

María Jesús Lorenzo-Modia and Mónica Amenedo-Costa. *Mid Eighteenth-Century Female Literary Careers in The Monthly Review and The Critical Review*. ArCiBel, 2018. Pp. 236. €19.00. ISBN: 9788415335658

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24197/ersjes.40.2019.125-129>

Mid Eighteenth-Century Female Literary Careers in The Monthly Review and The Critical Review (2018) constitutes an interesting and insightful exploration in the field of journalistic genres with its analyses of the literary review from its emergence at the beginning of the eighteenth century, through to its development in English literature and culture in the 1750s. The authors of the book undertake an ambitious task of analysing the review genre determinants and their transformation relying on reviews of books by two English writers, Eliza Haywood (c. 1693–1756), Sarah Fielding (1710–1768) and the Irish Frances Sheridan (1724–1766). Two journals prominent in the eighteenth century, *The Monthly Review* (1749–1845) and *The Critical Review* (1756–1817), serve as the major sources for the book’s analytical contents. The book might be perceived as an important contribution to the studies of the history of English literature and eighteenth-century journalism. The major advantage of the book lies in its interdisciplinary potency: the study of the eighteenth-century reviews extends the readers’ knowledge about the social and cultural context of the period, and elicits further discussion about the early women writers, their role in the formation of the genre of a literary review and in the construction of a new female identity in English patriarchal society. Thus, the book succeeds in providing a new direction in the study of women’s writing in general and in building “an awareness around the place of women around the beginning of book reviewing” (13).

The book follows a transparent and coherent design. It includes an introduction, a theoretical part 2, an analytical part 3, conclusion, sources and bibliography, as well as an appendix with the reviews discussed in part 2 of the book. Part 3 is further divided into three main analytical sections, each devoted to a different female author, mentioned above, and to her main literary works discussed in literary reviews under the analyses. The diachronic organisation of the book according to writers and their works as they appeared in reviews proves a useful framework for the presentation of



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ES REVIEW. SPANISH JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES 40 (2019): 125–29

E-ISSN 2531-1654 | ISSN 2531-1646

the development of the review as a new form of artistic expression, which contributed to the emergence of the phenomenon of an open discussion over a literary text and of a critical discourse in the social and cultural realms dominated by a male perspective.

The introduction elucidates two main aims of the book: first, the focus on female authorship and the inclusion of female writers in review periodicals; second, the study of the impact exerted by journalism on British literary culture and female literary culture in particular. It is emphasised that the tension between the male criticism present in reviews and the female perspective exposed in the women writers' literary statements of the early and mid-eighteenth-century English literature constitutes the axis of this book's ideological framework.

Part two of the book, "Periodical Publications: Book Reviewing Papers," provides a detailed historical survey of the journals created in the seventeenth century including their titles and dates of creation, as well as famous writers involved in their publishing (for instance, Richard Steele's *The Tatler*, Joseph Addison's *The Spectator*, Steele's *The Guardian* with contributions from Alexander Pope, Daniel Defoe's *Review*, Jonathan Swift's contribution for *The Examiner*, and Henry Fielding's *The Champion*). The chapter discusses the progress observed in the development of a literary culture in press with respect not only to prominent writers involved, but also to the changing components of periodicals and, what follows, to their emerging subgenres. The book provides information on the emergence of two new journalistic forms—the essay periodical and the magazine: "two genres of periodical that most influenced the history of criticism during the early eighteenth century" (Basker 317).

A separate subchapter has been devoted to two distinct journals, *The Monthly Review* and *The Critical Review*. The first periodical mentioned is claimed to have exerted strong influence on the history of literary criticism in that it included summaries, criticism and extracts from books (24). The authors claim after Walter Graham that *The Monthly Review* deserves to be termed as "the earliest Review of importance in English literature" (209). Both journals have been selected as the sources of reviews for the book's analysis due to their historical value as they offered criticism on the latest literary works published in Great Britain and Ireland as well as abroad. Subchapter 2.1 of the book offers interesting historical detail concerning not only the foundation of the two journals and their development but also information concerning their graphic layouts, the analysis of the titles, headings and their transformations, and the contents of the journals divided

into distinct columns and sections. The book also raises an important issue of anonymity as an early feature of publishing common among women writers.

Chapter three of the book is devoted to the study of three women writers' literary works and their impact on literary criticism observable in reviews which were published after the 1750s, when criticism became an integral part of periodicals. The historical period is also marked by the transformation of an image of a woman and her role in society and culture into an active participant and a creator. This transformation is ascribed to the role of the press, where women appear as professionals who speak to female audiences educating them politically and socially, as the authors claim.

