Eighteenth-Century Fiction

Volume 17 | Issue 1 Article 6

10-31-2004

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Recommended Citation

Richetti, John (2004) "Review of: William Donoghue, *Enlightenment Fiction in England, France, and America*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*: Vol. 17: Iss. 1, Article 6.
Available at: http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/ecf/vol17/iss1/6

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Reviews/Comptes rendus

William Donoghue. *Enlightenment Fiction in England, France, and America.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002. xi+178pp. US$55. ISBN 0-8130-2481-1.

William Donoghue's thesis is that the eighteenth-century novel in England, France, and America works to counter the scepticism that dominates, in his view, the intellectual and moral life of the period. Realistic or mimetic fiction, he argues persuasively and cogently, is cognitively meaningful because it offers readers "a second order reality that is by definition immune to real-world doubt" (140). Moreover, citing Georg Lukács, he asserts vigorously that in the novel's "appeal to order, to a set of shared rules" there is always an ethical intention and effect (141). For me at least, this is a wholly admirable and productive approach to what novels aspire to do for their readers, although whether they actually or always achieve this is another matter. But I applaud Donoghue's insistence that there is much more to eighteenth-century fiction than an attempt at naive mimesis or (its opposite) self-reflexive play or ideological enforcement or cultural regimentation. "Realist forms," he says, in what should be a truism but lately has not been, "are a highly wrought product of the mind that help us know ourselves and our world. And this is the source of the pleasure we get from believing in them" (18). Donoghue finds that novels, like the logical fictions of Hume and Adam Smith, possess a "positive epistemological valence" and as such are "a highly wrought product of the mind" (18–19). I especially like his reminding us that sensibility is the soft side of scepticism. Cartesian dualism, he explains, "left behind a materialist universe" (95) for Enlightenment thinkers such as Spinoza, Diderot, and Shaftesbury, and, in the case of the latter, this led to an ethical theory based on taste and sensation.

Donoghue's best moments come in his introductory chapter when he lays out his assumptions, which constitute an interesting challenge to recent criticism of the eighteenth-century novel. He admits, as Bakhtin says, that novels offer a diverse collection of voices and ideas, "a kind of host blackboard to

the discourse of skepticism itself, to sentimentalism, and even to attacks directed against its own practice" (3). His key point, however, is that fiction possesses its own "discourse on the novel" that opposes scepticism and sentimentalism, that negates what sometimes looks like mere relativism and subjectivism, and that makes a real contribution to "the discourse on knowledge in the century" (14). And displaying his own lucid and precise grasp of philosophical distinctions, Donoghue distinguishes between the kind of everyday doubt until empirical evidence arrives that critics of the novel such as McKeon and Damrosch are in fact exploring when they speak of a sense of epistemological crisis in the century and the much more serious second-order scepticism dating back to Epicurus and Protagoras and invoked by philosophers such as Montaigne, Locke, Hume, and Shaftesbury whereby the only certain knowledge available comes from the senses. Strictly speaking, says Donoghue, realistic fiction is necessarily hostile to scepticism, and his refreshing argument is that "verisimilitude in fiction entails a correspondence theory of truth that presupposes the possibility of knowledge in the world" (15).

However, the various chapters that follow this stirring introduction do not live up very well or fully to the opportunities Donoghue has created for himself. Certainly, one has to admire his range and linguistic abilities in these chapters that take the reader from Pope and Richardson through Sterne and Laclos; thence to Diderot and on to Radcliffe, Godwin, and Goethe, finishing with a chapter on Charles Brockden Brown and the Marquis de Sade, with all the French and German quoted and translated. The occasional polemic against Bakhtinian polyphony is strong and convincing, as Donoghue asserts that, in fact, multiple points of view are "always structured, prioritized, and valued in novels" (39). A good deal of the time, an agile critical intelligence that offers surprising and memorable twists on familiar fictional features is on display. For example, in his discussion of Radcliffe he remarks that "the gothic takes sentiment's link to skepticism and dramatizes it" (100) and in the end Udolpho "displays a new awareness of the dangers and ultimate epistemological bankruptcy of its own sensibility by placing it squarely in the company of its irrational affiliates, gothic horror and the sublime" (101–2). And in the short conclusion, one more terrific idea emerges clearly that lives up to the guiding idea of the book. Quoting La Rochefoucauld on the necessity for survival at the French court of deception and artifice ("*habilité*" is the French term for it), Donoghue suggests that such artifice is fiction's weapon against scepticism: by encouraging a suspension of disbelief, the novel "out-maneuvers skepticism ... promotes, demands belief" (140). He finds that for Diderot, Laclos, Godwin, and Brown such artifice is thematized in their fiction and associated with a liberating intelligence. Even Richardson's heroines, he notes, practise a kind of artifice, distinct from that of their would-be seducers, that links deception (which for Donoghue equals mimesis) "with knowledge and virtue" (45).

