

**Jolene Zigarovich, ed., *Sex and Death in Eighteenth-Century Literature*. New York and London: Routledge, 2013. Pp. 314. £80. ISBN 9780415640039.**

**Donna T. Andrew, *Aristocratic Vice: The Attack on Duelling, Suicide, Adultery, and Gambling in Eighteenth-Century England*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013. Pp. 328. \$55. ISBN 9780300184334.**

The two books under review here remind us just how much ink was devoted to the sexual lives and scandalous deaths of the real and fictional alike in the eighteenth century. Together, they consider all manner of print, including novels, poetry, drama, sermons, essays, newspapers, magazines, correspondence, medical atlases, legal commentaries, and even classifieds, demonstrating how the most private acts were often laid bare to the reader's voyeuristic gaze in an endless variety of ways.

Jolene Zigarovich's edited collection of essays on *Sex and Death in Eighteenth Century Literature* is professedly inspired by Regina Barreca's edited collection *Sex and Death in Victorian Literature* (1990), providing what some might say is an overdue and 'necessary precedent' to Barreca's 'now seminal collection' (11). (Barreca opens the book with an amusing foreword reminding us that even in this modern, enlightened world, sex and death remain 'obscene' [ix] topics of discussion.) Zigarovich's useful introduction presents this collection as a way to open up an intersection in the histories of sexuality and death: on one hand (leaning on Foucault), 'structures of power and sexuality emerged' during this period, marking a period when the body and sexuality become 'cultural constructs, the direct loci of social control' (2); on the other hand (citing Foucault and Ariès), the eighteenth-century's emphasis on individualism increasingly removed death from the communal sphere, spawning a new fascination with the body and corpse. When considered together, Zigarovich argues, 'the sex-death dialectic lies at the discursive centre of normative conceptions of gender, desire and social power' (11). The essays themselves cover the full breadth of the long eighteenth century, and many of the popular modes of writing central to eighteenth-century literary studies, including amorous and sentimental fiction, it-narratives, the Gothic, folk balladry and erotica. As expected, Gothic literature gets the lion's share of attention here, and BARS members will find plenty of interest on this front: works from Matthew Lewis, Ann Radcliffe, Robert Burns, Joanne Baillie, William Godwin and P.B. Shelley are all considered in some detail. Elsewhere, Alexander Pope's 'Eloisa to Abelard,' Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess*, Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* and Herbert Croft's *Love and Madness* also receive due attention. The biggest surprises, though, are found in Marcia D. Nichols's excellent chapter on the connections between illustrations of female cadavers in medical atlases and the conventions of bawdry and pornography (which includes the most serious consideration of pubic hair I have yet had the pleasure to read), and Katherine Ellison's highly-commendable essay on James Boswell's rhetoric of (deathly) coldness as both a narrative strategy and a form of (sexual) self-control. Both of these essays bring a sense of inventiveness to a volume that can at times—despite the quality of scholarship—feel a little predictable in its choice of primary texts.

This sense of predictability, perhaps, might also stem from the fact that four of the twelve essays – by Bonnie Blackwell, Scott Black, George E. Haggerty and Zigarovich herself – have previously appeared as book chapters or journal articles elsewhere. Moreover, these essays were originally published some time ago, between 2000 and 2007. (One could also add Maximillian Novak's essay on Croft's *Love and Madness* to this list; although an original contribution complete with updated research, the chapter does bear similarities to

essays on the same novel published by Novak in 1996 and 2000.) That the volume isn't filled entirely with new research seems to belie Zigarovich's argument for the necessity of this volume. As a result, it is neither a 'greatest hits' collection, looking back to collate the best research from the last generation as a way to define the parameters of a particular sub-field, nor is it a collection committed to fresh scholarship to mark and facilitate a new way forward. Instead, the collection sits rather awkwardly between the two, and struggles to amount to more than the sum of its parts. As a publishing project, *Sex and Death in Eighteenth-Century Literature* may well have its problems, but its scholarly value rests on the quality of the contributions – which keep the volume's theme firmly in view – and the breadth of its coverage. Readers, particularly Gothic literature enthusiasts, will find the essays in this volume rewarding.

