

REVIEWS

Richard Bodek and Joseph Kelly, editors. *Maroons and the Marooned: Runaways and Castaways in the Americas*, UP of Mississippi, 2020, 224 pages.

Maroons and the Marooned is a provocative study that juxtaposes the historical investigations of *marronage*—autonomous communities built by runaway Black slaves in the Americas – with the examinations of *maroonage*, a term used in the volume to refer to the experience of mostly White European castaways. The book contributes to the growing research on the long ignored and underappreciated phenomenon of maroon communities and shows its central significance in American history. The authors point to the usefulness of a comparative reading of *marronage* and *robinsonade* narratives. Both runaways and castaways constructed new, autonomous societies in the wilderness. Fugitive slaves claimed their freedom from bondage, and survivors also experienced new and radical freedom after the shipwrecks suspended all hierarchies and orders. At the same time, the editors underline that their comparative approach does not ignore the differences between the two phenomena, and they are aware that to equate them would “disrespect the legacy of people who suffered the worst kind of bound labor” (xvi).

In the first three chapters, historians discuss diverse maroon communities in the Americas. Drawing on archeological research, J. Brent Morris surveys different forms of maroon societies in the Great Dismal Swamp, the largest known location of such colonies in North America. The excavations have revealed evidence of a continuous, two-century presence of maroon settlements. The communities succeeded in avoiding surveillance and staying out of the public records. As a result, they are largely absent from dominant historical narratives. Morris contends that the aggregate population of the loosely joined maroon colonies in the region numbered at least several hundreds, perhaps even thousands. The most permanent settlements, located deep in the Great Dismal Swamp, were almost completely autonomous, and some of their inhabitants never came in contact with the outside world. The Civil War and abolition of slavery put an end to the maroon settlements in North America. In the next chapter, James O’Neil Spady revisits the historical narrative of the “Denmark Vesey Conspiracy” and argues that organizing resistance to slavery can be classified as *psychic marronage*, whereas secret slave ceremonies related to it constituted “*brief physical marronages*.” The following chapter is a study of maroon communities in Latin America, which are much better documented than those on the US territory. Edward Shore claims that there still exist Black rural communities that descend from fugitive slaves, which have sought official legitimation of their land possession after emancipation.

The opening historical studies of maroons are followed by cultural and literary analyses of shipwreck narratives and their survivors. Steve Mentz, the author of *Shipwreck Modernity* (2015), argues that the *maroonage* paradigm—consisting of three stages: shock, immersion, and salvage—enables us to process the ultimate modern condition of uncertainty. In Bodek and Kelly’s collection of essays, Mentz

offers an alternative history of Bermuda, which focuses on non-human forces such as the Gulf Stream, the coral reef, and tobacco, which shaped the colonialization of the islands. In the following chapters, Peter Sands, Simon Lewis, Claire Curtis, and Richard Bodek demonstrate that the condition of being marooned is a central trope in Transatlantic creative literature. The marooned characters live in utopian, dystopian, or postapocalyptic settings, and such figurations re-imagine and explore the meanings of the modern human condition and the democratic polity. The final chapter revises the narrative of North American colonial origins and argues that the 1609 Bermuda shipwreck is a much more usable cultural template than God's chosen nation's errand into the wilderness. Joseph Kelly contends that whereas the Puritan myth assumes that any change of the chosen people corrupts the sacred mission, shipwrecked castaways are necessarily transformed by their experience, which in turn shapes the communities they build. He suggests that the wreck of the *Sea Venture* in Bermuda is a more relevant history for contemporary US Americans. In 1609, the ship set for Jamestown was swept on the reefs surrounding the archipelago. Instead of continuing to Virginia, a part of the crew, mostly consisting of indentured servants, wanted to settle down on the tropical island and attempted to found what can be termed a maroon community. Kelly argues that "their experience produced the first instance of social contract theory in the English tradition," and thus the "original recorded instance of American democracy derived from marronage" (183). Kelly's chapter bridges the gap between the examinations of fugitives and castaways and makes a very persuasive case for the central yet largely unrecognized significance of both phenomena for American history.

Juxtaposing marronage and maroonage, Bodek and Kelly's study performs an interesting experiment in comparative analysis. The historical chapters of the volume—both those on the African American maroon communities and on the Bermuda shipwreck—form the most coherent and helpful part of the anthology. Literary studies are independently quite interesting, but the texts they discuss—spanning more than two centuries, several genres, and three continents—seem too diverse to enable any strong conclusions. Most imaginative literature discussed by the authors represents speculative genres featuring tropes such as time travel and post-apocalyptic reality. Although Richard Bodek does include Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, the volume would benefit from the inclusion of other Black speculative, Afrofuturistic, or utopian narratives. As most works discussed in the book represent novel and alternative societies, a comparative analysis of African American texts such as Martin Robison Delany's *Blake: or the Huts of America*, Sutton E. Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio*, Pauline Hopkins's *Of One Blood*, W. E. B. Du Bois's "The Comet" or more contemporary futuristic texts by authors such as Samuel R. Delany or Colson Whitehead would productively complement the project.

Overall, the volume constitutes a thought-provoking reading. It meaningfully contributes to the research on maroon communities in the Americas, and it demonstrates the significance of shipwreck narratives for contemporary culture. The authors and editors show how the communities that emerge from marronage/maroonage help us reimagine and rethink both the past and present of modern society.

Anna Pochmara
University of Warsaw