

Review - Mackie, Erin , *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates: The Making of the Modern Gentleman in the Eighteenth Century* ( Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press , 2009 ), pp. xii + 231; ISBN 978 0801890888 .

The rakes, highwaymen and pirates of the eighteenth century are fascinating, endlessly romantic, hypermasculine figures. We find them attractive, even when – as reconstructed grownups – we probably shouldn't. So when the present reviewer was offered the opportunity to review this book, he jumped at the chance, unfairly anticipating a racy work of popular history. This may account for some early frustrations with what is in reality a complex and highly theorised literary study.

The argument of *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates* is easily summarised but not easily unpacked. The 'English gentleman' of the eighteenth century is widely regarded as a quintessential model of hegemonic masculinity: whereas one would normally assume that this model was defined against criminal 'others', Mackie contends that the rake, the highwayman and the pirate actually shared its status as modern masculine types, and indeed played a supportive role in its development. As she argues, 'masculine power continues to rely on modes of privilege, aggression, and self-authorization that violate the moral, social, and legal dictates that constitute its own legitimacy' (p. 2), so the (illegitimate) rake, highwayman and pirate actually had much in common with the (legitimate) gentleman. The book essentially argues that modern patriarchal masculinity is inherently paradoxical and therefore offers some oblique readings of texts from the period in which it was formulated.

These texts will be familiar to students of eighteenth-century literature since the rakes, highwaymen and pirates in question are largely drawn from the pages of Defoe, Gay, Richardson, Burney and Godwin. In addition to this, Mackie includes examples from the 'criminal biography' genre of the age, life writing (in the form of James Boswell's *London Journal* ) and numerous cultural references from other periods. The latter particularly characterise the chapter on pirates, which takes us on a dizzying non-chronological journey from Sir Francis Drake to the Pirates of the Caribbean movies. Mackie has little time for historians who dismiss colourful myths in their search for 'positivist historical reality' (p. 74), but this historian would like to have seen a more systematic effort to connect the literary representations to the social, political and cultural worlds in which they were produced. For example, the fascinating account of Dick Turpin launches straight into an obscure novel of 1834, with no prefatory account of the highwayman's celebrated and highly contested life. Mackie does engage thoroughly with historical work on crime, where the issue of masculinity nowadays looms large in relation to questions such as violence and public conduct. Other branches of gender history are less well represented, however: Philip Carter's argument that the 'fop' was a social rather than sexual figure, for example, may have had implications for the figure's frequent appearance in this book as an 'other' for aggressive criminal heterosexuality. It may seem churlish to criticise a book from another discipline for not paying due respect to one's own, but this is a review for a history journal of a book that makes big historical claims. There is likely to be a lively debate about whether *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates* stands and delivers.