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THE JUDGMENT OF THE DRAWING ROOM

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Enlightened Sentiments: Judgment and Autonomy in the Age of Sensibility by Hina Nazar. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012. Pp. 192. \$45.00 cloth.

In *Enlightened Sentiments*, Hina Nazar shows how Enlightenment rationalism is involved with sentimentalism, and how that involvement is embedded within Romantic fiction. Sentimentalism, located philosophically with David Hume and Adam Smith and fictively with novelists as differently positioned as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jane Austen, is “mutually engaged” with rationalism “in an ongoing liberal project that seeks normative underpinnings for a postmeta-physical age” (3). Nazar grounds her argument in a delineation of an autonomous judgment that is fundamentally social, enacted through the epistolarity of mid-century novels and within the drawing rooms of Austen’s domestic fiction. The “social constitution of subjectivity” (4) aligns sentimentalism with Kantian rationalism through their shared use of an “aesthetic analogy for moral judgment” (5): characters in novels judge others and their own hearts by using the same rules and standards by which they judge landscapes, artworks, poems.

Nazar establishes the framework for her argument in the first two chapters, which outline the “rhetoric of spectatorship” (12) that informs philosophical and novelistic sentimentalism. Spectatorship links aesthetic and moral judgment to “an understanding of individuals as socially embedded subjects, whose ability to question the norms

of their societies and to constitute alternative principles of action requires active social engagement in the form of critical debate” (16). The “claims of the subject” in sentimentalism and Kantian aesthetics share space with the claims “of context” (58). In chapter 3, “Judging Clarissa’s Heart,” Nazar points out that Samuel Richardson’s epistolary structure cooperates with *Clarissa’s* (1748) trope of spectatorship to enforce the sociability of judgment. Throughout the novel, until her death and martyrdom, Clarissa “insistently questions her heart’s authority” (61), installing herself as both spectator and judge. Her understanding of herself “as her heart’s observer rather than its blind disciple” emerges in her injunctions to her friend and correspondent Anna to “lay [her] heart open,’ as though it were a book that could be placed on a lectern, or some other object for joint viewing” (64).

In its formal structure as much as its plotting, Richardson’s novel insists on an “other-directedness of judgment” (52) that derives from David Hume and Immanuel Kant. Through her letters, Clarissa “socialize[s]” the “paradigm of judgment” (62). Correspondence enables her to receive “readers’ reports on her self-representation” (67)—a departure from the Puritan diarists whose rigorous self-scrutiny constitutes them as her most obvious formal forebears. Epistolarity

articulates inward judgment but upends its infallibility. Through *Clarissa’s* insistence that self-examination is a social act, fully realized only in exchange, Richardson “opens up an ethical understanding that pivots around standpoints rather than standards, and that identifies the social world to be an ineluctably perspectival public space” (79).

In “A Sentimental Education: Rousseau to Godwin,” Nazar reads Rousseau’s *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (*Julie, or the New Heloise*, 1761), as one of *Clarissa’s* immediate heirs. Inheritance is a key critical trope in *Enlightened Sentiments*: the legacy of “moral self-direction” (1) passes from *Clarissa* to *Julie* to Henry Mackenzie’s *Julia de Roubigné* (1777) to William Godwin’s *Fleetwood* (1805) to “the writings of one of sentimentalism’s most important literary heirs”: Austen (115). But, like the plots of so many sentimental novels, literary heritability is never straightforward: every generation, as Mary Crawford remarks in *Mansfield Park* (1814), “has its improvements.” In *Julie*, “Rousseau seeks to revise *Clarissa* into a Bildungsroman of the passions, to show how the love of two people of refined sensibilities . . . lends itself to affiliation with virtue” (82). But by the novel’s conclusion, which leaves St. Preux as an intellectually free ascetic and Julie as both bourgeois matron and willing sacrifice, it has become “simply

a narrative of replacing obedience with obedience" (91).