For much of the time, however, in the body of the book the discussion is at best dutiful, often enough ploddingly familiar and even pretentious at its worst. For example, in a chapter loftily subtitled "Atropos or Dissemination," Donoghue compares Sterne and Laclos on sentiment and sexuality, with the former (he concludes) failing to "promote sensibility as independent of both knowledge and novelistic continuities" and in the process isolating and sterilizing it (67). Laclos, on the other hand, ignores sentiment (do we need to be told this?) and links sexuality "to knowledge and mimesis in the protagonists" (67). There is not much to be learned from such facile observations, which in this case, it seems to me, do not redeem themselves as truisms. There are other problems in the chapter devoted to Diderot, which is essentially a survey of his long struggles to find a satisfactory fictional format. Donoghue traces Diderot's enthusiasm first for Richardson and then for Sterne and finds that he never managed to resolve the contradiction between his philosophical materialism and his wavering attempts to find form for his fiction. His novels, says Donoghue, do not, as many critics contend, mirror the dissonance of the world but express a dissonance (and I guess that means they are failures as novels) "between form giving and his materialist philosophy" (88). Those who know Diderot better than I will have to evaluate this chapter, but it strikes me as routine and over-elaborated, predictable and perhaps just too neat, as it works through Diderot's fiction in the light of Donoghue's assumptions about the "discourse of the novel." So, too, in his comparison of Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*, Donoghue's treatment fits exactly with his thesis, with Caleb and Brown's Carwin standing as embodiments of the novelistic approach—both of them hungry for knowledge and masters of purposeful disguise and artifice and opposed by figures who represent romantic delusions of various sorts.

The most interesting and far less schematic discussions at the end of the book are of Goethe's *Werther* and of Sade's monstrous fantasies, for here Donoghue contributes what strikes me as an original twist to the story of the European popularity of sentimentalism, which in his attractive scenario is explained as scepticism's dangerous offspring. So, for him, *Werther* is a parody of a sentimental novel that fails to overcome the determinants of materialism and turns to violence, and works such as *Justine*, *Juliette*, and *The 120 Days of Sodom* are, despite Sade's admiration of the English realistic novelists, "pure sensationism, subjectivism, solipsism, materialism, the failure of reason and logic—located firmly inside the language not of the novel but of romance" (138). And yet even here, for all his impressive command of Goethe's and Sade's works, Donoghue's analysis of them seems inevitable. Whoever thought that Sade was a true rationalist? His monstrous hero-villains can only be taken as parodies of rationality, just as poor, distracted Werther's suicide is a deluded romantic gesture in the face of a meaningless universe. I like a good deal of Donoghue's book, and I am impressed by his comparatist's command

of a wide range of ideas and texts, but I wonder if he might not have written a better book if, instead of painting with this broad brush, he had sat himself down to extended explication of fewer novels in order to show more than he does at the micro-textual level how his notions of mimesis and knowledge actually and fully play out.

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Julia V. Douthwaite. *The Wild Girl, Natural Man and the Monster: Dangerous Experiments in the Age of Enlightenment.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002. xiii+314pp. US$19; 13.50UK. ISBN 0-226-16056-4.

The Yahoos of the fourth book of *Gulliver's Travels* present an enigma, for it is not certain whether they are the degenerate offspring of European castaways, or autochthonous monsters. Gulliver is never sure how to express this, whether what he has found is a perfect human figure that arouses his horror and astonishment, in all its native nastiness, or its defaced and corrupt descendant, with its sins inscribed on its body. The satire, if satire it is, constantly points at the connections between the gestures of these ape-like creatures and the behaviour of courtiers, lawyers, and politicians, posing the question of priority. Are the beast-like humans the original of humanity, or the repulsive end of it; are the members of civil society the perfection of human nature, or its scandal? Or is there no difference, and is one as bad as the other? And if so, are animals such as horses better than humans?

The enigma haunts the eighteenth century. Although various answers are proposed, the problem reappears as intractably as ever in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* a hundred years later. Whether the manufactured monster is the gruesome and evil outcome of Victor Frankenstein's mistaken attempt to perfect the human figure, or whether it is an abused but unattractive example of primal innocence, are conjectures the novel airs but cannot resolve. In the course of the century, Julia Douthwaite shows, there were many attempted solutions, falling either side of the gap dividing primitivists from perfectionists. Rousseau is the best known of the primitivists. Believing that each stage of the growth of civil society marks a deeper level of corruption among its citizens, Rousseau espoused a theory of education that depended on a hermetic seal between the pupil and society. Thus Émile is taught what is important to humanity while remaining ignorant of what would despoil him of his nature. Rousseau's *Émile ou l'education* (1762) was followed by many