



Peggy Thompson, ed. *Beyond Sense and Sensibility: Moral Formation and the Literary Imagination from Johnson to Wordsworth*

Peggy Thompson, ed. *Beyond Sense and Sensibility: Moral Formation and the Literary Imagination from Johnson to Wordsworth*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2015. Xv, 213 p., ill. ISBN 9781611486407. U.S. \$90.00 (hardcover).

What first drew me to this superb collection was its promise that it would explore complex issues of sensibility and morality in eighteenth-century British literature. *Beyond Sense and Sensibility* does not disappoint, offering authoritative and compelling chapters about how emotional receptivity and moral sense appear and evolve from the middle 1700s to the turn of the nineteenth century.

The introduction and nine critical essays in this volume explicate the influence that sensibility and rationality had upon authors and their readers. In her introduction to the collection, Peggy Thompson divides the book into three parts (“Revisiting Sensibility,” “Rethinking Didacticism,” and “Reframing the Questions”) that delineate the relationship between sensibility and subjectivity. Unlike other recent studies in the field, the book will also prove beneficial to evolving discourse about affect theory and thing theory. Ultimately, *Beyond Sense and Sensibility* will aid researchers in understanding the broader implications of emotion, moral formation, and identity.

In part one, Adam Rounce, Rhona Brown, and Heather King respectively examine how James Boswell, Robert Fergusson, and Frances Burney revisit and reconsider themes of literary sensibility and the formation of moral character. Rounce discusses the synergetic relationship between emotional response and literary celebrity, and illustrates how Boswell, in *Life of Johnson* and *Lives of the Poets*, constructs his own ethos as a man of feeling. Brown next analyzes Fergusson’s interest in Scotland’s much-romanticized historical past, his reactions to the nation’s Enlightenment present, and his opposition to extremes of sensibility. She further traces Fergusson’s journey to find his own authorial voice while experimenting with both neoclassical and vernacular verse (27-28). King concludes with her analysis of visual representations of female virtue and moral influence in Burney’s *Cecilia* and *Camilla*, persuasively showing how Burney interrogates ideas about bodies and speech as instruments of power.

Part two offers knowledge about didactic sensibility, as Christopher Johnson, Leslie Chilton, and Adrienne Wadewitz explore literature as a mode for teaching moral character. Johnson examines how Philip Doddridge’s funeral sermon for Colonel James Gardiner presented him as a sentimental hero whose moral qualities could teach a receptive audience how to



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correctly act and convey emotion. Chilton next considers how Tobias Smollett adapts the moral didacticism of François Fénelon's *The Adventures of Telemachus* for *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*. Chilton's recovery work of *Telemachus* and *Clinker* is not so much a comparative analysis, but rather introduces both texts as exemplars of moral instruction. Wadewitz similarly examines Charlotte Smith's abolitionist children's literature as cultivating moral sense in young readers. She illustrates how Smith both criticizes British civilization built upon the slave trade and instructs her audience to become feeling citizens in an unfeeling world (94-95).

For part three, Peggy Thompson, James Noggle, and Evan Gottlieb critique Enlightenment-era moral formation and its creation of ostensible moral creatures. Thompson explains how Samuel Johnson's *Rambler* essays emphasize reason, not emotion, as a practical guide for moral living. She further appraises the ways in which Johnson instructs his readers to overcome habit and emotion in the formation of a so-called "moral" identity, thus allowing uninterrupted reason to direct one's thoughts and actions (112). Noggle then provides a thought-provoking discussion of sensibility and its relationship with affect theory, and traces uses of "insensible" and "insensibly" in Eliza Haywood's *The Female Spectator*, Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. He evaluates how Haywood, Smith, and Gibbons respectively use "insensibly" as an unconscious cultivation of the mind, as a subconscious comprehension of moral rules, and as a sign that historical transformations provoke emotional responsiveness (129, 131-32, 141). Gottlieb concludes the collection with a critical discussion about William Wordsworth's interest in natural philosophy and exploration of the relationship between the poet and subject-objects. He further examines both Wordsworth's use of the undefined "thing" in his works as quasi-mystical and how Humean and Hartleian ideas about sensation influenced *Lyrical Ballads* (145-46, 149-51).

In all, I commend the authors and their thought-provoking chapters, and recommend *Beyond Sense and Sensibility* to anyone interested in the study of sensibility and British literature. Narrowly, the book would attract scholars whose research interests align with sensibility and sentimentality in British literature, didactic literature and moral formation, and the construction of moral character both within text and without. The authors not only contribute to the current discourse about the sensibility aesthetic and its many transformations in literature, but they also emphasize the importance of sensibility as a powerful foundation for



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identity creation.

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