Mackenzie and Godwin set out to correct the patriarchalism that erases Julie from Rousseau's narrative—one with tragic overlay, one with liberal corrective. In *Julia*, Mackenzie returns to the female community that constituted the sociability of judgment for Richardson, but establishes its fragility through a weakened epistolary frame, "attenuated" toward century's end "by the growing internal differentiation of modern society" (100–101), and in the face of the commodification implicit in an *Othello*-like plot of "imagined infidelity and jealous rage" (98). In *Fleetwood*, Godwin offers "the monstrous progeny of a Rousseauvian education" (106). Fleetwood's sensibility lacks "perspective-making contact with a broad spectrum of other standpoints" (109), and his unchecked egoism militates against the companionate union that is the dream of sentimental fiction. The second chance afforded him at the novel's conclusion places *Fleetwood* "at a critical juncture between sentimental tragedy and the comic resolutions of many nineteenth-century realist novels" (115), bridging the generation gap between Rousseau and Austen.

In "Judgment, Propriety, and the Critique of Sensibility: The 'Sentimental' Jane Austen," Nazar reworks the official story of Austen's reverence for Richardson (quotes

from family memoirs attesting to her Richardsonian taste and knowledge head the chapter) to offer this novel as a kind of read-out of all the elements that link Richardson equally with Humean sentiment and Kantian aesthetics. Austen's first published novel, and one that was begun in the last decade of the eighteenth century, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) follows in the line of descent from Richardson through Mackenzie and Godwin. It also looks, as many readers have noted, like an explicit critique of sentimentalism, and Nazar devotes some time to the antisentimentalist take on Austen, most often lodged in her two earliest written novels, surveying critics from Walter Scott and Ian Watt to Marilyn Butler and Clara Tuite. Rather than focusing on the instability of Austen's oppositions, however, the "broadly history-of-ideas" context for Nazar's reading offers the tension between the two Dashwood sisters rather as a "family quarrel within sentimentalism" (9). Both, she argues, "take judgment and feeling to be inextricably intertwined" (121). The difference lies in one sister's commitment to judging within rather than against the social world. In the end, for Nazar, Austen's novel highlights the difficulties of judging "in a world in which established rules have lost authority" (123). This is the world of *Clarissa*, but it's also the world of all Austen novels, in

which heroines cannot depend on traditional hierarchical structures. The Dashwoods employ aesthetic criteria as a means of judging character. (Nazar points out that both sisters value connoisseurship in a potential lover.) But Elinor's "cultivated impartiality" contrasts with Marianne's Fleetwood-like narcissism and isolationism in being "highly compatible with the norms of politeness" (136).

Throughout this chapter, Nazar signals a canny recognition of Austen's status as a novelist so beloved she becomes a malleable character all her own. In a neat reworking of yet another favorite biographical detail, she connects Elinor's ability to muse over her own faithless lover without shutting herself up in her room to Austen's reputed habit of writing her fiction in the family drawing room. Both indicate "a liberty of mind or thought that is operative even in the presence of others" (142). Austen's drawing-room settings, in other words—both within her novels and in the stories of their production—emphasize not the impossibility but the sociability of reverie. Moreover, she recognizes that the drawing room, like the salon of a different

era and continent, is a gendered space. Highlighting "the domestic woman's fitness for critical thinking and public participation" (144), it "is the place where middle-class women like Austen's heroines and Jane Austen herself stepped into a larger world" (146).

Nazar's readings of these novels, and of the complex philosophical history that informs them, are uniformly rigorous, thoughtful, and illuminating. Her conclusion—that "by casting her light on the drawing room, Austen places the norm of a common point of view at the center of a nineteenth-century tradition of fiction that builds on eighteenth-century sentimentalism and aesthetics" (146)—makes *Enlightened Sentiments* not just an engaged work of literary criticism but an important interlocutor for other scholars of emergent domestic realism.

Kristin Flieger Samuelian is associate professor of English at George Mason University. She is the author of Royal Romances: Sex, Scandal, and Monarchy in Print, 1780–1821 (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), as well as essays on Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and Romantic-period culture, and she edited Austen's Emma (1815) for Broadview Press (2004). Her current book project looks at representations of dance and nationalism in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British culture.