

Peter Garside and Karen O'Brien, eds., *The Oxford History of the Novel in English: Volume 2: English and British Fiction 1750-1820*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. 704. £95. ISBN 9780199574803.

The volume under review here is a timely contribution to the burgeoning field concerned with novels written and published between 1750 and 1820, a period greatly shaped by social and political transformations, as well as by decades of warfare. This collection covers an impressive range of different works of fiction by more than two hundred contemporary authors. It comprises of thirty-three essays written by a number of familiar names to scholars working in the field of the novel and Romantic literature, as well as emerging academics. As a whole, the essays carefully examine the historical, political, social, and cultural implications of the times when these novels were written and consumed, providing a lucid account of different forms of novels in the period covered by this collection. Readers might be surprised to discover the extent to which the thirty-three contributors to this volume constantly speak to each other.

A brief survey of the six major parts into which these essays are categorised is perhaps appropriate, considering the space allowed for this review. Part 1, on novel publication and distribution, comprises three essays on production, authorship, and circulation. This section provides a thoughtful and meticulous analysis of the literary market and contemporary readerships that helps to contextualise the material texts in this period. The second part is the largest section, containing fourteen essays that cover major authors (Tobias Smollett, Laurence Sterne, Jane Austen, and Walter Scott) and literary traditions in the study of novels in this period, ranging from sentimental fiction, gothic novels, and political novels of the 1790s, to evangelical novels, and the historical novel. The next four essays that follow in Part 3 discuss the different narrative structures observed in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novels. For instance, Nicola J. Watson discusses epistolary fiction, noting that 'during the 1770s and 1780s over 40 per cent of novels appeared in letter form' (370), before its decline in subsequent years.

In the fourth part, the essays focus more specifically on 'Contexts' and explore the development of the novel through its engagement with marriage, property, imperial commerce, slavery, and gender issues, among many others. Essays in the other five parts already provide abundant and useful information about the cultural and social implications of the texts discussed. Nevertheless, the title of this volume grounds it in history and implies its application of a necessarily cultural-historical approach to discussing literature. A few more essays would, therefore, have been a welcome addition to this section and to this volume as a whole.

Part 5 of the volume exemplifies the generically fluid nature of fiction, focusing on other forms of fiction, including fiction in magazines, short fictional forms, fiction for children, and the relationship between fiction and the stage. Discussions in this group of essays are particularly informative, for they not only underline the innovative dynamism of fiction during these years but also broaden the scope of fiction's contribution to the literary culture of the age.

In the final part, four essays situate the novel in the relevant institutions of contemporary literary culture. Michael Gamer here shows how the rise of collections and reviews helped to group novels into several modes of fiction, and turn them into a credible literary genre. The aim of this volume, as the editor Karen O'Brien states in the Introduction, is to evaluate 'the literary achievement of a huge range of major and less well-known novelists against a backdrop of the second "rise" of the novel' (xviii). Thus, it seems appropriate to end this volume with Clifford Siskin's essay 'The Rise of the "Rise" of the Novel'. Much remains to be done, but this ambitious volume offers an essential reference

point for futures studies not only into the works of individual novelists, but also the role novels have played in the shaping of literary culture more widely.

Given its extraordinary range and depth, this volume does exactly what the general editor Patrick Parrinder describes as the aim of the *Oxford History of the Novel in English* series: ‘to present the detailed history of the novel in a way that is both useful to students and specialists, and accessible to a wide and varied readership’ (xvi). Despite its high price, this collection will undoubtedly be indispensable for both teachers and students, and will surely be added to the reading lists of modules on eighteenth-century and Romantic literature. For literary scholars, this volume offers invaluable information about the current state of scholarship on the novel, and the ways in which vigorous debate and new evidence over the past few decades have shaped the field. It will surely enliven discussions for many years to come.

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