

Huggins, Mike (2016) Book review: British sporting literature and culture in the long eighteenth century. *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 33 (6-7). pp. 763-765.

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Sharron Harrow (ed) *British Sporting Literature and Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Farnham; Ashgate, 2015) pp.xvi +232, bibliography and index, 32 illustrations, £60 (hardback). ISBN 9781472465085.

In recent years the vast majority of historians of sport have shown relatively little interest in the long eighteenth century, preferring to concentrate on the more recent past, and largely abandoning the field to specialists in literature such as John Whale or David Nash, or mainstream historians like Wolfgang Behringer Emma Griffin, Rebekka Mallinckrodt, or Angela Schattner. They have shed new light on a period which has been tentatively suggested by many scholars including Allen Guttmann and Norbert Elias to have seen the origins of modern sport.

Sharron Harrow is a professor of English at Shippenburg University, with a specialist knowledge of eighteenth century British literature and culture, and she brings together an interdisciplinary team, albeit dominated by English literature specialists as the book's title might indeed indicate, several of whom are former sports participants. Sports historians are sometimes accused of showing limited awareness of relevant articles in cognate disciplines and most authors here are open to the same accusation, with almost no reference to material in sport history's academic journals. Nevertheless the collection is an interesting and helpful one, especially in raising my awareness of the ways in which modern English specialists think about approaches and topics.

It begins with an introduction 'Playing by the Rules'. This argues that during the period many modern rules of sport were codified; sport emerged as a business, a spectacle and a performance; and that gaming organised itself around sport. The argument here is overplayed, but the introduction is useful for reminding readers of eighteenth sport's ubiquity, the range of sources available, the disagreements and debates it generated, the book-length secondary literature covering sport, and the recent critical resurgence of interdisciplinary attention to sport by eighteenth century studies.

The rest of the collection is organized around three sections: Contexts, Sports and People. In Contexts, Emma Griffin challenges the conventional view that industrializing Britain over the long eighteenth century witnessed a sharp increase in the volume and intensity of elite criticism of working class sports and pastimes. She suggests that while there was some ambivalence towards sport, there was a substantial degree of toleration. Many were indifferent and though there were some hostile voices, 'the majority thought some measure of regulated diversion was to be encouraged' so the idea of a 'decisive shift in attitudes towards traditional pastimes of the poor does not appear to be so well grounded as has long been assumed' (31). Jean Williams explores the legacy of ancient Olympism and its combination with early modern British sports pastoralism, drawing on the emerging sports literature from the fifteenth century to the end of the eighteenth century. This allows her to effectively analyse its shifting meanings, continuities and significant changes. Patricia Crown merges some literary sources with a critical insight into John Collett's prints of the 1770s. These showed how clothing used for sport could challenge gender and class conventions. Collett's prints showed a variety of sports and pastimes: driving, riding, shooting, skittles, cricket, ice-skating, rowing and hunting, often with sexual subtexts, and some playing with stereotypical roles. The chapter uses well-chosen illustrations very effectively.

The section on Sports covers three sports. Early modern tennis, its arrival in England from France, its uses, representations, transformations and steady decline from perhaps the late seventeenth century onward are discussed by Alexis Tadie. Linda Troost discusses the use of archery as a recreational pursuit. It experienced a growth in interest in the 1660s, when some early societies were formed in Scotland and England, such as the Finsbury Archers, often based on parish and rural contexts, with some regional competition. After a slow decline, there was a second revival in urban contexts in the 1770s, drawing on conscious antiquarianism, and archaic names like the Toxophilite society, often initially stressing personal display and exclusivity of membership rather than skill. This was a time when women from elite backgrounds took up the sport. Horses were important to sports such as hunting, horseracing and coursing, and Donald Nichol explores horse culture, and the varied uses to which horses were put, through an exploration of relevant poetry and prose of writers such as Fielding, Pope, Swift and Defoe alongside a close analysis of a satirical miscellany, *The New Foundling Hospital for Wit*, which between 1768 and 1773 criticised horse racing and Jockey Club members. Echoing several other recent studies he emphasises that though the Jockey Club has been believed to have been founded circa 1751, it had an earlier existence, with its roots perhaps forty or more years before.

The last section focuses on People. The editor, Sharon Harrow, deals with the famous Jewish pugilist Daniel Mendoza, who has been the focus on a substantial number of texts, stressing his Jewishness, including detailed treatment in M. Berkowitz and R. Ungar, *Fighting Back: Jewish and Black Boxers in Britain* (London: Hebrew and Jewish Studies Dept., 2007), surprisingly unreferenced here. Harrow adds to existing studies through the ways she links the multiple contemporary narratives focused on Mendoza to broader sports literature of the period and to boxing's theatricality and Mendoza's complex relationship with and performances on stage and in the theatres of the time. In 1810 Lord Byron swam across the Hellspont in Turkey, deliberately linking this in his writings to the classical tale of Hero and Leader. Jack D'Amico traces the roots of the event, his earlier swimming training in London and broader sporting life, setting it in the contexts of the history of swimming and Byron's own reflections on it in his writing.

Overall the book is a useful introduction to the state of play in the relationship between sport and literature in the eighteenth century, providing some in-depth readings of sporting representations, points for future study, and reasonably broad in its scope and coverage, offering multiple perspectives on reading sport, despite the many gaps inevitable in such collections. Even those few specialists in the sport of the period will find new material and insights here. The essays are well-written and richly footnoted in terms of English literature, and the illustrations are a real strength.

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