Chapter three is divided into three subchapters which present the literary achievements and corresponding reviews of three prominent female writers of the eighteenth century. The first subchapter introduces the figure of Eliza Haywood with biographical information about her engagement in the publishing industry and her impact on female readers. The book includes the writer's literary achievements, which encompass periodical publications, reviews, poetry, drama and novels. The subchapter is further divided into sections devoted to particular works by the author and their reviews. It focuses on the critical reception of Haywood's later literary works reflected in the reviews found mostly in *The Monthly Review* and some in *The Critical Review* as well. The works analysed in this subchapter include: *Dalinda*, *A Letter from H—G—g, Esq*, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, *The History of Jenny and Jemmy Jessamy*, *Modern Characters*, *The Invisible Spy*, *The Wife*, *The Husband*, *Clementina; or, the History of an Italian Lady*, and *The History of Leonora Meadowson*. The authors formulate their concluding remarks by relying on reviews of the works mentioned in the two periodicals quoting rare praises and frequent critical remarks directed against the writer's literary skills and primarily the female-centred fictional reality of her novels. What the authors sadly acknowledge is the huge impact of deprecating male criticism demonstrated in the reviews quoted on the writer's underrated career appreciated only in the twentieth century.

The second part of chapter three provides an insight into the literary career and criticism of the English novelist, Sara Fielding. Her works of fiction analysed in this book include *The Adventures of David Simple*, *Volume the Last*, *The Cry*, *The History of Countess of Dellwyn*, *The History of Ophelia*, *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia* and her translation of Xenophon's *Memoirs of Socrates*. The analysis opens with the discussion of

a pamphlet, *A Comparison between the Horace of Corneille and The Roman Father of Mr. Whitehead*. Each of the works mentioned is discussed with regards to the reviews found in *The Monthly Review* and *The Critical Review*, as is the case in the previous subchapters. The reviews provided disclose a positive evaluation of Fielding's works and even point to her high recognition in the academic world, establishing her position as a serious writer, with respect to her final works and their reviews in particular, as the authors claim (90).

The last subchapter of chapter 3 discusses the works of Frances Sheridan: *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* and *Conclusion of the Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*; two plays, *The Discovery* and *The Dupe*; *The History of Nourjahad*; and *Eugenia and Adelaide*. The reviews found in both journals reveal frequently contradictory views on the literary works by Sheridan. The subchapter offers an insight into both positive and negative criticism of the works.

The final part of the book provides concluding notes after the detailed analysis of the reviews. It is confirmed that the reviews reflect a male-oriented perspective in their critical approach to female works of literature. As the dominant social voice in the patriarchal society of eighteenth-century England, male journalistic criticism directed at female literary attempts often undervalues a female perspective and, as a result, leads to female writers' oblivion despite their unquestionable literary merits, rediscovered in the twentieth century.

The book discusses positive and negative reviews formulated as a critical response to the three writers' literary works. The dominant negative criticism of Haywood's works explains the reason for her absence in the British canon of the past. It also highlights the discrepancy between the writer's embodiment of a new woman and the critics' narrow perspective on gender roles dominated by the patriarchal system of eighteenth-century Britain. The more advantageous critical reviews of the two authors, Fielding and Sheridan, are regarded by the authors of the book as another reason for the implication of a male oriented criticism. Sheridan's review in *The Monthly* serves as a good example for the authors to discuss another technique of discriminating women writers, namely by ostentatiously ignoring their mistakes and by a reviewer's obliging decision to omit them. This instance of the lack of objectivity in evaluating a female-authored text is another proof of male dominance exerted on women writers who were not judged on an equal footing with works by male writers. The authors rightly conclude that "[t]his in itself says much about the literary and cultural

reception of female writers in Britain and raises awareness of the use of gender power in critical discourse” (123). It is also argued that reviews reflect social and cultural phenomena such as gender roles and general ideologies prevalent in that period. The analysis of *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* and its reviews exemplifies the case when an original work is depicted as boring because it represents views contradictory to the socially accepted and dominant ones.

The authors conclude that the reviews of female writers’ literary works played multiple functions in the social and cultural realms of eighteenth-century Britain. They expressed the perspective of the dominant male voice marginalising female writers’ works. Nevertheless, the fact that female works were published, albeit with critical comments, proves the alteration of the female writers’ position in the literary world. Also, the successful female writers such as Fielding and Sheridan show that the eighteenth-century literary canon in Britain changed by admitting the female writers’ talents and the merits of their works. Reviews are perceived as a form of witnessing and recording a significant social change which stems from a simple fact of female writers becoming visible in the literary and cultural world. *The Monthly Review* and *The Critical Review* are claimed by the authors to have granted these women writers their cultural space and, as such, to have raised people’s awareness about the position of women in society and their increasingly active participation in the formation of British literary history and culture.

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