

G. Gabrielle Starr. *Lyric Generations: Poetry and the Novel in the Long Eighteenth Century*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004. 298pp. US\$42. ISBN 0-8018-7379-7.

Lyric Generations is a fresh and compelling study that traces the complex interdependence of lyric and novel from Richardson to Wordsworth. Gabrielle Starr investigates how the expressive limits of lyric and novel are often overcome in texts that fuse expressive devices from both genres: “the problems that the breaks in one genre pose can be answered by another” (5), Starr writes in her introduction. To the question, “what is missing from lyric?” (5), she gives the answer: “some of the things we find in novels.” Yet this is a deceptively simple summary of the challenges to conventional readings of eighteenth-century poetry and prose that *Lyric Generations* lays out.

The counter-intuitive stakes of the book are self-evident, since conventional wisdom is that “the rise of the novel” in the eighteenth century marks the eclipse of the lyric. Generically distinct and distant from the novelty of novels, lyric poetry glows only dimly throughout the eighteenth century (famously in a churchyard, at evening, on the sofa)—until it flares brilliantly once again with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*. But Gabrielle Starr sets out to teach us otherwise, and she traces a series of complex, sophisticated readings that show how the lyrical past haunts the novelistic present—and then how the inventions of novelistic narrative breathe life into the first stirrings of Romantic lyric.

Each chapter in *Lyric Generations* takes up a particular expressive challenge that the writers of major eighteenth-century texts (poems and novels) faced and demonstrates how the problem was solved by recourse to the “opposite” literary genre. So, in chapter 1, Donne’s and Herbert’s lyrics of suffering provide Richardson with a model for narrating Clarissa’s own travails. In chapter 2, lyric devices for creating sympathetic identification between speaker and reader are shown to offer Behn and Haywood ways of generating intense, communally felt reader responses to their fiction. Starr turns to mid-century poems in chapter 3—*The Seasons*, *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, and others—and shows that, even in non-lyric poetry, Renaissance “lyric affinities” allow formal, patriotic speaking voices to become personal and individual. In chapters 4 and 5, Starr argues that, perversely, novelistic “realism” depends often on the reuse of scenes and events recognizable from lyric. And, finally, she writes about early Romantic lyrics—unexpectedly, we learn that Wordsworth and Coleridge owe a deep debt to novelistic conventions.

Starr gives us the useful term “lyric absorption” to describe the focus of her scholarship. Certainly, the surprise and the success of *Lyric Generations* derive from the ways in which Starr shows lyric devices popping up in the most unlikely places. This book consistently produces vigorous and surprising readings of important novels and poems, made possible by Starr’s perception that, far from being “opposed genres” in the period, novel and lyric are crucially interdependent.

The book's most important contribution lies in detailed close readings that speak to some long-standing problems in understanding eighteenth-century poetry. In chapter 3, for example, Starr attends to one of the critical frustrations for responding to mid-century lyric: how, amid so much national, patriotic, communal, *general* feeling, can an intimate, idiosyncratic "I" break forth—a speaking self that compels the reader to real identification and sympathy? She points out that Anne Finch, Mary Leapor, and Thomas Gray were all writing under pressure from a culture in which "we" was the priority speaking voice—in which collective sentiment was more important than the reflections of a solitary "I." So Starr's readings of Thomson, Shaftsbury, and Gray turn upon her identifying a series of "lyric moments" when the poet explicitly articulates deep anxiety about the disappearance of the speaker's actual, bodily self from his poem. Her argument here is that "physicality is stripped away because it is the most pressing representative or reminder of self, self-interest, and self-focus" (97).

This argument leads to another interesting question: where does the embodied "I" go once it is taken out of poetry? It jumps genre to the novel. But how do novels come to manage the embodied personal voice with such virtuosity, such brilliance? Because novelists already have a magnificently rich tradition available to them: that of seventeenth-century lyric. Starr argues that what makes novels by Richardson, Defoe, and Fielding convincingly "real" to readers is that the details of their imagined physical worlds are repeatedly cross-checked and redescribed by the characters who progressively encounter them. Starr uses the term "chiastic" to describe this particular type of realism: "a kind of proximation that constructs the fictional through moments of contact with the real, not through mimesis so much as chiasmus" (112).

Starr convincingly brings lyric poetry into her argument by revealing the presence of Stuart epithalamia and other lyric devices in *Clarissa* and *Grandison*—lyric is, after all, the form in which personal experience gets organized and represented to the outside world. In eighteenth-century novels, Starr explains, "absorbed lyric" provides the flashpoints in the text where fragmented experience gets formed into something consensual.

This leads Starr to the final, very successful chapter of the book, in which she shows that domestic fiction feeds back into eighteenth-century poetry—and eventually shows up after being absorbed into Wordsworthian lyric. In one particularly excellent passage, Starr argues that our instinctive recoiling from the speaker of *Resolution and Independence* is anything but instinct: it is formally dependent on our training as readers of the novel. We find the speaker's lack of compassion in the poem bizarre, and then increasingly compelling, precisely *because* in so many novels random encounters produce deep bonds of sympathy (in *Tom Jones*, *Joseph Andrews*, *A Sentimental Journey*, and so on): "The expectation that the tale of the sick and wasted old man will elicit a sympathetic response in the hearer and a corresponding change in his life is one in which we are trained by literary history shaped by the novel" (189). As this quotation demonstrates, one strength of *Lyric Generations* is that

things do not add up too neatly: Starr often emphasizes the dissonances, the meaningful absences that are created when lyric appears in novels, and novelistic tricks in poems.

The book is a pleasure to read for reasons that are as much local as general—and the detailed readings in *Lyric Generations* are richer and more learned than can be contained in a summary of its broad-brush arguments. Starr is an excellent close reader, and her observations about so large and diverse an array of texts are fresh, striking, and downright smart. She is talented in describing the fabric of a lyric, and she has a way of finishing up sections of text with memorable, often beautifully written insights that jump off the page startlingly. This is a memorable book.

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Felicity A. Nussbaum. *The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race, and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 336pp. Hbk US\$75; Pbk US\$27. Pbk ISBN-10: 0521016428; ISBN-13: 9780521016421.

Felicity Nussbaum's *The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race, and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century* introduces the term "anomaly" to the now familiar triad of "race, class, and gender" that is central to so much recent work in early modern cultural studies. For this reviewer, this addition is a welcome innovation, one that might be asked to carry even more weight than it does in the analysis she develops.

Beginning with a discussion of the fictions of Aphra Behn and Eliza Haywood, and continuing through to an examination of the theatrical performance of racial identity on the late eighteenth-century stage, Nussbaum's argument divides into two parts: "Anomaly and Gender" and "Race and Gender." Implicit in that organization is a suggestion that, somewhere in the middle of the eighteenth century, an emergent process of racialist thinking began replacing earlier models that stressed anomaly and defect. Nussbaum does not argue that case explicitly, but she does assert the importance of a mid-century transformation:

The middle of the eighteenth century is a critical turning point in the argument I am weaving for several reasons: it marks women's alleged retreat into the private sphere and the ascendance of domesticity; in 1745 the question of the Protestant succession (which had dominated English politics for seventy years) is finally put to rest; the Seven Years War beginning in 1757 radically changed the outlines of Britain's empire; and the category of "monster" was first introduced by Linnaeus as a scientific classification in 1758. All of these developments