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Article abstract

As a literary critic Anna Letitia Barbauld provides important evidence for those who have sought to challenge a long-established critical view that the development of the novel was premised on a renunciation of the wonders of romance which went hand in hand with the project of Enlightenment science and its rejection of miracles and the supernatural. At the same time, she presents an alternative perspective from that of influential eighteenth-century male critics such as Samuel Johnson regarding the relationship between novels and romances, and a sharply contrasting view of the place of wonder within the overall history of fiction. Against male contemporaries, she makes a case for women's continuing special claims as readers and writers of fiction based in part on their greater receptivity to emotions such as that of wonder, challenging Johnson's implicit positioning of men as the leaders of a developing form of literary realism that required a broad knowledge of nature and society.

From Moated Castle to Modern Parlour: Anna Letitia Barbauld's Theorization of Wonder, Women, and the Novel

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In *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Reinvention of Wonder* (2014), Sarah Tindal Kareem offers an important challenge to the story that Ian Watt influentially tells in *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) about the relationship between eighteenth-century fiction and wonder. Against Watt's insistence that the development of the novel was premised on a renunciation of the wonders of romance which went hand in hand with the project of Enlightenment science and its rejection of miracles and the supernatural, Kareem argues that the authors of eighteenth-century prose fiction reinvented rather than renounced wonder. In her view, "[w]hile supernatural objects of wonder are certainly viewed more skeptically during this period, the result is not that wonder loses its hold on people, but rather that wonder's objects shift."[1] By this account, practitioners of an emergent fictional "realism" sought to create the effect of wonder by employing new strategies of defamiliarization, including some borrowed from science. Yet eighteenth-century literary criticism reveals an already divided sense of the novel's relationship to the wonders of romance. In his well-known essay on fiction published in *The Rambler* No. 4 (31 March 1750), Samuel Johnson states that the "comedy of romance" (his designation for the novel), unlike romance, must "bring about natural events by easy means" and

1. Sarah Tindal Kareem, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Reinvention of Wonder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2.

"keep up curiosity without the help of wonder."[2] He elsewhere associates wonder, as Kareem notes, with the temporary suspension of the cognitive process, a conception of wonder evident in a line of Enlightenment thinkers that included Joseph Addison, Adam Smith, and Henry Home, Lord Kames.[3] In distancing the novel from the wonders of romance, Johnson fortifies a distinction made by William Congreve close to sixty years before in the preface to his literary work *Incognita* (1692), where the latter pronounces that "Romances give more of Wonder, Novels more Delight."[4] However, the conception of the relationship between wonder and the novel advanced by Anna Letitia Barbauld (*née* Aikin; 1743–1825), who edited the landmark fifty-volume series *The British Novelists* that was published in 1810, is significantly different from Johnson's. While maintaining continuities with Johnson in distinguishing between romances and novels, Barbauld regards the line of separation between the two as far less clear-cut and conveys a sharply contrasting view of the place of wonder within the overall history of fiction.[5] In the process, she makes a case for women's continu-

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2. Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, in *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, 20 vols. (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1969), 3.19.

3. For more on Johnson and the theorization of wonder see Kareem, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Reinvention of Wonder*, 37–38, 42.

4. William Congreve, *The Complete Works of William Congreve*, ed. Montague Summers, 4 vols. (London: Nonesuch Press, 1923), 1.111. John Richetti has called this passage "the critical *locus classicus* in English" for the late seventeenth century (see his monograph *Popular Fiction before Richardson* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969], 174). Somewhat complicating our sense of Congreve's place in the history of literary criticism is Kristiaan P. Aercke's interpretation. Reconsidering Congreve's preface in relation to *Incognita* itself, Aercke cautions against an unquestioning acceptance of its author's critical argument, reminding us that "a great many seventeenth-century prefaces are disingenuous and intentionally unreliable texts" (Kristiaan P. Aercke, "Congreve's *Incognita*: Romance, Novel, Drama?," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 2, no. 4 [July 1990]: 295).

