

## Book Reviews

### *Arbitrary Rule: Slavery, Tyranny, and the Power of Life and Death*

By MARY NYQUIST

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Mary Nyquist's meticulously researched interdisciplinary study investigates the relation between the antislavery sentiments marking early modern English political writings and the Euro-colonial practice of enslaving Africans in the New World. By tracing the discursive plasticity and polemical power of slavery, *Arbitrary Rule* reveals the myriad ways that ideas of political servitude could never completely deny the conditions of actual chattel bondage or even remain indifferent to its legitimacy. Through a series of careful examinations of the mechanisms by which political slavery occluded and exploited the legal, experiential, and material differences between those who were actually enslaved and those freeborn citizens protesting injustice, Nyquist offers a crucial reexamination of the discursive history of rights-based modern liberalism. Her idea to contextualize early modern humanism's interest in liberty in an expanding transnational slave trade generates fresh insights into the enduring interdependency of freedom and unfreedom.

Although historical context sets the stage for Nyquist's inquiries, she favors close textual over materialist analyses, exemplified by extended discussions of the formal properties of the discourses she examines. Throughout, Nyquist remains vigilant to the semantic changes in key terms and the variety of rhetorical devices writers employ, such as analogy, as well as to the otherwise undetected shifts in discursive registers. Her approach, which brackets off the social and economic influences shaping the worlds of her authors, ably conveys the layered processes through which meanings are produced and conveyed in interdiscursive settings.

Over the course of an introduction, ten chapters, and an epilogue, Nyquist rigorously pursues four major areas of concern: the ancient foundation of the linkage between slavery and tyranny as key terms for political disenfranchisement; resistance literature's skillful synthesis of Greco-Roman antityrannicism with Christian scripture; the importance of legal slavery to early modern debates on sovereignty, particularly the power of life and death; and, finally, antityrannicism's appropriation of Hebraic and Roman rituals designed to regulate the relations between masters and slaves. In the first third of the book, Nyquist exposes antityrannicism's pairing of slavery and tyranny as the conceptual ground for resistance in Greco-Roman political thought and in sixteenth-century French and English resistance theory. Here she shows how Athenian democratic ideology represented political slavery as a condition for which certain populations were naturally suited and for which those capable of self-rule

should be spared. Her discussions of Aristotle, Herodotus, and Cicero emphasize the importance of the boundary between the household and the *polis* for the citizenry's freedom, and the ways that the capricious and self-interested tyrant threatened the idea of an ordered public arena for the collective implementation of rule of law. Discussing the political writings of Etienne de La Boetie, John Ponet, Thomas Smith, and Jean Bodin, and (in the next chapter) George Buchanan's *Iephtes*, a scriptural drama based on Euripides' *Iphigenia*, Nyquist rethinks the idiom of patriarchalism among those early modern Christian humanist writers who appropriate Greek and Roman notions of freedom as she demonstrates that resistance and social contract theories appear earlier than is usually claimed. The next third of the book features in-depth analyses of Filmer and Milton, among others, as Nyquist explicates how early modern interpretations of specific biblical texts validate or contest Greco-Roman concepts of slavery and freedom in the context of concerns generated by the English Revolution. In the final third of the book, Nyquist focuses on the writings of Hobbes and Locke in order to juxtapose the Hebraic notion of voluntary entrance into slavery with the Roman ritual of formalizing an individual's release from legal servitude. Along the way are fascinating discussions of the visual and verbal representations of the pileus or liberty cap donned by the formerly enslaved as a sign of free status, and the visual and textual conventions that relied on nakedness to project New World and African societies in a precivil past. Nyquist's book will forever alter our thinking about the complex and surprisingly mobile relation between attitudes toward chattel slavery and the theorization of political rights. Insofar as collective political liberty is an ideal that we continue to defend, studies such as Nyquist compel us to ask: at whose cost?

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*The Cambridge History of South African Literature*

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The heterogeneity of South African society makes it difficult to do justice to the range and variety of expression present in the country's literary history. A significant part of the criticism leveled at the existing literary historiography has come from scholars who felt that English-speaking critics had misrepresented or undervalued authors and issues in their fields. A solution to this problem is to include representatives from all those fields in a multi-authored, collaborative project. Derek Attridge and David Attwell's *Cambridge History of South African Literature* sets out in this vein to be "the most fully representative collection of historical scholarship on the country's extensive literary production yet to have been published" (12). It includes discussion of oral and written literature in all of South Africa's official languages,