

Kate Parker and Courtney Weiss Smith, eds., *Eighteenth-Century Poetry and the Rise of the Novel Reconsidered*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2014. Pp. 255. Hb. \$80/Pb. \$39.99. ISBN 9781611487022.

Eric Parisot, *Graveyard Poetry: Religion, Aesthetics and the Mid-Eighteenth-Century Poetic Condition*. Farnham and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2013. Pp. 184. \$149.95. ISBN 9781409434733.

For scholars and teachers of eighteenth-century British literature, the realist novel is our prestige object, an emergent genre which, read as an exemplary expression of the modern condition, links eighteenth-century studies with the broad currents of literary and intellectual history. Despite its popular readership and cultural cachet in the period, by contrast, the verse written in England in the century between Milton and Blake is considered idiosyncratic and anachronistic, with its neoclassical decorum and Latinisms, its hackneyed figures of speech, its exaggerated performativity of faith and feeling. The contributors to Parker and Weiss Smith's innovative collection, *Eighteenth-Century Poetry and the Rise of the Novel Reconsidered*, take up this problem of genre history. Readings emphasizing generic cross-pollination and boundary play open up a larger exploration of the Enlightenment's legacy. This immensely rewarding book manages to shed new light on eighteenth-century literature by putting it in dialogue with post-humanist cosmologies and actor-network theory, the new formalism, neuroscience, and media archeology.

In the opening chapter, Sophie Gee reads Pope's *Rape of the Lock* as an 'experiment in characterization,' insofar as Belinda, inhabiting a 'proto-novelistic' setting, is defined by a discontinuity between a hidden consciousness and a typological identity visible in 'a set of surface markings' (9, 12). Kate Parker then argues that Eliza Haywood, in *Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, doubles down on the mock-heroic reflexivity of Pope's *Rape* so as to critique the contradictory imperatives that govern female identity, prescriptions that render female desire nearly unrepresentable. I do wonder how these opening chapters fit together. Where Gee sees a suggestive duality in Belinda's character, in the difference between her inner rage and her polite exterior, Parker contrasts Pope's patriarchal complacency with Haywood's feminist critique.

Christina Lupton and Aran Ruth argue that it-narratives and sentimental novels draw on thing poems – verse scribbles and scraps, 'perishable and tactile objects' – in order to thematize 'the energy of their circulation and their ability to effect people as objects' (51-2). While Henry Mackenzie loved to suggest that his narratives were 'found things,' such as a fortuitously discovered 'bundle of papers' (59-60), Jane Austen deemphasizes the novel's status as a mobile, material object. Shelley King's stimulating chapter reads the novelistic representation of poetry without reference to generic or medial reflexivity. She interprets the appearance of verse in Amelia Opie's novels not as a dialogized staging of generic difference but, rather, as a feature of realist characterisation. Simply put, for Opie's characters, as for many eighteenth-century individuals, poetry plays a role in their 'rich aesthetic lives' (66).

Wolfram Schmidgen polemicizes against the identification of modernity with 'differentiation,' as in the division of labour, the separation of spheres, and subject/object epistemologies. Attending to a shared 'respect for the ... openness that constitutes any single thing' in Thomson's poetry and Defoe's novels (101), Schmidgen challenges readings of eighteenth-century literature that discover 'self-possessed individuals whose clearly delineated