5. Despite the considerable body of scholarship established now on Barbauld, her criticism remains understudied in comparison with her other writings. The following are some notable exceptions: Catherine Moore, "'Ladies … Taking the Pen in Hand': Mrs. Barbauld's Criticism of Eighteenth-Century Women Novelists," in *Fetter'd or Free?: British Women Novelists, 1670–1815*, ed. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1986), 383–97; Katharine M. Rogers, "Anna Barbauld's Criticism of Fiction—Johnsonian Mode, Female Vision," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 21 (1992): 27–41; Claudia L. Johnson, "'Let Me Make the Novels of a Country': Barbauld's 'The British Novelists' (1810/1820)," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 2 (Spring 2001): 163–79; and Anne Toner, "Anna Barbauld on

ing special claims as readers and writers of fiction based in part on their greater receptivity to emotions such as that of wonder, thus challenging Johnson's implicit positioning of men as the leaders of a developing form of literary realism that required a broad knowledge of nature and society.

Among the continuities with Johnson and other eighteenth-century critics is Barbauld's acceptance of literary realism as a defining feature of the novel against romance.[6] In the prefatory essay she composed for *The British Novelists*, titled "On the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing," Barbauld traces the origin of the novel to ancient "stories taken from, or imitating, real life" and speculates that in the passage from "[r]ude" to "polished times" an increasingly "closer imitation of nature began to be called for."[7] In her view, it was at least in part the growing interest and investment in realism that gradually changed the character of prose fiction. In another essay that she mined for *The British Novelists* series, "Life of Samuel Richardson, with Remarks on his Writings," originally prefixed to her 1804 edition of Samuel Richardson's correspondence, Barbauld explains that as knowledge increased and superstition lessened, there was growing conviction that "*le vrai seul est aimable*" [*the true alone is amiable*]—a quotation that she borrows from French literary critic Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux.[8] As

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Fictional Form in *The British Novelists* (1810)," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 24, no. 2 (Winter 2011–2012): 171–193. Significant commentary on the criticism appears elsewhere in William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft's Broadview edition of Barbauld's writings (cited below in footnote 7) and in McCarthy's biography *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008). In the Broadview edition, selections from Barbauld's prose, including her criticism, are placed together after her poetry, pages 186 to 482. In the biography, discussion of Barbauld's criticism is interwoven into an account of her life, sometimes with dedicated subsections. The two projects most relevant to the current article, *The British Novelists* series and Barbauld's edition of Samuel Richardson's correspondence, each receive their own subsection, the first pages 422 to 430 and the second pages 412 to 419, with other passing references listed in the index on page 707.

6. Within the same tradition, Clara Reeve states that the novel offers "a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written," in contrast to romance, which "treats of fabulous persons and things," representing "what never happened nor is likely to happen." See Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance and The History of Charoba, Queen of Aegypt*, 2 vols. (London, 1785), 1.111.

7. Anna Letitia Barbauld, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2002), 388.

8. Anna Letitia Barbauld, ed. *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, 1804, 6 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1.xii. In "Life of Samuel

perhaps Barbauld remembered, the original quotation, which appears in the 1675 poem "Epître IX. Au marquis de Seignelay" preceded by "Rien n'est beau que le vrai," is applied by Boileau directly to fiction.[9] According to Barbauld, it was this belief in the importance of an appearance of truth that eventually compelled a more plausible action and "characters moving in the same sphere of life with ourselves, and brought into action by incidents of daily occurrence."[10] As she chronicles, the earliest fictions in modern Europe were the chivalric romances, which focused on the frequently wonderful adventures of knights and ladies. Next came the historical romances, with "personages … removed from common life, and taken from ancient history; but without the least resemblance to the heroes whose names they bore" and "adventures" that "were marvellous, but not impossible."[11] Barbauld attributes the demise of the historical romances to Boileau, who, she notes, "ridiculed these, as [Miguel de] Cervantes had done the others, and their knell was rung," so that "people were ready to wonder they had ever admired them."[12] She appears to refer here to Boileau's attack against historical romances in *Dialogue sur les héros de roman*, composed in 1664 and first published in 1713. Boileau's objections to historical romances are notably somewhat different from those made against chivalric romances in Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, the first part of which was published in 1605, the second in 1615. Essentially, Boileau accuses the writers of historical romances of sullying the reputation of ancient classical heroes such as Alexander the Great by giving their names to effeminate fictional counterparts. Among the other fictions Barbauld briefly mentions as flourishing during this period are "the monkish legends," which she describes as "a species of romance

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Richardson, with Remarks on his Writings," Barbauld employs almost identical phrases to those cited above in "On the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing." The relevant sentence in the introduction to Richardson reads as follows: "A closer imitation of nature began now to be called for: not but that, from the earliest times, there had been tales and stories imitating real life; a few serious, but generally comic." (Barbauld, *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, 1.xiv–xv.)

