Charlotte Sussman. *Consuming Anxieties: Consumer Protest, Gender, and British Slavery, 1713–1833*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000. x, 267 pp. $50.00 US hc.

Charlotte Sussman's subtitle, long as it is, is too short: it should also mention colonialism and commodification. Her book, too, is short but ambitious. It is a work of fully historicized literary criticism and argues convincingly that literature itself is part of history, shaping attitudes as well as reflecting and recording them.

After an introduction explaining her theoretical approach and outlining her argument, Sussman's first chapter surveys forms of consumer protest—essentially, though the term is anachronistic, boycotts—current between 1713 (the Treaty of Utrecht, which gave Britain a monopoly on the Atlantic slave trade) and 1833 (the emancipation of the slaves in the British West Indies). Made possible by the rise of free-market capitalism and consumer culture, these included John Hanway's advice to abstain from tea for reasons of personal and national health; John Wesley's advice to do so for religious reasons; the American Revolutionaries' refusal of tea, and Swift's refusal (in *The Drapier's Letters*) of coinage minted in England, for political reasons; and most importantly, the abolitionist campaign to abstain from slave-grown sugar, which drew on reasons of all these kinds. As Sussman points out, "consumers could participate in such movements even if they were denied the right to sit in parliament, or vote, or sign parliamentary petitions. For this reason, abstention movements provided a political forum open to women, to colonized subjects, and to religious dissenters" (23). At the height of its success in 1791, the anti-sugar movement involved 300,000 households.

The centre piece of Sussman's second chapter is her discussion of *The Drapier's Letters* (1724–25), but she also shows how an understanding of this polemic can illuminate texts ranging from *Gulliver's Travels* (1721–26)—in which Gulliver imports exotic commodities (tiny sheep) from Lilliput, is first commodified (as a freak) in Brobdingnag and then partly commodifies the bodies of the Brobdingnagians (making a comb out of the King's whiskers and one of the Queen's thumbnail parings, and so on), and sharply advises the British not to try to colonize the Houyhnhnms—to "A Modest Proposal" (1729), surely the ultimate study in human commodification. Throughout, Sussman is acute on Swift's ambivalent status as Protestant and Anglo-Irish, and the consequent ironies and ambiguities of his texts.

Sussman begins her third chapter by conceding: "England's colonial possessions seem very far away in Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* [1771]" (81). She

uses the novel ingeniously to show how anxiety about the issues she has been discussing penetrated right to the heart of England. Matthew Bramble's revulsion from Bath water and London food (especially when prepared by foreign chefs) not only recalls Hanway's hygienic objection to tea; it also figures a revulsion from the social changes brought about by the influx of colonial wealth—changes comparable, Sussman argues, to the transculturation Captain Lismahago undergoes during his misadventures among the Miamis.

The second half of the book raises issues of gender. The fourth chapter begins by surveying a favourite rhetorical move of the abolitionists: suggesting that sugar is metaphorically or even literally polluted with the blood, sweat, and tears of slaves—thus simultaneously rendering sugar the object of a Matthew Bramble-like disgust and British consumers of it—revealed as cannibals—the objects of Swiftian horror. "[I]n every pound of sugar used," William Fox argued in 1791, "we may be considered as consuming two ounces of human flesh" (115). Opposed to this mass cannibalism, in the abolitionists' view, was compassion, which the emergent ideology of domesticity categorized as a specifically feminine virtue: "this rhetoric of the antislavery movement constructs physical incorporation and sympathetic identification as each other's opposites" (129).

It is a little difficult to reconcile this conclusion with the beginning of the fifth chapter, which contrasts the kinds of reading associated with the two sexes—but then, no ideology is entirely consistent. Men's reading was supposed to be public, rational, outward-looking; women's, private, sentimental, and solipsistic. Coleridge, for example, complained about "the fine lady" who "sips a beverage sweetened with human blood, even while she is weeping over the refined sorrows of Werter" (132); such a reader does not appear to be naturally compassionate. Sussman sees the project of the ladies' antislavery societies, which by 1830 were both numerous and active in disseminating tracts, as bridging the gap between these two kinds of reading, "turn[ing] sentimental conventions to overt political use" (156). The chapter ends with a reading of *The History of Mary Prince*, apparently the first autobiography by a woman slave, written down for the illiterate Prince by an antislavery lady (Susanna Strickland, later Moodie), which sometimes exploits the conventions of sentimental literature for political effect and sometimes subverts them "with a knowledge of the particularities of Afro-Caribbean experience not often available in the discourse of ladies' antislavery societies" (154).

In the last chapter, Sussman shifts her gaze from the metropolis to the colonies, where plantation society (which she calls, a little misleadingly, "slave culture") was especially anxious to uphold domestic ideology. It wanted to believe that its women were "even less active, even more pale, even more re-

strained, than their British counterparts, as if better to preserve the former's claim to racial purity" (162). It also tried to inculcate the domestic ideology among them, not to bring the races together but to keep them apart, by preventing miscegenation. But even proslavery writers conceded, and antislavery ones insisted on, that the opposite process might take place—that exposure to the brutal oppression of slaves might turn ladies into brutes. Sussman illustrates this predicament with readings of three novels. In two, Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1785) and Charlotte Smith's *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer* (1800), domestic ideology triumphs as black women help white heroines return to England and marriage; in the third, Smith's *The Wanderings of Warwick* (1794), a man becomes disgusted with his fiancée when he sees her taking sadistic pleasure in the flogging of a slave girl.

The conclusion begins by surveying twentieth-century consumer protests, from Gandhi's Swadeshi movement to the California grape boycott. Most of it, however, is devoted to the often-discouraging aftermath of Emancipation and the increasingly racist ideology of the nineteenth century. It ends with a provocative reading of Barrett Browning's "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" (1848), which Sussman critiques for "biologism" (201) but praises for its rejection of sentimentality.

Sussman's primary research is exhaustive, ranging from canonical texts through lesser-known works to dozens of anonymous pamphlets. Her engagement with a wide range of classic and contemporary secondary sources is equally impressive. I wish, however, she were less fond of two argumentative strategies. First, she almost never cites an author or political agent from her period without subjecting her/him to an ideological critique (see 16, 18, 23–24, 49, 93, 100, 112–13, 125, 135, 140, 146, 150–51, 158, 178; the only exceptions being authors of colour and Karl Marx). No political movement—not even abolitionism—has ever been purely sweetness and light, but Sussman does not need to be quite so insistent about this truism to assure the reader of her own progressive credentials. Secondly, though less pervasively, Sussman tends, in citing secondary sources, to point out their limitations (see 41–42, 45, 56–57, 123). No critical book or article contains all of the best that has been thought and said in the world, but Sussman does not need to insist on *this* truism for the reader to appreciate the real originality of her work—which after all is a book, not a book review.

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