ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the various representations of the male mulatto in metropolitan French literature from his appearance in the early nineteenth century to his sudden, and heretofore unexplained, disappearance in the late nineteenth century. I argue that the romantic representations of *le mulâtre* are unique images of black masculinity. These literary characters present black men endowed with a higher degree of agency than other images of black masculinity, those other images being various permutations of *l’esclave royale* and *le bon nègre*. The images of “the royal slave” and “the good negro” fill the works of late eighteenth writers who produced the works known as *la littérature négrophile*. I argue that the sudden appearance of the male mulatto in metropolitan French literature effectively heralds the end of *la littérature négrophile* and presents black masculinity as a more complicated, nuanced personality. In this sense, the literary representations of the mulatto under observation serve as a type of bridge, connecting the helpless images of black masculinity in the late Enlightenment to the more modern images of black masculinity in the early twentieth century.

My research is based on literary analysis, historical research, critical race theory and gender studies. It is my hope that this project contributes to and encourages the application of critical race theory and gender studies to the Romantic literary tradition and demonstrates the extent to which the racial “other” shaped France’s conception of itself in the nineteenth century.