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Ramesh Mallipeddi. *Spectacular Suffering: Witnessing Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic*. U of Virginia P, 2016. Pp. xiv, 265. US\$49.50.

Politically suspect, self-indulgent, ineffective: sentimentalism, Ramesh Mallipeddi admits, and metropolitan sympathy for slaves' suffering in particular, "has been the target of withering critique" by scholars of the eighteenth-century Atlantic world (4). In *Spectacular Suffering*, however, Mallipeddi invites us to reevaluate sentimental sympathy—not to recuperate this metropolitan preoccupation with the injured black body but rather to develop a new theory of slave agency that will better account for the "embod-

ied dimensions of black experience in slave narratives and in black cultural and aesthetic forms" (5). To this end, the book's first half examines scenes of physical distress in sentimental responses to slavery from metropolitan observers like Aphra Behn, Richard Steele, and Laurence Sterne, while the second turns to the less well-studied archives of slaves' representations of their own experiences of dispossession, which range from Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* and Ignatius Sancho's *Letters* to medical records, captains' journals, and the proceedings of parliamentary investigations of the slave trade. By reading these archives together, *Spectacular Suffering* demonstrates how "the emergence of actual slaves as speaking subjects in the English public sphere was . . . shaped by the discursive parameters" of the metropolitan focus on spectacular suffering (71), and how these slaves, as speaking subjects, nonetheless managed to leverage spectatorial sympathy to generate a "melancholic counterknowledge of colonial modernity" (11). With attention to the methodological challenges that necessarily attend any excavation of these fragmentary archives, Mallipeddi thus strives to shift the focus of contemporary scholarship on the Atlantic world and begins to bridge the current "chasm between recovery projects that aim to generate historical knowledge about slavery . . . and those that take corporeal dimensions of slave existence as their point of departure to trace acts of regeneration and recuperation undertaken by enslaved people themselves" (15). Meticulously researched, clearly written, and original, *Spectacular Suffering* delivers on this promise: Mallipeddi both exposes the troubling ways contemporary critics reproduce their metropolitan subjects' tendency to foreground spectacle and suffering and demonstrates how recentring slaves' "bodily experience as a source of knowledge" can open new avenues of inquiry about how the "ostensible objects of sentimental compassion" generated their own "affective response to . . . the commodification of their bodies" (4–6).

Instructors will find Mallipeddi's first three chapters especially useful, as the book begins with compelling close readings of widely anthologized and frequently taught texts (Behn's *Oroonoko*, Steele's *Spectator* No. 11 [Inkle and Yarico], and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey*) that demonstrate just how similar the transformations of the injured body at the centre of sentimental representations of slave distress are to the transformations of the body that underpin the commodification and punishment that characterize Atlantic slavery. In Chapter One, for instance, Mallipeddi identifies *Oroonoko* as a "foundational" illustration of this dynamic (47), weaving together research on the conventions of heroic drama, the logic of the fetish, and the processes of trade and mercantilist exchange to expose "the changing valences of the black body as a consequence of its commodification" (50). In Chapter

Two, Mallipeddi takes a similar approach, combining Jürgen Habermas' and Michael Warner's analyses of the public sphere with a close study of the heroic epistle (or lover's complaint) to argue that, in Steele's *Spectator* No. 11, the sympathy the heroic epistle makes available to Yarico, its heroine, emerges only "via a bracketing of racial slavery," by foregrounding her abandonment rather than her enslavement (70). By tracing this move through the many adaptations Steele inspired, furthermore, Mallipeddi discovers that this gesture also tightly circumscribed the sympathy available to Mary Prince, whose nineteenth-century *History* of her own enslavement was censored for acknowledging any forms of freedom she found within either slavery or sexual relationships; like the fictional Yarico, Mallipeddi observes, Prince is authorized to vouch for her experience as a woman or a slave, but not both. More striking, Mallipeddi finds that contemporary critical emphasis on the auction block and whipping post has reproduced Steele's "dialectical logic," obscuring aspects of the slave experience that resist the opposition between slaveholders' violence and abolitionists' benevolence (78). For instructors who want to invite students to interrogate the conditions that shape our encounters with the past, then, Mallipeddi clearly and concretely explains how the representational strategies of Steele's essay have informed the scholarly protocols that govern Yarico's appearance in many twenty-first-century anthologies—and, by identifying a range of new sources that tie Prince's discursive context to our own, he also opens up exciting new topics for comparative research.

Altogether, then, both the structure of the book and its chief intervention reinforce the shift in perspective championed by Okon Edet Uya in a 1972 essay on slave songs, which Mallipeddi quotes briefly in Chapter Five: "Rather than viewing the enslaved solely from the standpoint of the masters to document 'what was done to the slaves,'" Mallipeddi argues, "we should also examine the internal dynamics of slave life to trace 'what the slaves did to themselves and how'" (176). To this end, Mallipeddi is most disruptive in the book's second half, in which he works to expose the "internal dynamics of slave life" captured between the lines of the metropolitan texts he treats in the first section. For instance, inspired by critic Charlotte Sussman's attention to the "tension between the abstract, deterritorializing logic of capital and the embodied, local practices of historical subjects" (Mallipeddi 8), Chapter Four reads through plantation reformers' complaints about slaves' idleness to uncover "a black counterculture—what Caribbean slaves themselves called 'play'—which provided the basis for an oppositional politics" (112). In Chapter Five, likewise, Mallipeddi breaks with the previous chapters' sentimental literary frames to examine the descriptions of slaves' melancholy in eighteenth-century medical tracts and nautical surgeons' handbooks—

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and this time, he finds that it is not the eighteenth-century observers who have misrecognized the embodied experience in front of them. Rather, he explains, modern epidemiology has wrongly “somatized the disorder, locating it squarely in the body” (161). By looking back, however, to the eighteenth-century interpretation of melancholy and its related afflictions (including the ingestion of clay) as psychosomatic disorders, Mallipeddi suggests that we might acquire new “historical insight into how . . . melancholy emerged as a symptom of, response to, and protest against the effects of forced migration” (150), and so begin to move “beyond the binary and teleological connections between slavery and freedom that . . . continue to inform current thinking on the problems of slavery” (214).

Following Prince, then, who advertises her *History* by observing that Britons might “know what slavery is” but do not yet “know what a slave knows” (qtd. in Mallipeddi 74), Mallipeddi’s chief aim is to encourage scholars of the Atlantic world to historicize our own preoccupation with the spectacle of slaves’ suffering and, building on the work of more contemporary postcolonial scholars like Suvir Kaul, to recentre the embodied knowledge that might “make palpable how non-literate, ordinary, and common slaves . . . registered their experiences of slavery . . . and aspirations for freedom” (Mallipeddi 17). In addition to these accomplishments, one of the book’s most exciting revelations is its re-envisioning of the project of recovery, or the new relationship it imagines between the scholar and the subject of archival inquiry. What if, rather than treating recovery as the “sole prerogative of critics,” Mallipeddi wonders, we instead imagine it as a series of acts of regeneration by which the historical subjects of slavery might “recove[r] themselves” in the same way that “[b]odies recover—and also fail to recover—from harm[,] . . . shock, and sickness” (15)? In this way, casting new light on familiar sources and exposing an unseen archive of slaves’ embodied knowledge, *Spectacular Suffering* marks the beginning of a productive methodological shift in studies of the eighteenth-century Atlantic world.

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