stood “not as the antonym of reality, but as a way to grasp and investigate reality.”

Latour argues that since eighteenth-century “reality” has been classified into “fifteen distinct ‘modes’ of existence” (associated with “religion, law, fiction, technology, etc.”), these diverse modes render “reality” plural, for differing interpretative procedures bring to light, and instantiate, diverse “parts” of reality. This account, Warner asserts, offers an opportunity for literary scholars to rethink literature’s engagement with reality. In particular, fiction’s “distinct fusion of form and meaning, medium and message” generates a new “mode of existence” (adds to “reality”); fiction draws on existing social associations while “recharging” reality with fiction—fictional characters enter into matrices of social associations (people “see” the “Hermione Granger” or “Elizabeth Bennet” aspects of other people); fiction crosses with other “modes of existence” and thus “augments reality by experimenting with it.” If fiction is understood “as a mode of existence,” Warner claims, then literary historians should perceive that “novels probe rather than simulate reality,” and they should appreciate that novels do their probing in “numberless new ways.”

As Latour is one of the most original thinkers now writing, literary scholars might well follow Warner’s example of reading him. However, to say that novels probe rather than simulate reality is to re-discover the value of what Aristotle said about poetry’s difference from history, and thus link the renovation of literary theory to a return to its origins.

BOOK REVIEWS


I will be deeply disappointed if Orr’s work does not inspire imitators. She begins with the premise that, when confronted with the “complex and messy” collection of fiction in the early eighteenth century, rather than choose to eliminate chaos by selecting a handful of texts and forcing a progressive and linear “rise,” we should instead approach the corpus of fictions “without predetermined conclusions” because “their values may baffle us, but that does not make them less valid.”

Of course, it is worth noting that assessing what counts as fiction in a period of generic slipperiness is easier said than done, as Orr herself notes: “How do we study fiction in a world that seldom distinguished fact from fiction, new from old, original from translation?” Her corpus, which consists of “nearly five hundred separate works of fiction printed in England between 1690 and 1730” is, as she notes, a task only truly achievable in a time when the bibliographies of fiction and the English Short Title Catalogue can be brought to bear on the digital corpora of Early English Books Online (EEBO) and Eighteenth-Century Collections Online (ECCO). Orr adds to that sum a valuable appendix of over two dozen works of fiction not included in McBurney’s Checklist of English Prose Fiction, 1700–1739. She considers both printed works newly published in the period and reprints, providing a rich sense of the works available in the marketplace. Published fiction, she argues, was so disconnected from the notion of “serious” literature that it pro-
vides “greater insight into the business side of the literary production than other forms of writing do.”

It is worth noting that these parameters cannot wholly account for earlier texts encountered in private collections or via manuscript circulation, which was still a viable mode for text transmission. And while an easy answer would be that such forms of circulation were too exclusive to be considered alongside the prose fiction corpus in print, Orr’s own findings about the nature of the fiction marketplace reject such a simplification. These correctives about “common knowledge” are one of the most important contributions of this monograph. She also provides useful correctives and compelling arguments for claims that the fiction marketplace was much smaller than previously assumed, that chapbook readers “would have to have reading skills at least as good as a reader of a simple amorous tale,” that “many works of fiction were anonymous because readers were not concerned with who wrote them, and authors were not trying to make a reputation for themselves by writing fiction.”

Her description of her focus as on “texts, booksellers, and readers” belies her primary engagement with textual apparatus—in many cases the primary resource for evidence about the latter two categories. Orr notes that the barriers to accessing texts are “no longer a problem” which is largely true, though it is a claim that deserves (at least) two caveats: (1) the majority of the digital surrogates used to fuel this work are held by proprietary databases; and (2) the category of “surviving texts” is an incredibly important qualifier. These of course do not undercut in any way the contribution of Orr’s work here: it is as comprehensive as possible, and I look forward to her data being fruitfully joined to complementary work in the future.

Because so much of Orr’s work seems ripe for extension by scholars working on other genres or other periods, I find myself wishing there were a way truly to see her method and her data—admittedly an impossibility within the constraints of the monograph form. Her thirteen tables are a tantalizing snapshot of the hard-won, and largely invisible, labor of building controlled vocabularies and imposing taxonomies on a wildly variable corpus.

What Orr does with this substantial corpus is nevertheless useful: analyzing and enumerating genre term strategy in title pages and advertisements and rethinking our existing categories and taxonomies. Her observations on her novel corpus lead to some intriguing routes for further research. For example, she notes that the usage of genre labels on title pages seems to denote form more than content. There is a useful study to be written based on Orr’s data placing her work on fictional title pages within the larger corpus of works in print, especially given how many (“History,” “Letters,” “Memoirs,” chief among them) also perform different rhetorical functions for nonfictional works.

Along the way, Orr crafts a “few generalizations”: that the modern canon does not map neatly onto the actual works reprinted, that there is “little connection among the works that proved to be long-lasting,” and that readers “would have encountered all these different earlier works alongside new publications, with almost no distinction made between very old, somewhat old, and relatively recent works of fiction” because readers in this period would not have a clear sense of a “linear, developmental progression” of fiction over time.

The first half of the book, “Fiction in the Print Culture World,” begins with chapter 1 painstakingly laying the foundation for the data collection and analysis that follows,
beginning with the challenges of defining the novel and other forms of fiction. Chapter 2 is a thoughtful and detailed accounting of the costs attendant on publishing fiction in the period, fiction’s minuscule share of the retail market, and correlation of length and price of fiction. Chapter 3 explains the ways that notions of authorship are constructed on title pages, in paratextual material, and in collected works and anthologies.

