

Review: Katherine Judith Anderson, *Twisted Words: Torture and Liberalism in Imperial Britain* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2022) 234pp. ISBN 978-0-8142-1512-8, \$69.95.

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KATHERINE JUDITH ANDERSON'S 2022 monograph *Twisted Words: Torture and Liberalism in Imperial Britain* begins on a grim note: a scene from Rudyard Kipling's 1890 story 'The Mark of the Beast', wherein a British police officer tortures an Indian priest. Anderson posits that, although Kipling's characters feel a sense of disgrace at their actions, they are adhering to a tradition of torture that 'was central to the history, literature, and culture of nineteenth-century Britain and its Empire, despite the corresponding evolution of liberalism'.¹ As philosophical liberalism swept Britain, Anderson claims, so too did anti-imperial revolution sweep its colonies, prompting swift and brutal imperial retaliation. In this work, Anderson focuses on the seeming disparity between this liberal ideology and the continuing deployment of torture both in reality and in nineteenth-century fiction. The after-effects of Britain's responses to the Morant Bay Uprising, the 1857 Indian Rebellion, and slave rebellions prior to abolition were, Anderson argues, significant factors that contributed towards the continuing interest in torture in nineteenth-century British fiction—and, subsequently, to the period's discourses surrounding violence, human rights, and the governmental sanctioning of torture as a valid response to states of national emergency.

This historical grounding allows Anderson to examine an array of sources in a variety of contexts, including martyrological novels and non-fiction sources such as periodicals and court documents, particularly those from the 1865 Morant Bay Uprising. Expanding on the post-colonial work of torture scholars such as Stephen Morton and Nasser Hussain, and diverging from Edward Peters's 1996 *Torture*, which concluded that nineteenth-century definitions of torture became 'largely sentimental', Anderson argues for serious engagement with the period's changing definitions of human rights and citizenship and the exceptional state violence that prompted them.² Anderson's

¹ Katherine Judith Anderson, *Twisted Words: Torture and Liberalism in Imperial Britain* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2022), p. 3.

² Anderson, p. 5.

work is the first monograph to examine torture's relationship with liberalism over the course of the nineteenth century. In doing so, she posits that her work serves, in the vein of Andrew Sartori and Priyamvada Gopal's approach to liberalism, as a work of 'anticolonial reclamation'.³ Anderson undertakes this work by using both fictional and nonfictional accounts to argue for their representation of Britain's torture victims as potential British subjects, recognising their humanity even in the wake of overwhelming violence.

Anderson's first chapter centres on Catholic and Protestant martyrological novels of the nineteenth century, whose scenes of torture she reads as a liturgical conflation of state and religious power. Anderson presents readings of seven martyrological novels: Nicholas Wiseman's *Fabiola, or the Church of the Catacombs* (1854), John Henry Newman's *Callista: A Sketch of the Third Century* (1855), Frances Taylor's *Tyborne; And Who Went Thither in the Days of Queen Elizabeth* (1859), J. M. Neale's *The Farm of Aptonga: A Story of the Times of S. Cyprian* (1856), Anne Manning's *The Lincolnshire Tragedy: Passages in the Life of the Faire Gospeller, Mistress Anne Askew* (1866), W. H. G. Kingston's *The Last Look: A Tale of the Spanish Inquisition* (1869), and finally George Eliot's 1863 novel *Romola*. While Anderson lends most of her focus to Eliot's *Romola* and John Henry Newman's *Callista*, the range of works she examines breaks new scholarly ground in its noncanonical breadth. Departing from scholars such as Maureen Moran, who have explored the imagery of martyrdom in nineteenth-century works, Anderson focuses instead on the somatic experience of torture.⁴ In so doing, Anderson presents an argument for what she calls 'sensory liberalism' in these texts, arguing that they offer an 'alternative form of liberalism [...] rooted in bodily experience more than intellect and reason'.⁵

Chapter Two argues that incidents of torture committed by south Indian tax collectors in 1855, who were working in service of the British, shifted definitions of torture for British Victorians and 'authorized a modern understanding of it as a systemic

³ Andrew Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire: An Alternative History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014); Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (New York: Verso, 2019).

⁴ Anderson, p. 21.

