

possibility of “emancipationist potential” and an attendant framework of rights. Custom has a broader and more multifaceted meaning than Bowen sometimes allows for here. Her book is more about the cultural politics of custom than its politics. Are there costs, moreover, to aligning plebeian life so unequivocally with customary culture? Is it efficacious to position the plebeian orders as entirely hostile to change as such, and what impact does this have on later, nineteenth-century understandings of working-class enfranchisement, and its precise organization according to a desire for social and political transformation? I pose these questions less as criticisms and more as promptings, and as a response to the engagement and rigour that Bowen brings to her material.

Bowen has valuable things to say about customary culture and the novel in her significant study. Lucidly argued and elegantly written, Bowen’s study offers fresh readings of several novels that enhance a substantial contribution to a growing scholarly literature on popular culture and the novel in eighteenth-century Britain.

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Tilottama Rajan. *Romantic Narrative: Shelley, Hays, Godwin, Wollstonecraft*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. xxx+282pp. US\$65. ISBN 978-0-8018-9721-4.

Tilottama Rajan’s *Romantic Narrative* challenges a number of traditional divisions in the study of the literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: poetry and prose, male versus female, high and low culture. Intellectually stimulating, theoretically sophisticated, and deftly argued, this book presents the kind of work that we have come to expect from Rajan’s archive.

At the outset, Rajan outlines three general aims: “First, it offers a theory of narrative, or rather, of a ‘narrativity’ opposed to the disciplinary apparatus of the Novel, where the word *Novel*, with a capital *N*, signifies a sociopolitical institution ... on whose normalizing role in the public sphere critics from Jürgen Habermas to Clifford Siskin have written. Second, ... this study questions the association of narrative with what Peter Brooks calls ‘reading for plot,’ which derives from a unigeneric reduction of narrative to the (Victorian) Novel. And finally, it reflects on what the category of Romantic narrative can tell us about disciplinary issues raised by historical study that are of particular urgency at this point. These include the role of poetry versus prose as epistemic practices in an emergent modernity and the place of Romanticism itself within a reorganization of knowledge that has subsumed it into a ‘nineteenth

century,' the understanding of which is informed by the late-twentieth-century's shift from literature to culture" (xii). These grand objectives are carried out dazzlingly in the six chapters that provide discussions of Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Alastor, Zastrozzi, St. Irvyne*, and *Prometheus Unbound*, Mary Hays's *Emma Courtney*, William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and *St. Leon*, and Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman*. Of these chapters, three (on Shelley, on Hays, and on Wollstonecraft) are expanded and reworked versions of articles and chapters that have been published in another form from as early as 1993.

Rajan approaches these works through phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and post-Heideggerian philosophy. She highlights the ways in which these texts explore the limits of a number of Romantic genres. In *Alastor*, for example, Rajan argues that "representing himself both as lyricist and narrator, Shelley encounters in the process of representation, and specifically in the problematic of genre, a mirror stage in which the identity of literature is enacted and called in question through the Narrator's troubled construction of the Poet" (10). Similarly, Rajan notes that Hays's *Emma Courtney* "is a textually self-conscious work which draws on personal experience so as to expose the narratology we use to construct both life and text. As such it invents or at least crystallizes a larger Romantic intergenre, which I call autonarration" (82). Invoking Kant, Hegel, Lyotard, Lacan, Kristeva, and others, Rajan weaves seamlessly between late eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century texts.

The emphasis on consciousness, language, and narrative, while illuminating and perceptive, also has a tendency to focus and narrow our perspective, at times reducing the richness of the novels to mainly textual concerns. In the chapter on *Caleb Williams*, Rajan writes, "through their use of the tropes of trial and confession, Godwin's novels all foreground the aporia between the political or morality (as distinct from ethics) and justice, between passing judgment and truly doing justice to the other. This difference can also be seen as one between the Novel as a form of Hegelian objective spirit and narrative as answerable to the subject ... Godwin puts on trial the very genre of the Novel as judgment: the very reaching of a moral decision formalized by 'deciding' or resolving the plot" (121). Of *St. Leon* Rajan notes, "Godwin's second novel makes narrative the space of the (im)possible by using alchemy and gambling as its operative metaphors, not just subjects of the text but also ways of producing and critiquing its narrative: as speculation, as the (in)credible transformation of one phrase into another, and as an (un)willing suspension of disbelief" (144). Gambling, gaming, and credit in the novel become tropes for the relation between Romanticism and the Novel, creating debates between "fiction as possibility and the empirical and moral realism of the Novel" (169).

The focus on the works as text culminates in the last chapter, entitled “Whose Texts? Godwin’s editing of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *The Wrongs of Woman*.” Deliberately not engaging with the hundreds of critical essays and chapters on Wollstonecraft’s unfinished novel published by feminist, new and old historicist, and materialist critics, Rajan instead examines the consequences of Godwin’s editing on the reception of Wollstonecraft and her last novel. She highlights the fact that the novel is a mediated text, one that recasts Wollstonecraft from a Female Philosopher to an “author” of sensibility. Somewhat different from the others chapters, the final chapter performs a bibliographical study of the thirty-two interventions that Godwin makes on Wollstonecraft’s novel and the effect of these insertions or changes. Embedded in the chapter is an aside outlining the “three-part process necessary to obtain a divorce in England in the late eighteenth century” (184–93) and how Wollstonecraft borrows the “adversarial structure of a lawyerized trial” for her political testament.

It would have been helpful for students and readers to have a sense of how Rajan situates her work on Romantic narrative among other books about the same authors and period. Miriam Wallace notes that the 1790s is a “locus of important work” where scholarship on the Enlightenment crosses over with scholarship on Romanticism and where there can be good critical exchanges (Wallace, *Enlightening Romanticism, Romancing the Enlightenment: British Fiction 1750–1830* [Surrey: Ashgate Publishing], 2009). Katherine Binhammer’s *The Seduction Narrative in Britain, 1747–1800* (2009), Arnold Markley’s *Conversion and Reform in the British Novel of the 1790s: A Revolution of Opinions* (2009), Miriam Wallace’s *Revolutionary Subjects in the English Jacobin Novel, 1790–1805* (2009) and Adriana Craciun’s *British Women Writers and the French Revolution: Citizens of the World* (2005), for example, read a number of the same texts as Rajan in very different ways. Some debate and dialogue between Rajan and these and other critics would have made the book even more useful, productive, and impressive.

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