

Laura Kirkley, ed., *Caroline of Lichtfield* by Isabelle de Montolieu. Trans. Thomas Holcroft. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014. Pp. xxxii + 270. £60. ISBN 9781848933927.

In her groundbreaking book *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800* (1932), J.M.S. Tompkins has a chapter on ‘Didacticism and Sensibility’: two concepts that might seem mutually exclusive, but that were often complementary. Novelists used the paradigm of sensibility as a matter of course because it was the dominant aesthetic and ethical model in the second half of the eighteenth century, but also because it enabled them to make in a seemingly innocuous form points about social, and especially gender, relations. This ‘ideological’ function is to be found in the novel under review.

Isabelle de Montolieu, a Swiss writer, had a variegated career, translating and adapting a great many novels from several European languages of which she had sometimes a limited command, as she herself readily acknowledged. Her translation of Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* heightens the feelings in it and makes sensibility much less ambivalent than in the original; she also tampers with the plot quite freely, having Willoughby marry the young woman he seduced. Indeed, in Montolieu’s prolific works, it is sometimes difficult to tell what is original and what is a loose adaptation, some of the works she translated having been lost.

Her first novel *Caroline de Lichtfield, ou Mémoires d’une famille prussienne*, published in 1786, was extremely successful and remained so for decades. When Montolieu was preparing the manuscript for publication, she had the editorial support of no less than the historian Edward Gibbon and Jacques Georges Deyverdun, the translator into French of Goethe’s *Werther*. Thomas Holcroft, who probably chose to translate this novel for commercial reasons, was, like Montolieu, both a novelist and a translator, but he took a less adaptive approach to translation than she did. With this novel Montolieu clearly made a deeper impression on her readers than many novelists of sensibility. The dénouement of *Caroline de Lichtfield* diverges from the standard sentimental plot in having the protagonist come to love her disfigured husband; having initially been attracted to an attractive young man, Lindorf, she gradually warms to her kind, thoughtful older husband, who is a sort of father figure and offers a companionate marriage. This unconventional ending may partly explain why Maria Edgeworth wished to visit Montolieu in 1820; Edgeworth also enjoyed reading sentimental fiction and allowed herself to shed tears over it, although she very much resisted effusive sentiment in her own fiction. Austen may have been influenced by Montolieu’s novel when she devised the plot of ‘Elinor and Marianne’, the first version of *Sense and Sensibility*, in the 1790s. The question of second attachments was still taken very seriously in the second half of the eighteenth century, having been dramatized at length in Samuel Richardson’s *Sir Charles Grandison*; this question runs through *Sense and Sensibility* and Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda*. Second attachments were deemed by conventional moralists to be incompatible with female delicacy and propriety, but these novelists were anxious to uphold notions of female rationality and agency, which transcend the essentially physical and intuitive dictates of sensibility.

Caroline of Lichtfield is a novel of high sensibility, but Laura Kirkley argues, in her Introduction, that it can also be self-reflexive and subtly ironical. She places this work in Montolieu’s œuvre, discusses it as a Swiss novel and contrasts it with Rousseau’s *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* and *Emile*. As Kirkley touches on late eighteenth-century and modern translation theory in her Introduction, she might have explained the ways Holcroft tailored his translation for ‘the British target readership’ (xviii). However, the helpful endnotes *do* comment on many aspects of Holcroft’s translation; Kirkley shows how Holcroft sometimes condensed the text, sometimes expanded it, underlining certain points, without seeming to

have one clear end in view when carrying out those changes. The notes also elucidate literary and historical references, and show how Montolieu to some extent critiques the paradigm of sensibility.

This edition provides a select bibliography, a chronology of both Montolieu and Holcroft, a note on the text, four appendices, editorial notes and textual variants, all of which are very helpful. Altogether, this is a very welcome addition to the Chawton House Library Series.

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