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April London. *The Cambridge Introduction to the Eighteenth-Century Novel.* Cambridge Introductions to Literature. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 260 pp., $ 26.99 pb.

Teaching the eighteenth-century novel to students today, and in particular to non-native speaking students, can be quite a challenge. One reason for this is the great range of formal experimentation the novel underwent in its formative period, developing from a marginal to a culturally central genre. This means that most students will encounter texts they find rather difficult to read: heroes who lack the kind of inward depth that invites identification, whose story presents a series of episodical adventures rather than a sustained narrative culminating in a climactic moment of crisis resolved, narrators whose extent of classical learning or contemporary cultural competence calls for being matched by that of an ideal reader students and scholars alike have to continue struggling to become. Hence a well-crafted introduction to this field is as welcome as it is difficult to produce.

April London has taken up that challenge at the behest of the Cambridge Introductions series. Proceeding from the insight into the "status of the novel as a mode in process" she presents "its history [as] one of continuous, if uneven, experimentation" (1). The introductory chapter charts this field with regard to forms and themes, the readers addressed, and the authors and publishers involved in eighteenth-century print culture, before briefly surveying some critical paradigms that have shaped the history of the novel since the publication of Ian Watt's formative study *The Rise of the Novel* (1957). Against his Whig interpretation of that history as one of progress, London seeks to posit a more balanced account in terms of a dynamic, uneven process of success and failure, of trial and error, that reviews well-known critical categories such as identity within a productive tension between, for example, the individuum's desire for singularity and for sociability. London identifies three central clusters, "Secrets and singularity", "Sociability and community" and "History and nation", through which she explores the "thematic, formal, and contextual diversity" (6) of the genre. Each forms a section which is opened by a very brief overview over the main texts addressed in the following three chapters that discuss variations of the main concern identified (e.g. 'singularity' as an intensified mode of individual identity is examined in turn as the power of, the virtue of, and the punishment of singularity). Other possible clusters such as the representation of children, of place, of domestic interiors, and of writing and reading are briefly addressed as "an alternate approach" in the Introduction (6–10). Somewhat confusingly, they here seem to be dismissed instead of being incorporated into thematic concerns such as the family (which forms the substructure of chapters 1 to 5) or "The sociability of books" (chapter 6), the confusion arising chiefly from the fact that

they do play a role, after all, in London's readings of individual novels in these and other chapters.

This approach allows London to restructure the vast field of the eighteenth-century novel in ways that are both familiar and innovative. Thus the first chapter opens, unsurprisingly, with a reading of *Robinson Crusoe* (still championed by many as the first novel in English); equally unsurprisingly, this opening serves to introduce the issue of the autonomous self which Watts had already identified as a hall-mark of eighteenth-century forms of identity. But then London continues by emphasising the importance of secrecy (rather than open self-accounting, as Watts had done) and the tension between self-determination and social affiliations such as family and faith, which she traces through other novels by Defoe, most notably *Col. Jacque, Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*. Focusing on how this tension develops over the course of the epoch, London considers a group of texts that are normally not seen as direct successors of Defoe's episodic adventure tale: the novel of sensibility. Where Defoe's heroes and heroines succumbed to the fascinating power of singularity, shedding social responsibilities and loyalties in their pursuit of material and emotional autonomy, Richardson redefines singularity in *Pamela* and *Clarissa* as an exemplary virtue that sets them apart from the acquisitive, immoral attitude of their families. Fielding's novels – in so many ways antagonistic counterparts to those of Richardson – are next considered as a corrective to this virtuous singularity when the families in *Joseph Andrews* and *Amelia* are presented as agents that "counterbalance, correct, supplement, or reward the forced autonomy of the protagonists" (15). Finally, the eccentricities of Lennox's *Female Quixote* or Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (or rather, of his father and uncle) foreground "the imperfect fit between the individual and social" (16). Increasingly, the exceptional individual is now punished for his or her singularity. London traces this scenario in two gendered traditions: on the one hand, the novels of manners by Sarah Fielding, Frances Sheridan, and Jane Austen (but not, as might have been expected, Mary Wollstonecraft's fictional work); on the other, the portraits of men of feeling painted by Henry Mackenzie (1771) and William Godwin (1805) respectively. London's focus on the tensions between self and society, rather than on either of them individually, produces a persuasive account of the development of the eighteenth-century novel that considerably complicates Watt's critical narrative of the rise of individualism and complements it in important ways.

