## **Eighteenth-Century Fiction**

Volume 17 | Issue 2 Article 18

1-31-2005

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## Recommended Citation

Grogan, Claire (2005) "Review of: Mary Robinson, Walsingham, ed. Julie A. Shaffer; and M. Robinson, 'A Letter to the Women of England' and 'The Natural Daughter', ed. Sharon M. Setzer," Eighteenth-Century Fiction: Vol. 17: Iss. 2, Article 18. Available at: http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/ecf/vol17/iss2/18

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Mary Robinson. *Walsingham*, ed. Julie A. Shaffer. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2003. 559pp. US16.95; CDN19.95; UK8.99. ISBN 1-55111-299-X.

Mary Robinson. A Letter to the Women of England and The Natural Daughter, ed. Sharon M. Setzer. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2003. 336pp. US15.95; CDN18.95; UK8.99. ISBN 1-55111-236-1.

That Mary Robinson, poet, actress, and novelist, has regained her standing as a seminal writer of the Romantic period is evidenced by more than fifty-five articles and books produced about her in the last decade. Readers now have ready access to three more Robinson works through the Broadview Literary Text Series. Broadview's welcome edition of Mary Robinson's Selected Poems (ed. Judith Pascoe, 2000) is now joined by recent editions of two of her literary works and a polemical piece: Walsingham, The Natural Daughter, and A Letter to the Women of England. Building upon its well-earned reputation as a press that provides easy, affordable access to primary texts, Broadview clearly establishes itself as the primary source of Robinson's oeuvre.

Julia A. Shaffer and Sharon M. Setzer continue the Broadview tradition of sound editorial practices. Both editions provide the now familiar elements of the Broadview Literary Series, namely contemporary critical reviews, chronology, a scholarly introduction, and a selection of appendices to contextualize the work.

Of the two editions, Setzer's has the clearer and more accessible style. She relates A Letter to the Women of England and The Natural Daughter to the Wollstonecraftian tradition of women's rights in late 1790s Britain. Juxtaposing Robinson's polemic—with its strong criticism of the sexual double standard—with her novel uncovers the ideological positioning of The Natural Daughter's plot. Setzer's precise attention to detail throughout is evident through her correction of Robinson's birthdate. The discrepancy between what is generally taken as Robinson's birthdate (27 November 1758) and Setzer's assertion of 27 November 1756 arises, we learn, from an error (perhaps deliberate) in Robinson's own Memoirs when cross-checked with "the date recorded in the Register of Baptisms at the church of St Augustin the Less in Bristol" (11). How fitting that a woman renowned for her role-playing and concerned with appearance should have dropped a couple of years in her own Memoirs!

The chronology helpfully reminds or informs the reader of major events pertaining to the French Revolution or to influential characters in Robinson's life. Setzer's choice of appendices (Robinson's tributes to the Duchess of Devonshire, excerpts from the Morning Post, Richard Powhele's Unsex'd Females, and Wakefield's Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex) is clear and consistent with her introductory essay. The footnotes are informative for the intended audience of either "the reader with a particular interest in Robinson or the general reader relatively unfamiliar with eighteenth-century life and literature" (38).

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Shaffer, in her edition, focuses upon the importance of role-playing in Robinson's life and literary works as she assumes roles variously as daughter, actress, mother, wife, poet, and novelist. On the stage and then as a writer, Robinson uses cross-dressing to shed her female gender and enter the male's body and space with its accompanying social, legal, sexual, and political powers. Shaffer's appendices provide fascinating material on fictional and factual cross-dressers in the late eighteenth century. There is, however, a looseness between introductory comments and later development of subsequent material. For example, Shaffer cites Hannah Snell (the same Snell of Norfolk that contemporary novelist and poet Amelia Opie excitedly records having met) as one of those women "who went to war to join their husbands, highlighting that they did so out of love" (16n1). The fuller story in appendix B informs us that Snell, abandoned by her husband when pregnant, pursues her errant partner when the infant dies, more out of revenge than a desire for reconciliation, "for there are no bounds to be set either to Love, Jealousy, or Hatred, in the Female Mind" (520)! En route she becomes an accomplished soldier, and when her husband is executed for murder before she can meet him she happily continues on her new life path.

Similarly, while Shaffer's introductory essay addresses some of the transgressive possibilities of Robinson's fictional hero/heroine Sidney's crossdressing, the contextualizing material clearly indicates how much more conformist she is than her real life contemporaries. We learn that actual women cross-dressed as men not only to impose on the system but also specifically to impose on other women, while the fictional Sidney cross-dresses at the mother's behest to obtain the family inheritance. Interestingly, the factual cases foreground lesbian sexual desires rather than those of inheritance, which leads the reader to cast Robinson in a more conformist than transgressive light. Juxtaposing such accounts with the novel reveals how Robinson promotes heterosexual desire to the exclusion of any alternative. However, such contextualizing material certainly fulfils the Broadview mandate to open interesting avenues of inquiry and alternative readings. One can only delight in Shaffer's sharing details of Giovanni Bianchi's An Historical and Physical Dissertation on the Case of Catherine Vizzani (1751), in which Catherine Vizzani, one carpenter's twenty-four-year-old cross-dressing daughter masquerading as Giovanni, is fatally wounded when eloping with a young maiden and her sister—who refused to be left behind! Fatally injured in her thigh, Giovanni opts for a degree of comfort in her dying hours: "in this extremity, a leathern Contrivance, of a cylindrical Figure, which was fastened below the Abdomen, and had been the chief Instrument of her detestable Imposture, became so troublesome, that she loosened it, and laid it under her Pillow" (524)!

Overall, these useful primary texts by Robinson will facilitate, I have no doubt, further fascinating studies about this woman and her work.

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