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Keywords

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Susan Carlile, ed. *Masters of the Marketplace: British Women Novelists of the 1750s*. Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2011. \$60.00. 267 pp. ISBN 978-1-61146-012-4.

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Susan Carlile's *Masters of the Marketplace: British Women Novelists of the 1750s* brings contributions from some of the most influential scholars of eighteenth-century women's writing together with newer voices in a collection that assigns new value to a literary period often neglected or rendered as a period of stagnancy in between the groundbreaking 1740s and the more formally experimental 1770s.

In her introduction to the collection, Carlile identifies a strong need for feminist literary theorists and scholars of women's writing to approach the 1750s not as a period of stasis but rather as a time during which authors "engaged in a critical renovation of the novel as a genre and reclaimed it for a protofeminist project, challenging, educating, and joining their readers" (11). While this is true, the use of the term *protofeminist* evokes a methodology that prevents this collection from absolutely breaking the study of women novelists of the 1750s open by enforcing a fairly small canon: the essays in the collection focus entirely on Sarah Fielding, Eliza Haywood, Charlotte Lennox, and Sarah Scott. These authors need the critical illumination they receive, but the collection risks creating an alternative canon that simply replicates the small, tightly knit feeling of novel culture endorsed by the Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett model that has dominated the study of the eighteenth-century novel for so long.

Despite the narrowness of the collection's focus, the essays and the collection's introduction provide a foundation for future study that will enrich our scholarship on novels of the 1750s. The dichotomy that Carlile dismantles in her introduction when she explains that these authors were not mistresses but masters of the marketplace suggests that women possessed a degree of power we do not always accord to them in our readings of their texts or our views of their lives. The collection begins the process of resituating the women as the successful authors they were during their lifetime by challenging the paradigms of literary history like those enforced by George Ballard and Clara Reeve that marginalized their accomplishments.

Divided into four parts, *Masters of the Marketplace* offers a model for locating and appreciating women's contributions to the novel during the 1750s. The first section addresses how female authors of this period continued to challenge the status quo. Rather than accept the reformed coquette model that has dominated the study of many of these authors (especially Eliza Haywood), the essays by Aleksandra Hultquist, Karen Cajka, and Eve Tavor Bannet identify ways in which two of the most prolific novelists of the period, Haywood and Sarah Scott, developed authorial identities that do not conform to our assumptions about the novel's increasing intellectual and commercial respectability for women writers.

Haywood's shift from amatory fiction to more Richardsonian-style novels has been the subject of much critical inquiry. So much so, in fact, that many of us fall into the trap of reading *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* as either Haywood's attempt to capitalize on Richardson's commercial success by imitating his style or as a resignation to the emergent moral codes

connected to domesticity and femininity. Hultquist's study of Haywood continues the process of dispelling the conversion narrative that dominates scholarship on Haywood. *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* is not, to Hultquist, a "reformed coquette narrative" written as a post-Richardsonian domestic novel (31-32). Instead, the novel challenges "the idea of marriage-as-reward" (32). Hultquist concludes that Haywood's "treatment of marriage remains consistent across the span of her career showcases her skillful craftsmanship." She was not simply a hack writer who altered her style and content to sell books. Rather, she used emergent trends and techniques to explore the themes that interested her as she developed a comprehensive authorial vision.

Recovery efforts have, at times, led us to reduce or simplify an author's textual output so that her work fits into a broader pattern of women's writing. Bannet uses Scott's writing to challenge our preconceived notions. "Lives, Letters, and Tales in Sarah Scott's *Journey Through Every Stage of Life*" highlights how our deeply entrenched ideas about an author shape our understanding of her textual output. Bannet reads *Journey* as a formally experimental and feminist text that challenges our notions of epistolarity. Her suggestion that we remain too willing to distinguish texts from documents is a significant one: letters were not "true documents" (79), she explains, and it is this gap between performance and reality or between apparent value and actual meaning that underscores much of the collection.

The essays on "Educations in Epistemology" continue the process of revising our anachronistic or reception-based misinterpretations by showing the practices of knowing available to eighteenth-century readers. Kathleen M. Oliver's essay identifies gaps in our assessment of Fielding's *Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia* that she claims have resulted from classification problems related to the historical novel, and Patricia L. Hamilton's "Arabella Unbound: Wit, Judgment, and the Cure of Charlotte Lennox's *Female Quixote*" identifies a need to historicize feminist readings of texts. Hamilton argues that the two common arguments about the ending of *The Female Quixote* reveal our disconnection from the philosophical traditions that would have been familiar to Lennox and her readers.

While Hamilton examines the philosophical underpinnings of Lennox's work, Carlile focuses on the trappings of genre and assesses Lennox's "choice to turn to drama" at a point when, as Carlile mentions in the introduction of the collection, the novel has reached a point in which interiority is privileged, and women do not need to participate in theatre culture to support themselves, as was the case for their literary foremothers. Carlile suggests that Lennox's re-staging of her writing allowed her to meld "satire and sentiment" in generically and thematically productive ways.

Eighteenth-century readers easily understood contexts and conventions in ways that twenty-first century readers can only recreate through arduous historical work. But the section of *Masters of the Marketplace* on "Creating Community" indicates that eighteenth-century readers were expected to participate in meaningful ways to create community in and around the texts. This community frequently hinges on the shift from amatory fiction to domestic novels. Much as Hultquist identifies a link rather than break between *Love in Excess* and *Betsy Thoughtless*, Jennie Batchelor locates continuity rather than a story of reform in later works by Haywood, Fielding, Lennox, and Scott, as well as in Frances Sheridan and Frances Brooke.

With a similar interest in the role amatory forms and romance novels play in novels of the 1750s, Katherine Beutner claims that Arabella of *The Female Quixote* views “her own life to be prototextual, and anticipates the eventual appearance of her life history in literary form” (169). While this is of course part of Arabella’s delusion, Lennox’s investment in telling the histories of the women in *The Female Quixote* functionally rescues women’s stories from the periphery of discourse so that they can help the women create “community, comfort, and aid” (173).

The final section, “Performing in the Literary Marketplace,” addresses the public roles female authors played and dismantles some of the commonplace views about women’s reception and reputation that have underscored much of the scholarship on Haywood and Lennox in particular. The essays by Kathryn R. King, Marta Kvande, and Betty A. Schellenberg grapple with the textual and sexual politics that continue to surround any attempts to reform the literary canon. Their projects serve as a necessary reminder that although we have made much progress in understanding eighteenth-century novels by women, we are always also inscribed by our own approaches to the texts we have recovered and reexamined.

Schellenberg suggests that the 1750s were a period of networking, publication opportunities, and lucrative projects for women, which is the underscoring premise of this collection. Despite the layers of fiction we have stripped away from Aphra Behn, Haywood, and other Restoration and early eighteenth-century writers, the 1750s remain shrouded in fictions of domesticity that lead us to undervalue the *real* fictions: these authors produced their novels with a vigorous amount of creativity, intellectualism, originality, and generic experimentation that may in fact have been lacking in the works of some of the great male novelists of the period.

Masters of the Marketplace makes a crucial contribution to our understanding of women writers’ productivity, originality, and success during a decade often overlooked or minimized by historians of the novel. By redirecting our attention to commercial and literary trends during this period, the collection invites critical reexaminations of Fielding, Haywood, Lennox, Scott, and their contemporaries and provides a set of critical, historical, and theoretical lenses that will help us recuperate novels of the 1750s in new and exciting ways.