hazlitt***

(Macmillan Press/St. Martin's Press, 1999), xi + 250. \$72.

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Tim Fulford's new study of Romanticism and constructions of masculinity is one of the titles in the exciting new series, "Romanticism in Perspective: Texts, Cultures, Histories," edited by Marilyn Gaull and Stephen Prickett. As a series that offers "comparative and interdisciplinary" perspectives on "contentious or as yet unexplored aspects of Romanticism as a Europe-wide phenomenon," the titles thus far are extremely valuable and timely. Fulford's study is a needed examination of "masculinity" in Romantic prose documents; however, there are a few "contentious" issues that could have been more fairly dealt with and, in doing so, would have made the book an even more significant study than it is.

To begin, Fulford situates his narrative alongside the 1808 sex scandal that revealed the corruption of the aristocracy and military when one of George III's sons, the Duke of York, allowed his mistress, Mrs. Clarke, to sell commissions in the army. But if that episode was not embarrassing enough for the Royal family, the "Caroline affair," in which George IV put his wife on trial for adultery, was even more disastrous in the eyes of the public. As an effective new historicist move, Fulford uses these two sexually explosive affairs—both of

them extremely unchivalrous manipulations of women—to articulate his thesis: "aristocratic domination of power was doomed . . . the middle and lower classes had seen that they themselves preserved the codes of duty, honour, paternalism and patriotism which their King had now failed to embody. Chivalric manhood did not die; it was relocated in the middle classes. . . . The relocation of chivalry was a long and complex process" (9). This is an interesting thesis and has been explored by several others in a different set of texts written during the period. Fulford's contribution is to clearly position Burke as the source of so much of the anxious rhetoric about masculinity in the period. He then situates the later prose writings of Coleridge, Cobbett, Wordsworth, Hazlitt and DeQuincey as ambivalent responses to Burke; their prose writings in particular being sometimes successful, but often failed attempts to rewrite Burke as an apologist for chivalry, sublimity, and beauty.

Fulford next provides a close reading of Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* to assert that Burke actually provided a "gendered analysis of the dissemination of power" (32). Burke's distinction between "feminine softness and masculine power" led to a society which "idealised, through the cult

of sensibility, a masculinity open to traditionally feminine emotions" (35). Fulford later calls this shift of gendered attributes "the feminisation of men of power" (36), viewed by 1803 as "a dangerous process" (36). By the time Burke was writing about the French Revolution, however, he was willing to revert to resurrecting the chivalric myth in order to buttress the collapsing aristocratic system: "By killing the Queen [Marie Antoinette] they had destroyed the sustaining illusion of the nation as a family; they had also betrayed the chivalric duty of authoritative men to protect weak and beautiful women" (47).

Chivalry, in other words, is the benign face assumed by the patriarchy, and once the facade is ripped off, both men and women are forced to see the hideous face of naked power in all its brutality. Burke was all for keeping the pretense up for as long as possible, and saving rather than butchering the Royal family was a small price to pay for preserving the privileges that accrued to men from such a system, however compromised and corrupt it was, however much it was built on the use and misuse of women's bodies. But this is where Fulford will not go. He will not indict Burke's self-serving rhetoric, nor will he reveal a contemporary consciousness that sees behind the "romantic ideologies" he is analyzing.

In his next extended section—the discussion of Coleridge—Fulford very usefully places the works of Wollstonecraft, Godwin, Radcliffe, Lewis, Malthus and Mary Robinson into the context of Coleridge's early writing career. Sympathetic to liberal causes as a young man, Coleridge sought in all of these contemporaries a "way beyond discourses which served political, religious, social and sexual repression . . . by conferring an aura of irresistible power and apparent inevitability upon established authorities" (66). But here is the contradiction: the aristocracy can only hold its power through political, religious, social and sexual repression, and this would appear to be the quagmire that Coleridge found himself in when he could not conclude *Christabel*. Although I found Fulford more convincing when he was talking about prose pieces, his discussion of *Christabel* was suggestive when he placed the text next to Godwin's *Caleb Williams*: "Without *Caleb Williams*, no *Christabel*. Yet poems such as *Christabel* were themselves not solutions but explorations of the difficulty of finding a language of personal and social renewal. Such poems dramatise the difficulties encountered by radicals coming to terms with their own part-formation by

the traditional discourses of sexual and social power which in theory they opposed. These discourses included the gendered sublime and beautiful, the aristocratic manners they regarded as effeminate and the lower classes' social and sexual mores which were widely perceived as a threat" (82).

Fulford's discussions of Cobbett, DeQuincey, and Hazlitt are interesting, if truncated, while his attempt to deal with Wordsworth in only one chapter is disappointing. What I found most disturbing, however, was his ungenerous treatment of other critics who have discussed many of the same issues he explores here, albeit from different perspectives. When he discusses what is clearly "anxiety of influence" toward Milton and Shakespeare, he characterizes the writings of Harold Bloom on the same subject as a "study in a vacuum" (15). His treatment of female literary critics is even more dismissive: "those scholars have not always developed an equally nuanced picture of gender in the canonical Romantics. The male poets have at times been described as simply contriving the 'cannibalisation' and 'absorption' of the feminine" (17). The irony here, of course, is that Fulford proceeds to do exactly the same thing. Thus, he describes Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" as presenting "the capacity to absorb the feminine as an 'under-song' or as a Muse" (123), or Wordsworth's "Nutting" as a poem in which "manhood is achieved through violence and the subordination of nature" (190), both of these exactly the same points made in my uncited *Romantic Androgyny* (1990). There are several other examples of Fulford doing exactly what he criticizes other critics of doing, which I at least found rather unchivalrous.

It is extremely difficult to write about gender in any body of literary texts without bringing one's own sense of identity as a gendered person into the equation. I have asked myself often: "Why do male critics find it so threatening to have female literary critics analyze constructions of masculinity in the canonical male Romanticists? Why are they so quick to defend what they are forced (later) to admit is true: that authors they revere were less than divine in their dealings with women, both in their lives and in their poems?" As long as critics project themselves and their own values into the discussion, they will continue to need to see the poets—not as they were—but as projections of their own best imaginings about "chivalry, sublimity, beauty." And all of those ideologies, as we unfortunately know, are code words that avoid the reality of pain and oppression and corruption that sustains, that has always sustained, what we call society.