



Affected Sensibilities: Romantic Excess And The Genealogy Of The Novel, 1680-1810 (Ams Studies in the Eighteenth Century)

By Stephen Ahern

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A pioneering assessment of the history of the English novel, Stephen Ahern's new study "Affected Sensibilities" reconsiders the role played by the early British novel in the shift from a culture of libertinism during the Restoration and its aftermath, to a culture of sentimentality from mid-century through the beginnings of Romanticism. In a perceptive series of essays on prose narratives, the author develops the provocative thesis that the amatory, sentimental, and Gothic fictional forms that dominate the marketplace in the early years of the novel are deeply connected by a concern with sensibility, a capacity for living intensely that is largely determined by class and gender. Countering the standard account of sensibility's history, Ahern asserts the concept first appeared in the later seventeenth-century amatory tales and novels of Aphra Behn, and furthermore outlines significant continuities among the amatory, the sentimental, and the Gothic as fictional genres and as broader cultural modes. Ahern's extensive, careful, and original analyses combining studies of romance with studies of sensibility bring valuable new insights to a growing field of study. With a wide range of reference and a broad chronological scope, including chapters on the aforementioned Aphra Behn, on Eliza Haywood, Laurence Sterne, Ann Radcliffe, and Matthew Lewis, among others, "Affected Sensibilities" contributes to our understanding of the early novel and the cultural history of sensibility in a compelling discussion that will interest students and scholars alike.

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