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Frank Christianson, *Philanthropy in British and American Fiction: Dickens, Hawthorne, Eliot and Howells* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007, £47.50). Pp. 256. ISBN 10 0748625089, ISBN 13 978 07486 2508 6.

For Ralph Waldo Emerson, the charitable enterprises that distinguished nineteenth-century culture represented a profoundly ineffectual phenomenon. In "The Transcendentalist" he remarked that "philanthropies and charities have a certain air of quackery"; in "Self-Reliance" they were notoriously dismissed as mere cloaks for "malice and vanity." However, as Frank Christianson reveals, the complexity of cultural attitudes to philanthropy during the period has been largely taken for granted. Aiming to redress this oversight, his study explores "the nature and impact of philanthropy as a force in nineteenth-century British and American culture" (6) by triangulating three mutually defining discourses: political economy, philanthropy and realist fiction.

The study charts the emergence of philanthropy as a uniquely modern phenomenon, "distinct from charity, *noblesse oblige* and gift-giving" (11). It involved a transition from a religious to a secular impulse and from individual to institutional agency, a shift that paralleled the contemporaneous "ethical and aesthetic transformation" from romance to realism. "The logic of mid-Victorian philanthropy" is shown to "parallel that of literary realism in its exploration of the capacities and limits of the sympathetic experience, its quest for epistemological impartiality, and its reliance upon social taxonomies" (32). In a series of four readings of the social novels of Charles Dickens, Nathaniel Hawthorne, George Eliot and William Dean Howells, Christianson unravels these affinities between philanthropic and fictional representation.

Their respective engagements with "the altruistic imagination" involved various degrees of fascination and suspicion, all seeking to complicate a conventional sympathetic impulse. In the British milieu, *A Christmas Carol*, *Bleak House*, *Daniel Deronda* and *Middlemarch* are shown to represent critiques that ultimately endorse "renovated forms of philanthropic practice" (139). The two American examples prove more problematic. *The House of Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance* are examined as unsparing denials of philanthropic possibilities. The final chapter on Howells explores the ways in which *Annie Kilburn*, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* and in particular the utopian fantasy *A Traveller from Altruria* responded to the philanthropic challenges of post-Haymarket urban America, staging a form of "purgative" redemption of capitalism.

A monograph in the Edinburgh Studies in Transatlantic Literatures series, the study is in part a story of British intellectual influence, reading "the sentimental and realist traditions as putative legatees of the Scottish discourse of feeling" (37). It is also a sideways glance at transatlantic institutions and the basic affinities of economic thought and philanthropic practice in New York and London. Christianson situates his enterprise in the tradition of the new economic criticism of figures such as Catherine Gallagher, and it also complements the investigation into imagined anglophone communities of recent studies such as Amanda Claybaugh's *The Novel of Purpose* (2007).

Throughout, Christianson endeavours to balance his competing cultural, economic and aesthetic concerns, a heady fusion that is occasionally achieved at expense of stylistic clarity. Perhaps as a result, the readings of each writer seem somewhat abrupt. Nonetheless, this is an innovative and persuasive study, productively employing the twin loci of philanthropy and realism to chart "the circuitous route that Anglo-American culture took as a result of its ambivalent response to the consequences of industrial capitalism" (194).

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