9. The epistle can be found in Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Françoise Escal (Paris: Gallimard, 1966; collection *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade*), which remains the standard modern edition for this writer.

10. Barbauld, *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, 1.xiv.

11. Ibid. The same sentence appears in the prefatory essay to *The British Novelists* (see Barbauld, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, 386).

12. Barbauld, *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, 1.xiv.

abounding with the marvellous, and particularly suited to the taste of a superstitious age."[13] There are a few singular works she cites as well, including Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (c. 1585), which she characterizes as a "romance … of the pastoral heroic kind."[14] Continuing her history of the novel, Barbauld reports that by the time of Richardson "[t]he moated castle is changed to a modern parlour; the princess and her pages to a lady and her domestics, or even to a simple maiden, without birth or fortune; we are not called on to wonder at improbable events, but to be moved by natural passions, and impressed by salutary maxims."[15] Barbauld goes on to repeat Johnson's commendation that Richardson "had enlarged the knowledge of human nature, and taught the passions to move at the command of virtue," and she herself affirms that the experience of reading *Pamela* (1740) impresses "useful maxims and sentiments of virtue," allowing readers to "rise better prepared to meet the ills of life with firmness."[16]

Nevertheless, she remains emphatic that romances, like novels, had a foundation in reality. In "On the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing," she recognizes that "all fictions have probably grown out of real adventures" and that realism had always been a matter of degree rather than kind, a recognition that encourages her to categorize the ancient "*Milesian Tales*" as "novels" and *Theagenes and Chariclea*, written by Heliodorus, as "romance or novel."[17] Regarding the "[t]ales of magic and enchantment" that once prevailed as the dominant form of prose fiction, she speculates that they "probably took their rise from the awe and wonder with which the vulgar looked upon any instance

13. Ibid., 1.xvii.

14. Ibid., 1.xviii.

15. Ibid., 1.xxi.

16. Ibid., 1.xxii, 1.xxii, and 1.xxi–xxii. The original quotation appears in the preface that Johnson wrote for *The Rambler* No. 97 (19 February 1751), which he commissioned from Richardson. See *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, 4.154.

17. Barbauld, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, 381, 378, and 379. Like Barbauld, Reeve understands realism as a relative rather than absolute designation as applied to fiction. Both authors highlight the number of writers who produced "stories taken from, or imitating real life" during the medieval and early modern periods, such as Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, written between 1348 and 1353. Reeve draws additional attention to the many examples of eighteenth-century prose fiction that could still claim the title of romance or that mixed elements of romance and realism, notably Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which she includes among those works that "partake of the nature of both" romances and novels. Reeve, *The Progress of Romance and The History of Charoba, Queen of Aegypt*, 1.127.

of superior skill in mechanics or medicine, or acquaintance with any of the hidden properties of nature."[18] In summing up the lasting appeal of prose fiction towards the end of her essay, she observes that "the humble novel is always ready … to take man from himself … and, while the moving picture of life passes before him, to make him forget the subject of his own complaints," reflecting that

> [i]t is pleasant to the mind to sport in the boundless regions of possibility; to find relief from the sameness of every-day occurrences by expatiating amidst brighter skies and fairer fields; to exhibit love that is always happy, valour that is always successful; to feed the appetite for wonder by a quick succession of marvellous events; and to distribute, like a ruling providence, rewards and punishments which fall just where they ought to fall.[19]

The terms that Barbauld employs here in her tribute to the "humble novel" cannot but recall the language of romance, making the point that the novel, despite a change in content and new effort at realistic effect, retained an essential aspect of romance, directly tied to an unabated readerly "appetite for wonder."[20] There is a similar embedded message in the passage already cited above, in which Barbauld imagines the magical transformation of the princess and her "moated castle" into more modern and ordinary equivalents, with a critical vocabulary that borrows freely from romance. In an early prose piece, "The Hill of Science: A Vision," published in 1773, Barbauld identifies the experience of wonder as core to fiction in every form. The narrator of this

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18. Barbauld, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, 381.

