Reviews/Comptes Rendus

Pam Perkins. *Women Writers and the Edinburgh Enlightenment*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010. 320pp. US$86. ISBN 978-90-420-3137-1.

This study of three Scottish women and the milieu in which they lived and wrote simultaneously deepens and partially revises our understanding of the place of female writers in Romantic-era Britain. In the early 1990s, studies such as Anne K. Mellor's *Romanticism and Gender* (1993) demonstrated how representations of gender and sexuality were central to any critical understanding of "the Romantic ideology." A few years later, critics began to ask a related question: if women's issues had once been so central to the culture of British Romanticism, then what had happened to those female writers whose texts now had to be dug out of the archives to be reread? The collective answer, provided by critics such as Clifford Siskin, Catherine Gallagher, and Ina Ferris, was that women were pushed out of the market, and then out of the canon, by factors that included their own frequent (albeit overdetermined) choice to publish anonymously and the increasing professionalization of authorship that favoured their male competitors.

As Pam Perkins ably demonstrates, this answer is productively complicated when we turn our critical attention to the successful careers enjoyed by many female Scottish authors throughout the Romantic era. Perkins focuses on three: Elizabeth Hamilton, Anne Grant, and Christian Isobel Johnstone. First, however, Perkins lays out the salient aspects of turn-of-the-nineteenth-century Edinburgh that facilitated their professional accomplishments. Whereas most Scots were keen to promote their erstwhile capital as "the Athens of the North," Perkins notes that at least one anonymous novelist sneered that the remarkable literary productivity of its inhabitants also made it "the Birmingham of Literature" (18). Yet it was precisely this combination of Enlightened egalitarianism and a demystified, workaday approach to literary production that allowed women writers to prosper within the city's literary culture. They also had a built-in advantage when it came to avoiding the increasingly dreaded label of "bluestocking," benefitting from the general reputation of Scotswomen as "more modest and unassuming" than their English counterparts (37). Nevertheless, even north of the Tweed, Perkins asserts that a delicate balancing act was still required "for women who sought to establish a public, professional literary identity without overtly challenging their society's ideas of femininity" (53).

Each of the women whose careers Perkins considers found her own way to walk this socio-cultural tightrope. Although her first biographer made it appear that Hamilton more or less backed into her literary career, Perkins clearly demonstrates that her success was almost entirely

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premeditated. Both of Hamilton's initial novels, *Translations of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796) and *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), were pointed satires—"intellectually ambitious and often overtly polemical" (60)—which easily could have incurred the wrath of the male critical establishment. That they did not certainly owes something to their reactionary sensibilities, but it also speaks to Hamilton's ability to convince readers that women could participate in contemporary political debates as an extension of, rather than an alternative to, their private lives. Although Perkins does not deny that most of Hamilton's own ideas were hardly groundbreaking, she finds in her personal correspondence with some of the city's most famous scientists further evidence of "Hamilton's ability to blur the line between public intellectual work and private domesticity" (84). Even in Hamilton's most characteristically Scottish novel, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* (1808), Mrs MacClarty is laid low, not by any lack of domestic energy, but by "her moral and intellectual laziness" (127).

It was precisely these kinds of Scottish subjects that Grant excelled at depicting. Yet Grant's strategy for circumventing the barriers to success for literary women was in some respects the opposite of Hamilton's: where the latter made clear that she was not to be mistaken for her characters, Grant cultivated a purposeful confusion between herself and her primarily Highland subjects. *Letters from the Mountains* (1806), which went through four editions in two years, details Grant's experiences living near Inverness with her minister husband; although she does not pretend to be a native-born Highlander, she imbues her crafted epistles with enough observational naïveté to convince readers that they were seeing the Highlands as close to first-hand as possible. In fact, Grant's earlier volume of subscription-published *Poems* (1803) contains more than enough Ossian-esque "translations" and imitations to demonstrate the highly aestheticized nature of her vision. Here and in her later *Essays on the Superstitions of the Highlanders* (1811)—which Walter Scott explicitly acknowledged, along with Hamilton's *Glenburnie*, as an inspiration for his *Waverley* (1814)—Grant manages an impressive balancing act of her own: "insist[ing] upon the foreignness of the Highlands to her urban and English readers," while simultaneously "quietly establishing herself as a successful embodiment of the sort of cultural blending that one finds in Scott's glamorous but doomed Jacobite heroes" (190).

The final female writer Perkins examines, Christian Isobel Johnstone, is perhaps the most intriguing. Owing to a lack of records, which Perkins at all times appears to have consulted scrupulously, very little is known about Johnstone's personal life. Yet despite having begun her second marriage in uncertain circumstances (she appears to have initiated the new relationship prior to the dissolution of the first), she chose to publish under her new married name—a decision, Perkins suggests, of a piece with Johnstone's consistent negotiation of "difficult or controversial

matters of public, political debate" in both her fiction and her even more copious journalism (208). Her best-known novel, *Clan-Albin* (1815), had the misfortune to be published the year after *Waverley*; instead of apologizing for this, Johnstone used her preface to issue a quasi-satirical challenge to the author of *Waverley*, offering to pit her novel against his in "an 'equal combat of the Fingalians'" (212–13). Most critics and readers have not judged this much of a contest, but Perkins makes a strong case for returning this novel (as well as its late successor, *Elizabeth de Bruce* [1827]) to greater critical prominence.

Women Writers and the Edinburgh Enlightenment condenses a great deal of material into three lengthy chapters on each of its primary subjects, a structure that is eminently logical but makes for some protracted stretches of reading. (The use of section titles within chapters helps somewhat.) But this is a minor quibble with a book that, especially when paired with Ian Duncan's *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (2007), significantly enriches our appreciation of the major roles played by female authors in and around Edinburgh at a time when that city, however improbably, temporarily occupied the centre of English-language literary production. Given that at least one text by each of these women is now available in a scholarly paperback edition (several edited by Perkins herself), this book underscores how much we (and our students) have to gain by returning these women writers to the positions of literary and cultural prominence they originally occupied.

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Chris Roulston. *Narrating Marriage in Eighteenth-Century England and France*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2010. xii+240pp. US$99.95. ISBN 978-0-7546-6839-8.

Most eighteenth-century novelists considered married life a topic unworthy of narration because of its stasis and perceived tedium, devoid of climactic narrative energy. Few eighteenth-century novels engage the new bourgeois model of companionate marriage advocated in the advice literature of the day. Chris Roulston seeks to demonstrate how some English and French novels actually did attempt to go beyond the seduction plot in order to engage the topic of marital life. She argues that the topic challenged authors to find new, less climax-driven forms of narrative, and concomitantly forced the marriage narrative into the old novelistic patterns of "conflict, disruption, and reconciliation," thus interjecting instability into the depiction of the institution charged with societal permanence (6). Roulston asks whether the novel served to