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*Adventures in Domesticity: Gender and Colonial Adulteration in Eighteenth-Century British Literature.* By SHARON HARROW. New York: AMS Press. 2004. vii + 265 pp. \$72.50. ISBN 978-0-404-63545-9.

The title of this book, *Adventures in Domesticity*, points to the paradox which it investigates. After all, the whole point of successful domesticity, it is usually assumed, is that there should be no adventures in its sphere. The domestic is the launching-pad for adventures, and the haven to which the exhausted adventurer returns. This is a simplified version of what is meant by saying that the domestic is the private realm to be contrasted with the public, and usually also the female in contrast with the male. On the back of this contrast has been erected the assumption that the domestic is outside politics. Sharon Harrow's book is a contribution to the large number of recent studies debunking this view.

Her area of investigation is British literature of the eighteenth century, and the impact on the concept of the domestic made by overseas ventures and adventures—trade, travel, the founding of colonies, and the running of slave plantations. All these tend to put their projectors into morally tempting situations abroad, be they political, commercial, or sexual. The issues raised are the behaviour of the white man abroad and the bourgeois fear that he would behave with the freedom from sanction usually associated with the aristocratic libertine. In the sexual sphere such a man might throw the guilt on to the black woman, the 'cultural other'. The result is the increasing stress by the end of the century on the domestic purity of the white female, left defending values which are not attributed to either the black woman or, in many cases, the white man.

This book traces the impact of colonial excess on the ideology of the domestic and its representative, the white woman at home. It does this in chapters on Defoe's *Captain Singleton*, Richard Cumberland's play *The West Indian*, Anna Maria Falconbridge's *Narrative of Two Voyages to the River Sierra Leone in the Years 1791–1792*, and two great canonical texts, *Mansfield Park* and *Frankenstein*. It is noticeable that, written in the United States, it gives most of its attention to the Caribbean. From the British perspective the eighteenth century was as much concerned with India, and, as William Dalrymple has recently shown (*White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India* (London: HarperCollins, 2002)), there the concept of a shared domesticity between white and black on foreign soil was more likely than in a context where relationships were grievously distorted by slavery. The theme of the book, however, is concerned not so much with what happens abroad as with its impact back in Britain. The dilemma for those at home was to balance the the desirability of money from abroad with the debauched values of those who obtained it. As Harrow points out, writers, and especially women writers, repeatedly negotiate this problem of desire and risk.

This has been an area of lively discussion in Austen scholarship since Edward W. Said compelled critics' attention to Sir Thomas Bertram's estates in Antigua (*Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993)). Harrow assumes the validity of current discussion on this without demur, and adds to it in interesting ways. She stresses the 'dark' qualities of Henry and Mary Crawford, as against the 'fair' colouring of the Bertram girls, as subliminally suggesting a colonial origin for their lapsed moral values, and she suggests that Fanny Price's physical weakness is to be seen as validating her as a proper representative of English bourgeois domesticity, since so much writing on the Caribbean noted the convenient view that the women of other nations could do physical work, just as lower-class women in England could. This is refreshing, since it has been commoner to look for psychological explanations of Fanny's weakness, rather than ones based on policing racial and class boundaries.

This book has an interesting theme and makes some good points. It never, however, explains its choice of texts, leading one to speculate whether those chosen are typical

or unique in their perceptions—the former, I suppose. Its sense of the domestic is extremely limited, meaning little more than ‘maintaining the virtue of the white woman’. Throughout the writer should have looked more incisively at her often rambling chapters, to ensure that the ideas she is tracing come across with the clarity they deserve.

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