The second half, “Fiction in England, 1690–1730,” starts with chapter 4 exploring the “surprisingly large portion—close to a quarter” of her corpus that were reprints of pre-1690 texts, often with no signs that they are reprints. Orr performs a “chronological survey of the sources for works reprinted in the early eighteenth century” in order to “approximate the view of the history of English fiction that readers in this period might have had based on the works available to them.” She argues that “reprinting at this time formed the beginning of an English literary canon that was specifically fiction” and also begins to fill in what she calls the “puzzling omission” of “almost any discussion of fiction deriving from medieval romances in histories of the novel.” Significantly, most reprinted works are neither the most studied by modern critics, nor the works that most closely resemble the later novel form.

Chapter 5 addresses the quarter of fictions in the corpus that were English translations of “mostly French, but also Spanish and occasionally Italian or German,” works that provided motifs and themes for new English fiction. According to Orr’s analysis, translation was a “variously conducted” marketplace, in theory and practice. She taxonomizes translated works into three trends: “Amorous Plots,” “Comedy and Satire,” and “Exoticism” before discussing the two most frequently reprinted foreign works, Cervantes’s Don Quixote and Fenelon’s Telemachus, in their own sections. Orr argues reprints of these two works use different strategies for enduring success, some of which are inherent to the source text (narrative structure, character, thematic elements), and others that are part of marketing strategies the text allows (updating language, abridging the work for cheaper editions). Chapters 6 and 7 address the 200 works of new fiction produced in the period, with a focus on those that had multiple eighteenth-century editions. Dividing these titles into fiction “with Purpose” (chapter 6) and “for Entertainment” (chapter 7), she further categorizes and describes variations of each subcategory, and the standards for success.

Orr’s conclusion, “Did the Novel Rise?” encapsulates the “six points” of “the standard view of fiction” that she wants us to reconsider: that fiction (1) derived from romance and spiritual writing; (2) increasingly demonstrated verisimilitude; (3) was mainly read by women and servants; (4) that people recognized the “novel” as a new and more advanced type of fiction; (5) that the significant books were new works written in English; and (6) that increasing interest in fiction was a result of a rising and expanding middle class. Instead, Orr argues, we need to “look beyond authors and at the forces that shaped fiction publication more broadly” (duration of Elizabethan reprints, for example). She leaves us with important questions. What caused new editions to be issued of some works and not others? How does the persistence, in high numbers, of older works challenge our idea of the eighteenth century as the age of the novel? How does the flood of translations affect our understanding of the novel’s “Englishness”? “How do we study fiction in a world that seldom distinguished fact from fiction, new from old, original from translation?” Moreover, these are not niche concerns, but as Orr puts it, “these are the central questions and objects of study we should pursue, not merely in service of a centralized
canonical figure.” Whether her study sufficiently justifies this claim is the final question one might ask before dismantling the canon in favor of five hundred obscure titles that have found their way to the Internet.

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One of the most famous opening lines in all of literature initiates Johnson’s letter to James Macpherson: “I received your foolish and impudent note.” To read this “heterogeneous volume,” which completes in most ways the Yale edition of Johnson’s works that began in 1958, is to notice, among many other things, Johnson’s talent in beginning. Here are just a few of my favorites: “It is with a mixture of compassion and indignation, that we condescend to continue the dispute with the authors and publishers of the London Magazine: to be engaged in a contest with such antagonists as it is no honour to overcome, is very disgusting; and what honour can be gained by writing against those who cannot read?” “It is now more than half a century since the Paradise Lost, having broke through the cloud with which the unpopularity of its author for a time obscured it, has attracted the general admiration of mankind, who have endeavoured to compensate the error of their first neglect by lavish praises, and boundless veneration.” “Such is the power of interest over almost every mind, that no one is long without arguments to prove any position which is ardently wished to be true, or to justify any measures which are dictated by inclination.” And one particularly applicable to contributors and readers of the Scriblerian, “That a certain Degree of reputation is acquired merely by approving the works of genius, and testifying a regard to the memory of the Authors, is a truth too evident to be denied.”

This publication, volume twenty of the twenty-three volumes of the Yale Johnson but the last to appear, allows well-deserved praise to be given to DeMaria, who took over as general editor of the project with the death of John H. Middendorf in 2007 and, in addition, served as coeditor of several later volumes when it became necessary, including this one. DeMaria’s generosity in crediting his deceased coeditor, O M Brack, and other scholars in his notes and introduction is conspicuous but not unusual among Johnsonians, who are notoriously magnanimous. But his industriousness is unparalleled. I was not alone, surely, in thinking that the Yale Johnson would not be completed in my lifetime, and it now has been, at least officially. The editors explain, “we have restricted Johnson’s writings for others in the Yale Edition to those works that are wholly or almost wholly by him. A separate volume, apart from the Yale Edition, called Contributions to the Works of Others, is planned.” Subsequent references to Contributions throughout this volume suggest that it will contain much of interest.

“The protocols of the Yale Edition” keep the text from being a typical scholarly edition, if one could have been fashioned from materials so heterogeneous and multisourced. DeMaria carefully explains each time he deviates from the protocols, always applying common sense, and he leaves little doubt that we have here the best text likely ever to be produced of this largely journalistic material. Moreover, his explanatory notes expand...