contours set them off from the setting in which they act' (98). While literature in the period does often emphasize transformation, variety, and dispersal, I question this valorization of hybridity over 'separation of kinds, spheres, and functions' (91). After all, Bruno Latour's account of modernity, which Schmidgen references, is premised on a basic insight of systems theory: differentiation (or, contingent structural closure) produces hybridity. Purifying and mixing are dialectically inseparable. Heather Keenleyside reads personification in Pope's verse and Richardson's *Pamela*, asking why a figure of speech so central to the eighteenth-century imaginary has 'become an embarrassment' (105). Drawing on Blair and Kames, Keenleyside argues that personification figures animation rather than abstract idea, the subjective experience of being an object, the 'feeling of simultaneously moving and being moved' (113). What distinguishes humans from things, she suggests, is not action or vitality but the 'power to suspend motion, to stand still and think' (124). David Fairer similarly identifies an Enlightenment that rejects mind-body divisions. He traces a genealogy that runs from seventeenth-century anti-Cartesian philosophy, to early eighteenth-century verse, and onward to Sterne's playful novels. What he calls the 'erotics' of 'empiricism' – an atmospheric aesthetics 'in which things are hinted, colored, caught, touched, joined, released' – has its roots in Newton's account of the 'enigmatic attraction between bodies' (137-9).

In contrast with the three previous chapters, Joshua Swidzinski's essay explores texts in which boundaries are generative, in which 'the self is enabled by form' (163). Richardson's *Clarissa* and Young's *Night Thoughts*, he maintains, work to represent a humble and non-solipsistic subjectivity, modeling the process whereby an individual transcends solitary interiority by the mediation of 'public address' (167), 'by laboring with and in measure' (180). Natalie Philips also argues for an understanding of formal conventions as productive. Eighteenth-century poets, she writes, emphasized 'the power of literary forms to shape focus', using meter and rhyme as an 'external structure' that would regulate 'cognitive rhythms', counteracting a distracting 'urban cacophony' (188-190). Attention, though, is less a matter of single-minded focus, for these writers, than an ability to actively filter, coordinate, and synthesise. The collection concludes with Margaret Doody's erudite essay-length coda, which reframes these investigations of the instability of genre, and of personhood, in a longer history extending back to classical antiquity.

Eric Parisot's monograph *Graveyard Poetry* is resolutely historicist. It painstakingly details the theological background of an obscure eighteenth-century verse genre relevant today as a precursor of the Romantic lyric. Poems such as Blair's *The Grave*, Young's *Night Thoughts*, and Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, in which a solitary speaker meditates on transience and mortality, exemplify the interpretive recalcitrance of eighteenth-century poetry. Since modern aesthetic sensibilities render graveyard poems rhetorically incoherent, Parisot works to place the genre in the context of 'eighteenth-century religious practice and aesthetic theory' (5). His thesis is a familiar one. Graveyard poetry is a transitional object in the secularisation process, the 'general trajectory ... from the religious to the aesthetic' (49). Blair and Young accede to orthodoxy, sacrificing individual literary ambition to a 'spiritual awakening' (97). Both poets abandon the imaginative ambition to know the dead, accepting uncertainty as a condition of a chastened and 'compliant faith' (93). Gray, by contrast, establishes a form of meditative consolation independent of 'providence and eschatology' (9). He does this by imagining his own death (Parisot compellingly argues that the *Elegy* hints at its narrator's suicide) and by sympathizing with the dead, finding solace in the possibility of

‘secular remembrance,’ the future readers who will judge his literary fate (125). Of course, the traffic between orthodoxy and secularity moves both ways. Aesthetic experience, in the eighteenth century, was often figured with tropes of prophetic inspiration. John Dennis and other critics characterised scripture as definitively poetic, its rhetorical power inseparable from its pathos and its figurative language. Even religiously conservative writers were influenced by the idiom of sensibility. In *Night Thoughts*, Young claims that ‘to believe ... is to feel,’ sounding not altogether unlike the notorious atheist David Hume (54).

Graveyard Poetry is most lucid and fascinating as a contextualization, and interpretation, of Gray’s still powerful *Elegy*, a singular poem that is, in Parisot’s words, ‘at once the epitome and end of graveyard poetry’ (152). Parisot defines its legacy in terms of a ‘new mode of genius independent of theology’ (155). Drawing the story forward – of graveyard poetry in general, and the *Elegy* in particular – to Wordsworth’s Lucy poems and Immortality Ode would, perhaps, suggest an even more interesting and multifaceted afterlife.

Tobias Menely
University of California-Davis