

**Stephen Ahern, ed., *Affect and Abolition in the Anglo-Atlantic, 1770-1830*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013. Pp. 225. £55. ISBN 9781409455615.**

This volume considers the role and influence of affect, sentiment, and pathos in a wide variety of both abolitionist and pro-slavery texts. The collection consists of nine essays, ranging from the theoretical to the expository, and an introduction. The book is divided into four sections: 'Sympathy's Empire', 'Nation, Narration, Emancipation', 'Spectacles of Suffering', and 'Sentimental Bondage'. The divisions are apposite, and the essays cohere well as a whole, which is one of the positive qualities of this book.

Stephen Ahern's fine introduction situates the debate in its broader historical and philosophical context, and his copious footnotes provide references to the most recent scholarship, which makes the introduction a valuable resource for scholars at all levels. Ahern points out that while much work has been done on affect and gender, this volume focuses on affect and race (3), and explores the 'paradoxical uses to which affect – its embodied realities, its discursive structures – was put in this era' (19). George Bouloukos considers the relationship between sentiment, capitalism and slavery. His argument that 'sentimental sympathy' went from being used to 'attack and expose the sinful excesses of self-interest to defending rational self-interest – and ultimately even slavery itself' (42), is well defended. The idea that sentiment is a double-edged sword, used and abused by both abolitionist and pro-slavery activists, is an argumentative thread with which most of the other contributors engage.

Tobias Menely analyses the 'ethico-political efficacy of sympathetic identification' (58) and how it is the 'situation of suffering rather than its vivid representation' that 'give[s] sympathy its direction' (57). While sentiment and sympathy can easily be criticised, Menely argues strongly for sympathy's 'performative "force"' (67). It would be interesting to question why sentiment was more affective/effective in certain genres than others. Brycchan Carey, for instance, points out how much eighteenth-century drama about slavery 'overplayed its sensibility' (128) and largely failed to contribute towards abolitionism.

Anthony John Harding examines how the nationalist trope of the 'free air' of Britain was not as 'inimical' (71) to slavery as one might imagine, and Mary A. Waters, through a reading of the medical and physiological underpinnings of the discourse of sensibility in the poetry of Anna Laetitia Barbauld, shows how Barbauld could use this rhetoric to warn that when slaveholding perverts 'the resolute virtues arising from sympathy', the individual, as well as the body politic, is threatened by degeneracy, 'debilitation' and 'mental instability' (105).

Joanne Tong's sensitive reading of William Cowper's anti-slavery verse highlights the problems associated with pity and political effect, which still resonate in the post-Holocaust world. When representations of the horrors of slavery, for instance, achieve 'mere effect, such literature becomes the fodder of a debased public that demands ever more texts of shocking brutality and pitiable victims for it to consume' (147). Christine Levecq considers the presentation of suffering in petitions written by slaves and freed slaves in the United States. She shows how the language of affect was competing with several other discourses, and was often more successful when focusing on one person, rather 'than having readers envision broader, more systematic change towards an egalitarian community' (167).

Jamie Rosenthal's essay examines the way that white, female colonists could use the 'discourse of sensibility to assert female moral authority, while simultaneously reinforcing the subjugation and exploitation of black slaves' (171). Similarly, Margaret Abruzzo shows how 'appeals to suffering, victimhood, and cruelty both challenged *and* reinforced slavery' (190).

This volume is well edited, has a good index, and a useful selected bibliography. The footnotes to the chapters also contain valuable references. My major quibble with the book is with its title. The vast majority of the contributions consider texts which relate to the abolition of the slave trade, rather than the abolition of slavery itself. This could have been made clearer. Furthermore, the dates chosen in the title, '1770-1830', are not fully justified. Many of the contributors discuss texts from well before 1770, starting with Richard Steele's 'Inkle and Yarico' (1711). A tighter focus on texts relating only to the abolition of the slave trade would have been welcome, as the fight against slavery itself elicited subtly different responses in the language of sentiment when compared to the campaign against the slave trade. Abruzzo's observation, in the book's final chapter, that debates change over time, could, indeed, be used to introduce a further volume concentrating on affect and the abolition of slavery during the period 1807 to 1835. The present volume, however, remains a valuable contribution to the consideration of a problem of representation which is still very much with us today.

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