19. Ibid., 407–8.

20. In the field of eighteenth-century studies, the difficulties of pinpointing the origins of the novel and meaningfully defining and distinguishing "romance" and "realism" have been largely recognized. Perhaps the best-known account of the development of the novel as a genre distinct from romance is Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Pimlico, 1957), but it has since been repeatedly challenged. Among the many reconsiderations of the history of the novel after Watt are Lennard J. Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600–1740* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Margaret Anne Doody, *The True Story of the Novel* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997); William B. Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684–1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Steven Moore, *The Novel: An Alternative History, Beginnings to 1600* (New York: Continuum, 2010).

piece describes "the fields of Fiction, filled with a variety of wild flowers springing up in the greatest luxuriance, of richer scents and brighter colours than … observed in any other climate," a description that she perhaps has in mind when she speaks of the "brighter skies and fair fields" conjured up by "the humble novel" in "On the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing."[21] The homage to the novel's capacity to make readers lose themselves in the "moving picture of life" arguably serves to strengthen the connection between this fictional genre and wonder in evoking the image of the magic lantern and the wonders of the projected entertainments that continued to be popular throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[22] In another early piece of critical writing, "An Enquiry into those Kinds of Distress which Excite Agreeable Sensations," also published in 1773, Barbauld explores a different source of wonder common to romances and novels, with an evident debt to Edmund Burke's categories of the sublime and the beautiful, as set out in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). As she contends here, in representing scenes of distress, all fictional writing possessed the capacity to inspire either "wonder and admiration" or "love and pity," depending on whether characters displayed "fortitude, power, and strength of mind" or "gentleness, grace, and beauty."[23]

Surveying the recent annals of fiction in the prefatory essay to *The British Novelist* series, Barbauld surmises that women are better qualified than men to produce fictional scenes of distress. She submits further that novels by women display a characteristic "melancholy tinge" and sentiment, in contrast to the comedy that prevails in novels by men.[24] She attributes this difference to the fact that women must "nurse those feelings in secrecy and silence," which men usually

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21. Anna Lætitia Barbauld, *The Works of Anna Lætitia Barbauld*, ed. Lucy Aikin, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1825), 2.166. Both spellings of her middle name are accepted: Letitia/Lætitia.

22. For more on magic-lantern entertainments see Barbara Maria Stafford, Frances Terpak, and Isotta Poggi, *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2001), and Richard Crangle, Mervyn Heard, and Ine Van Dooren, eds. *Realms of Light: Uses and Perceptions of the Magic Lantern from the Seventeenth to the Twenty-First Century* (London: The Magic Lantern Society, 2005).

23. Barbauld, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, 198.

24. Ibid., 405.

experience only "transiently," positing "that men, mixing at large in society, have a brisker flow of ideas, and, seeing a greater variety of characters, introduce more of the business and pleasures of life into their productions" and perhaps possess greater "humour," which "is a scarcer product of the mind than sentiment, and more congenial to … [their] stronger powers."[25] Advertently or inadvertently, there are echoes of her 1775 "Thoughts on the Devotional Taste, on Sects, and on Establishments," where she declares that "[t]here is an extreme delicacy in all the finer affections, which makes them shy of observation, and easily checked," an assertion that prompts her to remark that "Love, Wonder, Pity … shrink from the notice of even an indifferent eye, and never indulge themselves freely but in solitude, or when heightened by the powerful force of sympathy."[26]

In comparatively assessing the fiction written by men and women, Barbauld tacitly challenges the assumption of Johnson and other male critics that the principal worth of the novel lay in its representation of a broad picture of nature and society. In his famous preface to *Joseph Andrews* (1742), Henry Fielding characterizes the novel as a species of fiction modelled on the epic and comedy rather than upon "those voluminous Works commonly called *Romances*, namely, *Clelia*, *Cleopatra*, *Astraea*, *Cassandra*, the *Grand Cyrus*, and innumerable others," coining the descriptive terms "comic Romance" and "comic Epic-Poem in Prose" to reinforce the distinction between novels and romances.[27] He goes on to state that the novel "differ[s] from Comedy, as the serious Epic from Tragedy: its Action being more extended and comprehensive; containing a much larger Circle of Incidents, and introducing a greater Variety of Characters."[28] The emphasis on

25. Ibid., 405–6.

26. Ibid., 219.

27. Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), 4. For more on the relationship of Fielding's fiction and romance, see Henry Knight Miller, *Henry Fielding's* Tom Jones *and the Romance Tradition* (Victoria, BC: University of Victoria Press, 1976) and Gary Gautier, "Henry and Sarah Fielding on Romance and Sensibility," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 31, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 195–214. Essentially, Gautier argues in his article that with respect to romance Fielding's "double strategy is to discredit the newfangled bourgeois version of romance wherever possible, and absorb the residue into a traditional romance framework" (209).

28. Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, 4.

breadth of action and variety of characters presents the novel as a masculine and worldly alternative to the seventeenth-century French romances. While Johnson is likely thinking about Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett when he warns in *The Rambler* No. 4 against novelists "who mingle good and bad qualities in their principal personages,"[29] he can be seen at least in some measure as elaborating the former author's critical account of the novel. Echoing Fielding, Johnson states that "[t]he works of fiction, with which the present generation seems more particularly delighted, are such as exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world, and influenced by passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind."[30] "This kind of writing," he affirms, "may be termed not improperly the comedy of romance, and is to be conducted nearly by the rules of comic poetry."[31] His subsequent insistence that the composition of romance requires "no further care than to retire to … [the] closet, let loose … [the] invention, and heat … [the] mind with incredibilities … without the toil of study, without knowledge of nature, or acquaintance with life," effectively privileges the novel over romance as a masculine and worldly form requiring broad knowledge of both nature and society.[32] Like Johnson, Barbauld might be nodding to Fielding in her statement that "[a] good novel is an epic in prose, with more of the character and less (indeed in modern novels

29. Johnson, *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, 3.20. Regarding the classification of Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759) as novel or romance, Gwin J. Kolb writes that it "*does* contain such standard trappings of the oriental romance as an exotic setting, highborn personages of both sexes, hidden identities, stories within the frame story, and a (mildly) exciting adventure—the abduction and return of the maid of honor, Pekuah," although he and others have regarded Johnson as moving deliberately beyond romance. Building on Kolb, Sheridan Baker makes the case that Johnson deliberately introduces elements of romance to overturn them as part of an effort to affirm an "essentially comic, psychological irony of the mind," a project essentially compatible with Johnson's strictures regarding the "comedy of romance" in *The Rambler* No. 4. See Gwin J. Kolb, ed. *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia* (New York: AHM Publishing, 1962), vi and Sheridan Baker, "*Rasselas*: Psychological Irony and Romance," *Philological Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (Jan. 1966): 250–51. Other relevant sources in this context include Ellen Douglass Leyburn, "'No Romantick Absurdities or Incredible Fictions': The Relation of Johnson's *Rasselas* to Lobo's *Voyage to Abyssinia*," *PMLA* 70, no. 5 (Dec. 1955): 1059–67.

30. Johnson, *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, 3.20.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

nothing) of the supernatural machinery."[33] Introducing her selection from Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, in volume 18 of *The British Novelists* series, she takes up his analogy between the novel and comedy, when she poses the following rhetorical question: "[W]hat is a comedy, but a short story, or novel put into dialogue?"[34] Submitting to the conception of the novel as an expression of worldly knowledge, Barbauld allows in her prefatory essay to *The British Novelists* that "[s]ome knowledge of the world is … gained by [novels,] … attained with more ease, and attended with less danger, than by mixing in real life."[35]

At the same time, she seems to believe that the novel finally plays a more important role for male and female readers as a stimulus to morality and feeling than as a source of knowledge. As she states in the introduction to Richardson's correspondence, in all countries fictional representations

> have been grafted upon the actions of their heroes … interwoven with their mythology … moulded upon the manners of the age, and, in return, have influenced not a little the manners of the next generation, by the principles they have insinuated, and the sensibilities they have exercised. A spirit of adventure, a high sense of honour, of martial glory, refined and romantic passion, sentimental delicacy, or all the melting sensibilities of humanity, have been, in their turns, inspired by this powerful engine, which takes so strong a hold on the fancy and the passions of young readers.[36]

From this passage it appears that one of the moral advantages of fiction lay in the capacity for idealized representation, captivating readers with images of "ideal excellence," as Barbauld puts it in "On Romances: An Imitation" (1773), and strategically re-appropriating age-old defenses of poetry stressing the moral advantages of art that improves upon nature, from Aristotle to Sidney and onwards.[37] Indeed, she warns that novels remained inevitably limited as sources of knowledge. Despite the efforts of novelists to adhere more strictly to the truth, novels would,

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33. Barbauld, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, 379.

34. Anna Letitia Barbauld, ed. *The British Novelists*, 50 vols. (London: F.C. and J. Rivington, 1810), 18.iv. McCarthy and Kraft include only an excerpt from Barbauld's introduction to *Joseph Andrews*, entitled "From Fielding," in the Broadview edition.

