Gerard Aching

Freedom from Liberation: Slavery, Sentiment, and Literature in Cuba. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015. 251 pp. (Cloth US\$ 48.00)

This engaging and important contribution to the study of slavery and the multiple meanings of freedom focuses on the life, work, and relationships of enslaved poet Juan Francisco Manzano in nineteenth-century Cuba. Beginning with the book's title, Gerard Aching contests the notion that there was a simple dichotomy of freedom and enslavement. He explores the tensions between the struggles of enslaved people and the aims of those who, by all appearances, were their allies in the fight, disentangling assumptions about what slaves wanted regarding their own freedom and the ideas held by abolitionists and reformers, their presumed liberators. Enslaved people were the subjects of their own struggles for freedom framed by their own ideas about what freedom meant. At the same time, they were the objects for reformers and abolitionists who had their own notions of freedom for enslaved Africans. These latter ideas were rooted in a self-serving relationship between liberators and the liberated. Aching uses Manzano's writings, as well as his interactions with Domingo del Monte and his literary circle and with the British abolitionist Richard Madden, to interrogate both the desire of the enslaved for freedom and the agendas of their liberators.

Aching begins by providing historical context, drawing on the works of David Brion Davis, Manuel Moreno Fraginals, David Murray, Manuel Barcia, and others. This enables him to introduce the precarious position Cuba maintained as Spain's wealthiest colony in the period of slavery's decline and expanding liberalism. The story of Manzano's presentation of his poem "*Treinta años*" illustrates the social dilemma of the literary circle members. When he was introduced to the circle and recited his sonnet, the members were so profoundly moved by his reading that they collected money for his liberation. These literary elites bought Manzano to set him free with wealth that was generated by the very system of slavery and colonial rule that had enslaved him. At the same time they were arguing for freedom from Spain. It is clear that they had empathy for Manzano but they distorted it by equating their own situation under Spanish rule, casting themselves as enslaved. Aching begins his careful reading of the autobiography that Manzano produced while enslaved by revealing the power dynamic between Manzano and del Monte. Manzano felt obliged to write whenever the wealthy and would-be patron del Monte asked him. Nevertheless, he produced subtle resistance in the text, achieving a delicate balance between exposing himself and critiquing slaveholders, writing that "he had chosen to separate the 'facts' from their 'most terrible part'"

(p. 104). Manzano crafted his text for a Cuban readership, although it was first published in English as a result of del Monte's support and Madden's involvement in translating the text. The intent was always to use Manzano's work in support of the Abolitionist movement as evidenced by the fact that Madden introduced his translation in Parliament in order to underscore the horrors of slavery. This is one example of Aching steadily building his case that the efforts of Manzano and those of the people with whom he worked were strikingly different in some ways but overlapping in others.

Aching then turns his attention to the literary circle led by del Monte. The works produced by circle members, including Félix Tanco y Bosmeniel's *Petrona y Rosalía* and Anselmo Suárez y Romero's *Francisco, el ingenio o las delicias del campo*, as well as nonmember Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab*, reveal the tension between abolitionist and reformist views of the humanity of the enslaved, denouncing slavery, promoting anticolonialism, and expressing a desire for development on the island. Aching deftly compares the fictional with the real showing that, while the novelists represented their world in good *costumbrista* style, they also created characters that did not conform to reality. These characters, such as the titular Sab, embodied the authors' anxieties and desires regarding change on the island.

Aching concludes with a reflection on the nature of freedom. On the one hand he confirms that freedom is relational. For both the abolitionists and the reformers there was a gap between themselves and the objects of their actions that could never be breached. On the other hand, Manzano's account of his own struggle along with his enduring affection for his enslavers shows that his fight was complex and not easily appropriated. Rather it forces us to more fully understand the power of oppression and the enduring usefulness of W.E.B. Du Bois's idea of "double consciousness." *Freedom from Liberation* successfully draws a sharp distinction between self-styled liberators who would define the parameters of freedom for those they would free and the agency of enslaved people who struggled for a freedom that they themselves would earn and define.

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