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**Carsten Junker.** *Patterns of Positioning: On the Poetics of Early Abolition.*  
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With *Patterns of Positioning: On the Poetics of Early Abolition*, Carsten Junker unlocks a vast historical archive, putting on display a wide range of texts and materials related to early abolitionism in the Atlantic world. His study examines “North American permutations and particularities of the poetics of abolition” (26), covering a time frame from the mid-eighteenth to the early nineteenth century. Junker pursues two aims: to investigate, with the help of theoretical frameworks, a textual archive that is highly specific to its own time, and to thereby expand existing theoretical approaches towards hegemony, applying them to this distinct archive (51).

The book’s structure is tripartite, reflecting its foci of investigation: 1) argumentative patterns, which Junker calls “topoi”, i.e., “recurrent units of argumentation realized in various sequences of abolitionist writing” (40), not to be confused with topoi understood more commonly as literary motifs; 2) narrative figures, which are narrative acts of emplotment that led to a formalization of abolitionist discourse; and 3) generic frames that open up the issue of slavery to a variety of audiences, often mobilizing emotions and placing slavery within a “larger framework of social negotiations” (40). All three sections examine the localization of the unfree as part of an ongoing subject versus object positioning and the connected processes of racialization and abjection (19). They follow up the study’s guiding question: How did the free position the unfree towards themselves (and vice versa)? Which were the grand narratives that the free deployed to make sense of the regime of slavery they witnessed and the ensuing “questions about their own lives” (262)?

The three sections not only place different emphases on various kinds of rhetorical strategies and literary forms – argumentative patterns, narrative figures, and generic frames – they also show that the poetics that figure so prominently in this study require analysis of several distinct levels of observation, through differently calibrated lenses: from fine-grained rhetorical strategies to the more abstract, bulkier categories of genre. Understanding the poetics of abolitionism requires a zooming in and out of the materials, a different degree of resolution, so to speak. Here lies one of the book's strengths: it shows that neither a close reading of this archive nor a contextualizing discourse analysis suffice. Instead, the force of early abolitionism was owed to its reaching out to readers on a cognitive as well as on an emotional level, and this was achieved through a variety of techniques and styles. Ultimately and unsurprisingly, the poetics of abolitionism were closely connected to its political dimension. As if the mechanisms of exclusion and vilification that Junker identifies at work in innumerable examples (e.g., animalization, gender obliteration) were not oppressive and at times heart-flinching in themselves, the overarching question was of course much grander and even more sobering: Whether the enslaved were given or denied access to a modern social and symbolic order around 1800, or even to human relationships more generally speaking (207). Thus, rather than simply identifying and categorizing poetical patterns, Junker shows their imbrication in an ongoing discursive formation on the place of the individual subject in a modern society.

The first section, “Arguing Abolition – Argumentative Patterns”, provides instances of such zooming in, exploring “small-scale poetic forms that help to constitute, generate, and structure” (255) abolitionist discourse. The discursive fields which Junker investigates are varied and cover religion, philosophy, political theory, economics, nation-building, as well as discourses on race, among others. Each of these fields is then further sub-divided into distinct themes that arguments about abolition rested on. Spread across these fields such argumentative patterns developed notions of amelioration, beneficence, equality, fellow feeling, guilt, and hypocrisy, but also moral principles and natural law. Junker very carefully traces the buildup and occurrence of such arguments in close readings of early abolitionist works such as Anthony Benezet's *A Caution and Warning to Great-Britain, and Her Colonies* (1767), Thomas Paine's “African Slavery in America” (1775), or John Wesley's *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774). While motivations depended on their authors' religious and national backgrounds, these texts all contribute towards a shifting of the “imaginary relations between the free and the unfree” (255), while stressing ruptures between the free and the enslaved or their common sociality, or possibly suggesting new rules, as Junker argues (255).

The second section, “Narrating Abolition – Narrative Figures”, turns to the narrative acts that assign the characters in texts positions in relation to one

another, resulting in plots of proximation, participation, or separation, for example. Junker's principal assumption here is that "there was, in short, *no abolition without narration*" (363), that stories were needed to make the discourse of abolition recognizable to readers and to label the slave trade as scandalous. Many of these narratives followed religious or moral threads such as that of "Criminal Confession and Conversion", "Repentance and Remission", and "Avarice and Abuse". However, Junker's corpus of texts includes many more instances of confessional narratives, essays (e.g., Benjamin Rush's "Paradise of Negro-Slaves – A Dream" [1798]) or the Inkle and Yarico tale introducing the theme of the Noble Savage (311). In each of the texts, the question is how close the reader, embodying the free, lets the suffering of the enslaved, the unfree, get to him or her.

Strategies of emotionalization play an even more prominent role in the third section dealing with "Generic Abolition – Generic Frames", i.e., literary and non-literary genres (the distinction not always being clear in this period). The section opens with a survey of available literary forms in the second half of the eighteenth century (e.g., epistles, diaries, historical accounts, pamphlets, and sermons) and an outlook into the nineteenth century, where genres such as the novel, the autobiography, the slave narrative, or the picaresque would become (commercially) significant forms. Junker defines genres not as sets of fixed formal rules, but as instruments "with which text-based utterances are poetically formalized for the specific purpose [...] of contesting and denouncing enslavement" (385). They are frames for speaking positions that open up dialogic spaces, where often the ambiguities of early abolitionism become visible (Benjamin Franklin's "A Conversation on Slavery" [1770] serves as an example). In these dialogic spaces, be they dialogues, anti-slavery pamphlets, or children's books, the culture of sentimentality could take shape. They formalized the sentimental ideals of compassion and fellow feeling. However, such mutuality was not a given. More often than not, these texts also served the purpose of accommodating feeling for and with the enslaved within "a hegemonic logic of circular white self-referentiality" (435), as Junker argues.

By focusing on the earlier period in abolitionist discourse and by positioning his analysis within a cis-Atlantic framework, allowing him to read the local or particular in connection with the ramifications of slavery in the Atlantic world, Junker responds to ongoing developments in American studies that seek out global or transnational exchanges and processes of circulation. This cis-Atlantic approach, which he introduces early in his study and to which he returns again in the conclusion, does not always figure prominently in his analyses and would deserve a more rigorous application across his three sections. Yet by virtue of his careful scrutiny of partly little-known sources and the highly methodological presentation of his results in the shape of categories and typologies, Junker provides a compelling account of the discursive dynamic that brought early

abolitionist discourse to public awareness way before its climax in the nineteenth century. Exactly because it traces in detail how the poetics of literature interacted with social and political discourse, it is a trove of information not only for the (early) Americanist scholar, but also for students who wish to understand the interrelationship between literary practice (in a broad sense) and abolitionism – before and beyond *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852).