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Review of: Stephen Shapiro, *The Culture and Commerce of the Early American Novel: Reading the Atlantic World-System*

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Review of: Stephen Shapiro, *The Culture and Commerce of the Early American Novel: Reading the Atlantic World-System*

Abstract
Review of: Stephen Shapiro, *The Culture and Commerce of the Early American Novel: Reading the Atlantic World-System* (2008), reviewed by Betsy Klimasmith

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examining the technical problems of narration, however, *Narrating Marriage* provides an in-depth look at the debates surrounding marriage in the eighteenth century both as an institution and as a lived experience between two individuals. This work is a welcome addition to eighteenth-century studies.

Aurora Wolfgang is professor of French at California State University, San Bernardino, and author of *Gender and Voice in the French Novel, 1730–1782* (2004).

Stephen Shapiro. *The Culture and Commerce of the Early American Novel: Reading the Atlantic World-System.* University Park: Pennsylvania University State Press, 2008. vii+372pp. US$34.95. ISBN 978-0-271-03291-7.

Stephen Shapiro proposes a new paradigm for understanding the early American novel: as the logical form to arise when a major economic shift changed the way in which "America" operated as a player in the global marketplace. Why, Shapiro asks, were so many novels published in the United States in the 1790s, only to fade from the literary marketplace until the late 1810s? Shapiro first posits that the explanatory rubrics structuring many of the most widely accepted literary histories of the period are inadequate to explain the outburst of novel writing in 1790s America, such as the rise of the middle class in America—because class and the novel in America are different from the European models; a revolutionary mindset—it had faded by the 1790s; the rise of liberalism or republicanism—terms too imprecise to be useful; classic accounts of gendered domesticity—anachronistically nineteenth-century; or the New Atlanticism—that remains enmeshed with the nation-state. To understand the emergence of "novelism" in the 1790s or at other historical moments, Shapiro proposes that we see the novel as one of the material products that help to make sense of transitions from one economic model to another.

The novel, Shapiro argues, offers writers familiar language and narrative forms through which to understand a new economic reality. Both before and after the American Revolution, the colonies' economies rose and fell with "the boom-bust cycles of English imperial militarism" (99). After a period of prosperity that accompanied Britain's military build-up in the late eighteenth century, the new republic was plunged into post-war depression in the 1780s and early 1790s as the shipbuilding industry collapsed, British goods flooded the American marketplace, and restrictive trade policies excluded American ships from potentially lucrative markets, especially in the Caribbean. In the 1790s, however,

as tensions between Britain and France led each country to enact trade embargoes against each other, the United States suddenly found itself perfectly positioned to take advantage of an extremely lucrative re-export market. Facing neither tariffs nor embargoes, American ships carried slaves, sugar, coffee, cocoa, and other highly profitable "goods of sensation" from the West Indies to Europe (102). The effect of this policy shift on the U.S. economy and culture was staggering, and Shapiro convincingly shows how it affected urban architecture and manners, shifting the nation's centres of population and power. To make sense of these shifts, he argues, American writers made use of and transformed the fading eighteenth-century European narrative form of the novel: "American novelistic production emerges to convey a re-export-associated middle-class experience as a means of compensating for its exclusion from traditional institutions and modes of address" (27).

Shaipro's theory of the early American novel—grounded in the cultural realities of the historical moment and informed by an economic theory that thinks beyond the nation-state—is compelling. The U.S.'s emergence as a re-export republic offers a useful explanation for why the novel emerged (and then faded) when it did; it also shapes a compelling framework for new and exciting readings of the period's fiction. Shapiro focuses his literary analysis on two novels, Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* and *Arthur Mervyn*. Of the two, his reading of *Mervyn* is the more exciting; *Mervyn's* Philadelphia setting allows Shapiro to highlight the operations of an urban space in the throes of unsettling re-export growth. Shapiro's attention to Mervyn's physical experiences with the products of re-export such as clothes, houses, food, and especially his marriage to Ascha Fielding, allows Shapiro to explore the dynamics of slavery, sensational consumption, sentiment, and sensibility that he identifies as the hallmarks of the re-export era.

Because he sets out to explain the burgeoning of American novelism in the 1790s, it seems counterintuitive that Shapiro would examine the work of only one novelist (and a relatively small proportion of Brockden Brown's voluminous literary output at that). His decision not to explore any other novels leaves unanswered the important question of how other authors engaged with the dynamics of the re-export republic. Shapiro dismisses work by women authors out of hand; for him the re-export city is a man's world in which female writers are little more than the mouthpieces of male editors: "When women wrote, the material conditions of publication—its social milieu and communicative apparatus—were established, controlled, and distributed by men who intervened to shape women's texts to mark their concerns" (144). This may be true, but it is illogical to assume that the many novels written by women in the 1790s remained unconnected from the dynamics of the Atlantic world-system. And what of the other male novelists who wrote during this productive

decade? Brockden Brown may indeed exemplify the privileged young man coming of age during the re-export era, but using his work to exemplify the novels written in the period flattens the lively diversity of 1790s novels and leads the reader to wonder how world-systems theory might shed light on novels besides *Wieland* and *Arthur Mervyn*.

Shapiro makes a compelling case that the economic dynamics of the Atlantic made the 1790s, with their sudden and destabilizing prosperity, one of the moments in U.S. history ripe for the novel to flourish. Shapiro's explications of world systems economic theory and the dynamics and culture of the re-export era are rich and will be useful to anyone working on 1790s fiction. While his paradigm offers powerful possibilities for new readings of 1790s novels such as Leonora Sansay's *The Secret History* or even Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple,* Shapiro's focus on Brockden Brown leaves much of the decade's literary florescence unexplored—but offers exciting possibilities to scholars who might take up where he leaves off.

Betsy Klimasmith is associate professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, Boston; her current research interests are the novel and the early American city.

Katherine Binhammer. *The Seduction Narrative in Britain, 1747–1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. viii+246pp. US$90. ISBN 978-0-521-11134-8.

In 1783, in a tract on the loss of female chastity, Charles Horne identified three separate elements in the act of seduction: seduction of the heart, seduction of the person, and seduction of the mind. Although previous interpretations of the period might have led us to believe that the physical loss of virtue would have been his main concern, in fact Horne was most preoccupied with the seduction of a woman's heart. Traditional feminist readings of the seduction narratives that proliferated in the second half of the eighteenth century point to their construction of women as helpless victims of male sexual aggression. Such interpretations, however, depend on the facts of the plot rather than on the structure of the narratives; these interpretations also depend on reading mainly canonical texts in an overly narrow historical context.

Through a richly historicized analysis of the narrative structure and cultural contexts of the seduction tale, Katherine Binhammer demonstrates that such stories helped create much more than an ideology of victimhood: they also helped to define the operations of the female heart, and hence the female self. More significantly, the proliferation of seduction narratives during the second half of the eighteenth century indicated