The lustful and often fatal exploits of Gothic villains and anti-heroes was compulsive reading to many in the eighteenth-century because they often scandalously betrayed codes of honour assigned to their social position as nobles, religious leaders, parents or spouses. Such codes of honour are central to Donna T. Andrew's exposition of *Aristocratic Vice* in eighteenth-century Britain. Andrew clarifies that while narrow definitions of honour in the early eighteenth century centred on the nobility and pride in their "house" and pedigree, more inclusive notions of honour extending to various stations of life pre- and co-existed; together, they evolved into a broader expectation of genteel politeness by the latter half of the century. Thus, Andrew's polite 'aristocracy' also includes socialites, politicians and military men as well as genuine nobility in her examination of their perceived penchant for duelling, gambling, adultery and suicide.

In her own assessment, Andrew's study attempts to refine the sub-genre of cultural history, consciously diverging from histories that focus primarily on High Culture, and from anthropologically-informed social histories examining how people lived; this, instead, is a 'history of opinion' that draws upon a wide variety of print to consider the 'ongoing arguments of the day' that formed 'a changing body of musings' (7). Andrew's definition of culture is expansive and inclusive; her sources include essays, sermons, classifieds, pamphlets, debating society records, plays, fiction, but her primary focus rests on the popular press as a record of observations and reactions to a number of significant case studies. More often than not, they are presented as repositories of public disapproval of the upper class and its immorality. This is a timely book; studies drawing on newspapers and magazines are on the rise, a trend certain to continue with the further digitization of such material. Andrew's study, however, is said to be 'more than three decades in the making' (ix); whether with the aid of electronic databases or not, her coverage of British newspapers and magazines is impressive indeed. On this front, I would dare say that Andrew sets the benchmark for future cultural histories utilising the eighteenth-century British press.

Andrew draws on these opinions to make two significant claims. First, that these vices were perceived as a 'constellation of [upper-class] corruption' (3) that had a cascading and adverse effect on the moral welfare of the nation; second, that repeated attacks on such vices – what Andrew labels 'cultural skirmishes' (6) – chart the 'development of what might be called a proto-[middle] class consciousness' (13). Individual chapters on each of the vices chart a similar trajectory up to the early decades of the nineteenth century: the shift from keeping scandal shrouded in privacy (often by illegitimate means) to their exposure in the press later in the century (namely, after 1760); the emergence of the press as a court of public opinion; and, some type of reform largely instigated by community pressure exerted through the press. This structure does mean that some opportunities to forge stronger ties between these vices are missed: suicide, for instance, was commonly seen as a gamble on the existence of an afterlife, while duelling was often viewed as an alternative form of suicide and/or gambling; adultery, one might hazard to guess, might have often been an impetus for

duels or self-destruction. These type of connections are drawn briefly and occasionally along the way, but could have been illustrated more substantively by consolidated examples.

Andrew's second argument, that such skirmishes 'helped to assert the virtues of the middling orders' (244), also needs some qualification: of the four vices, only duelling appears to be specifically characteristic of the upper classes. On the other hand, a lot of press in this period was devoted to reporting and commenting on suicide in the lower and middle classes; in this case, blaming the upper classes might have simply been an easy option for a wider, irresolvable social problem. Andrew's claims for class-consciousness is best illustrated by her chapter on adultery, but ideally more could have been made of the socially-inverting effects of ridicule as the dominant response to the bumbling sexual escapades of the upper crust.

These criticisms, however, do not detract from what is a unique and fascinating historical study – one that is likely to be a decisive influence on future research on the press and its influence on eighteenth-century cultural landscapes.

*Eric Parisot*  
*University of Queensland*