⁵ Anderson, p. 21.

and everyday interaction between citizen-subjects and their government'.⁶ Anderson uses the 1855 *Report of the Commissioners for the Investigation of Alleged Cases of Torture in the Madras Presidency*, commissioned by the British Madras (south Indian) government. Britain required money to continue its operations in India: torturing it out of Indian peasants meant that torture 'served as a troubling new marker of modernity as it evolved into a tool of global commerce'.⁷ Yet Anderson posits that the victims' statements in defence of their own human rights changed discourse around colonial subjects' political status, with 'torture open[ing] up the *possibility* for a more inclusive British citizenship'.⁸

Chapter Three focuses on the Jamaican Morant Bay rebellion, Governor Edward John Eyre's installation of martial law, and the torture that happened under it. In meticulous textual analysis of primary sources such as the 1866 *Report of the Jamaica Royal Commission*, not to mention private letters between military men and their civilian families on English shores, Anderson highlights how the British public drew binaries between their own peaceful existence and the violence inherent in the expansion of the broader Empire. This chapter provides useful socio-historical context, foregrounding a shift back towards literary concerns in her fourth chapter, which examines domestic torture in George Meredith's *The Egoist* (1879), George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876), and Anthony Trollope's *He Knew He Was Right* (1869). Anderson argues that, through the rhetoric of torture in their depiction of marital relationships, these novelists advocated for an acceptance of Britain's changing marriage laws and a shift towards stronger legal rights for women: for example, new laws such as the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878 granted assaulted women the option to separate from their husbands and retain custody of their children. Anderson sees Meredith, Eliot and Trollope 'disrupt rather than normalize gender discrimination, breaking the linear trajectory of the courtship plot through an insertion of torture at various points along the way'.⁹ Equating patriarchy with sovereignty, Anderson draws our attention to the cross-pollination of torture discourses between domestic and imperial spaces.

⁶ Anderson, p. 14.

⁷ Anderson, p. 55.

⁸ Anderson, p. 21, emphasis in the original.

⁹ Anderson, p. 110.

In her final chapter, Anderson turns to late Victorian settler colonialism, and 'adventure romance' or 'colonial Gothic' texts—specifically, George Lewis Becke's short stories 'The Revenge of Macy O'Shea', 'The Methodical Mr. Burr of Majuru' (1894), and 'The Trader's Wife' (1898), as well as Bertram Mitford's novels *The Weird of Deadly Hollow: A Tale of the Cape Colony* (1891) and *The Gun-Runner: A Tale of Zululand* (1893), and William Charles Scully's *Daniel Vananda: The Life Story of a Human Being* (1923). She argues that these noncanonical texts offer a complex view of colonialism, as they refuse to gloss over imperialism's artificial binaries between colonial force and slavery, settlement and capitalism, and even between realism and genre fiction in literature. Although these texts centre on separate colonial locations and span nearly twenty-five years, Anderson's emphasis on fin-de-siècle texts written by men who 'lived in the settler colonies about which they wrote' highlights these novels' visions of torture as a tool of white settler colonialism, and speaks to the prevalence of this view at the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁰

After this survey of the colonial Gothic, Anderson moves to her coda, which draws parallels between imperial violence against marginalized bodies in the nineteenth century and current police brutality in the United States, which she describes as the British Empire's 'twenty-first-century American heir'.¹¹ As a whole, her monograph argues that nineteenth-century imperialism created our modern understanding of torture, positioning state-sanctioned torture as a fundamental building block of Western modernity. Indeed, Anderson goes to great lengths to establish the academic study of torture as fundamental to understanding current practices of marginalisation, offering an impassioned argument for the value of nineteenth-century scholarship in modern-day contexts. She further advocates for a "'new" New Liberalism', 'a version capable of severing itself from capitalist imperialism and championing instead the definitions of justice and human freedom' as a defence of the Humanities in our present day.¹² As nineteenth-century scholarship continues to branch away from its historically white, British, and largely male roots, we would perhaps do well to emulate Anderson's enlightening work both within and without the canon. Scholars interested in this field might also build on the intersectionality of Anderson's work, using it as a springboard

¹⁰ Anderson, p. 138.

¹¹ Anderson, p. 176.

¹² Anderson, p. 179.

to examine the relations between torture, sexuality and gender, as Anderson examines heterosexual marital abuse towards women, but otherwise opens up a discursive space in which further work surrounding homosocial and homoerotic relationships could be undertaken. Overall, however, Anderson's meticulous analysis and judicious use of interdisciplinary material make *Twisted Words* a particularly effective monograph in dealing with the nineteenth century's faults and failures in a way that seeks empathy for and understandings of both its oppressors and victims.



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