

*Hubert Crackanthorpe: Selected Writings*. Ed. by WILLIAM GREENSLADE and EMANUELA ETTORRE. (MHRA Jewelled Tortoise) Cambridge: Modern Humanities Research Association. 2020. viii+414 pp. £34.99. ISBN 978-1-78188-966-4.

Hubert Montague Crackanthorpe (1870–1896) is well-known among those interested in the *fin de siècle*, although unfortunately this is more to do with his mysterious death by drowning in Paris at the age of 26 than for his writing, which has remained pre-dominantly out of print.

*Hubert Crackanthorpe: Selected Writings* – the 7<sup>th</sup> volume in Stefano Evangelista and Catherine Maxwell’s Jewelled Tortoise series – is therefore a much-needed edition that successfully presents the range and importance of Crackanthorpe’s writing.

The volume is comprised of two critical introductory essays by the editors, a selection of Crackanthorpe’s fiction and non-fiction, and a comprehensive bibliographic survey. William Greenslade’s essay, ‘Life, Context and Criticism’, begins with the details of Crackanthorpe’s death and the discovery of his decomposed body, recognizable only by his signet ring, before expanding on his connections with some of the most influential literary figures of the day (Henry James, William Butler Yeats, and Arthur Symons, to name a few), his establishment of the short lived journal, *The Albermale: A Monthly Review* (1892), and his life-long interest in French culture and writing. As discussed by Emanuela Ettore in ‘The Stories and the Prose Poems’, this context enables a deeper understanding of Crackanthorpe’s attraction to challenging, Zolaesque subject matter, and the artistic experimentation that led to him being considered ‘as one of the exponents of “new realism”’ (p. 35) at the beginning of his career. In three years, this realism rapidly developed into a darker and uneasy impressionism – a progression that is foregrounded in the organization of the short stories and prose poems in *Selected Works*.

The first part, 'Fiction', takes a chronological approach to Crackanthorpe's more realist short story collections. It includes six of the seven stories in *Wreckage: Seven Studies* (1893); all but 'Yew Trees and Peacocks' in *Sentimental Studies* (1895); two of the six in *A Set of Village Tales* (1895); and all three of the stories in *Last Studies*, collected and published posthumously in 1897. As justified by the editors, the omissions from these collections provide the space to present three lesser-known short stories in the second part, 'Uncollected Fiction'. This is the first time 'A Latter-Day Highwayman (An Adventure in Miniature)' has been published since the original newspaper version in 1896. In this short story, the narrator recalls the night he spent sheltering from a snowstorm in a disused cattle-shed with an inept highwayman who 'resembled a decadent Father Christmas' (p. 366). It is an excellent example of Crackanthorpe's off-kilter realism, dark humour, and, as Ettore puts it, his 'deconstruction of the clichés of contemporary representations of degeneracy' (p. 59). The third section is focused on a selection of the forty-one 'impressionistic fragments' (p. 35) collected in *Vignettes* (1896). In a way that is reminiscent of Symons's *London Nights* (1895), ephemeral urban spaces and experiences – such as the crowd after mass, fleeting crepuscular encounters, and the streets of London and Paris – are interwoven with pastoral countryside scenes and eroticized descriptions of European holiday destinations. This collection has a disconcerting effect, described perfectly by Lionel Johnson as 'a note of distrust in the stability of happiness [...] that this delight and that pleasure are fatally precarious' (p. 64), and offers a fascinating glimpse into the direction that Crackanthorpe's writing may have taken. If I have one criticism of *Selected Works*, it is that only sixteen of these *Vignettes* have been included. The fourth part, 'Non-Fiction', comprises of two earlier essays by Crackanthorpe (on Zola [1892] and contemporary fiction [1894]), and an interesting letter on literary freedom from 1894. The 'Appendix' and notes are excellent. Overall, *Selected Writings* is an accessible introduction to Crackanthorpe that makes proper

consideration of his work alongside others of the “Tragic Generation” possible. Highly recommended.

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