The next sections continue the trajectory from the autonomous to the sociable self. Part II on "Sociability and community" explores how novels imagined different forms of community, often in pronounced tension to what they perceived as the lived reality of domestic patriarchy. But while Richardson's "family of love" (87) in *Sir Charles Grandison*, Oliver Goldsmith's benevolent patriarchy in

The Vicar of Wakefield, Eliza Heywood's *Miss Betsy Thoughtless* or Jane Austen's *Emma* each spell out the costs of patriarchal ideology for both its agents and subjects and thus seem to plead for a "reformation of family" (as chapter 4 is entitled), "they all end by validating its authority to define individual, social, and political behaviour" (87). All this is already well known from Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987); more interesting are the two following chapters that consider alternative forms of sociability beyond that of the nuclear family. Chapter 5 examines the proto-feminist utopian collectives of Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* alongside the lesser-known *School for Widows* and *Plans of Education* by Clara Reeve, before jumping back to the late seventeenth century to include Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* – usually paired with *Robinson Crusoe* – in a set of largely unknown novels from the second half of the eighteenth-century (such as Phebe Gibbes's *Hartly House, Calcutta* or George Cumberland's *The Captive of the Castle of Sennaar*) that "invoke geographically distant cultures" as alternative communities of "women, colonial subjects, and religious iconoclasts" (88).

The first part of this chapter is aptly entitled "Beyond marriage"; the second, "Beyond England". It would have been helpful to off-set the third part, dealing with Gothic novels, in a similar manner, for example "Beyond individualism", as the subgenre is introduced with a quotation from the conservative political theorist Thomas Mathias insisting "that 'we all of us' either contribute to 'the stability of social happiness' or capitulate to the forces of 'anarchy, impiety and rebellion'" (131). This quotation defines the context for London's discussion of the Gothic novel as an expression of contemporary anxieties about political revolutions as a threat to sociability. "The logic of revolution" (132), however, remains curiously bloodless in the analysis of such genre-defining texts as Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and M.G. Lewis's *The Monk*. While London draws on Edmund Burke's aesthetic and political writings in *The Sublime and Beautiful* and *Reflections on the Revolution in France* respectively, these are neither invoked to illustrate the different ways in which female and male gothic respectively engage with patriarchalism and its anxieties, nor is Burke's thinking itself seen as implicated in its ideological structures but rather appears as objective observation and measured critique of politics and literature alike (134–135).

This chapter section reveals a structural weakness of the book on the whole, which appears sometimes more, sometimes less prominently: intended as an introduction to what is indeed a vast, heterogeneous field, it fails to provide the kind of structured guidance a student might expect from it. Most of the quite substantial chapters, for instance, have no subsections that would offer a student reader some orientation (an oversight somewhat counter-balanced by a comprehensive index listing not only authors and works but also issues). Neither does the book provide a sustained overview over established critical readings of eigh-

teenth-century novels, something any reader might be looking for in an introductory volume. While there are only few footnotes to distract from the argument at hand, these do not provide more than the briefest bibliographical reference to the novels and, even less often, to critical essays. The final section, “Guide to further reading”, is a case in point: it does not provide any guidance at all but is simply an uncommented bibliography, matching over five pages of reference to primary sources with a rather rudimentary three pages of critical essays and studies. And these do not even include alternative introductions or key studies such as – to stay with the example of the Gothic novel – Fred Botting’s eminently readable introduction in the Routledge New Critical Idiom series or Anne William’s *The Art of Darkness* (both 1995).

The two chapters in Part III, “History and nation”, take what London identifies as the constitutive tension between individuum and collective to the extreme: they examine how the novel mediated between personal experience and historical events. Here, the interplay between narrative text and historical context is foregrounded, especially in chapter 8, where Fielding’s *Tom Jones*, Smollett’s *Humphrey Clinker* and Scott’s *Waverley* are read as different fictional renderings of the same political event, the 1745 Jacobite rebellion. These texts (as well as several minor accounts) function as indicators of different ways in which the novel registered historical change and loss as personal maturity, thus reconciling the tension between individuum and society. In turn, this “internalizing of the historal process” (193) indicates the maturity of the novel as a genre: from the episodic histories at the beginning of the century which pitched singularity against sociability, to the historical novel that overcomes this impasse through an “awareness of the simultaneously personal, social and political transformations” (204) of their heroes.

Relying on close readings and primarily interested in the intertextual relations that shape the history of the novel – in my opinion one of the strengths of the book –, London’s study offers persuasive interpretations of familiar as well as less canonized novels. It charts the literary landscape of the eighteenth-century under rubrics that clearly were central to the experiences of contemporary readers but which have been neglected, perhaps unduly, in recent years in favour of the critical paradigms of race, class, and gender (and their post-Foucauldian variations of monstrosity, madness, and deviant sexuality). By virtue of its approach to the novel as a medium that articulated the tensions between individuum and community at different levels, London’s study revisits the rich and diverse field of the eighteenth-century novel from a perspective that incorporates both a traditionally humanist philology and a sensitivity to power relations. A reader knowledgeable of both will enjoy the ways in which they are brought to bear on the novels in question. A student new to the field will often be at a loss, as the book

presupposes a familiarity with critical concepts and historical contexts which they cannot have yet. Undoubtedly a valuable study in its own right, its structural failure to address this particular audience makes this book seem somewhat misplaced in an introductions series.

Isabel Karremann, Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg
E-Mail: isabel.karremann@uni-wuerzburg.de