35. Barbauld, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, 410.

36. Barbauld, *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, 1.vii–viii.

37. Barbauld, *The Works of Anna Lætitia Barbauld*, 2.174.

in her view, "always be different from real life, and therefore always, perhaps, in some degree, dangerous to the young mind."[38] With respect to Richardson, she notes that while "he took the incidents, manners, and general character, of the times in which he lived," "he drew equally from nature and from his own ideas."[39] The result is a number of improbabilities in his narratives and in his characters. In another essay, "On the Uses of History," included in her posthumous *Works* (1825), Barbauld weighs the relative merits of history and fiction, concluding that "man must be shown as the being he really is, or no real knowledge is gained" and explicitly warning readers not to take literally novels such as Richardson's *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753) and Madame de La Fayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678).[40] While she has generally high words of praise for romances and novels, identifying them in "On Romances: An Imitation" as belonging to "the multifarious productions which the efforts of superior genius … have crowded upon the world" and in the introduction to Richardson's correspondence as deserving "no mean rank among the productions of genius," Barbauld cannot entirely dismiss their dangers in the hands of naïve and unworldly readers.[41]

According to Barbauld, a special susceptibility to feeling advantaged women not only as writers but also as readers of fiction. In another posthumously published prose piece entitled "On Female Studies" (1826), she argues that a woman's "very seclusion from the jarring interests and coarser amusements of society … fit her in a peculiar manner for the worlds of fancy and sentiment, and dispose her to the quickest relish of what is pathetic, sublime, or tender."[42] Directly addressing her female reader, she proposes that "the beauties of poetry, of moral painting, and all in general that is comprised under the term

38. Barbauld, *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, 1.cxxiii.

39. Ibid., 1.xxi.

40. Barbauld, *The Works of Anna Lætitia Barbauld*, 2.292.

41. Ibid., 2.171 and Barbauld, *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, 1.ix. Reeve, who shares a high regard for prose fiction, makes this rather pointed observation: "the passion for tales and stories is common to all times, and all countries, and varies only according to the customs and manners of different people; and those who most affect to despise them under one form, will receive and admire them in another." (Reeve, *The Progress of Romance and The History of Charoba, Queen of Aegypt*, 1.64.)

42. Barbauld, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, 476–77.

of polite literature, lie particularly open" to women.[43] Interestingly, it is this situation of relative seclusion that prompts Barbauld further to recommend scientific alongside literary reading. As she underscores, science has the capacity to excite wonder through defamiliarization, teaching us "not to despise common things" and generating "interest in every thing … [we] see."[44] Through acquiring knowledge of science, she implies, the most sheltered women might enjoy wonder in the "common things" they encounter every day. As such, Barbauld offers a preemptive challenge to Watt's view that Enlightenment natural philosophy or science acted straightforwardly as a force of disenchantment. Indeed, her speculation in "On the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing" that the magic and marvels of romance arose from a lay ignorance of mechanics, medicine, and the workings of nature suggests that science had served all along as a source of wonder and inspiration for authors.

While Barbauld never produced a novel of her own, she drew deliberately on science as a source of wonder in her poetry. In this project, she evidently took cues from her brother, John Aikin, who in *An Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry* (1777) urges poets to study natural history in order to counter "the insipidity of Modern Poetry" and "supineness and servile imitation," which had "prevailed to a greater degree in the description of nature, than in any other part of poetry."[45] Notable examples of Barbauld's efforts this way include "To Mrs. P[riestley], with some Drawings of Birds and Insects" (1773) and "The Invitation: To Miss B*****" (1773). In the second poem, Barbauld explicitly connects the study of natural history with wonder, imagining young male students at the liberal Dissenting academy in Warrington who "[w]ith sharpen'd eyes inspect an hornet's sting / And all the wonders of an insect's wing" (157–58).[46] The two poems

43. Ibid., 477.

44. Ibid., 480.

45. John Aikin, *An Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry* (Warrington, 1777; London, 1777), 1, 5. For more on this essay see William Powell Jones, "John Aikin on the Use of Natural History in Poetry," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 21 (1963): 439–43 and Jeffrey Plank, "John Aikin on Science and Poetry," *Studies in Burke and His Time* 18 (1977): 167–78.

46. Unless otherwise specified, my source for Barbauld's poetry is McCarthy and Kraft's Broadview edition, and dates of composition and publication are provided from here. Line numbers are indicated parenthetically. Useful sources on the

repeatedly conflate the wonders of science with those of romance. As editors William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft note, the sight of "the Insect race" (73) "burst[ing] their silken shell" (80) and, after a moment's hesitation, "launch[ing] at once upon the untried air" (82), in the first poem, elicits "two scenes from Torquato Tasso's [early modern romance] *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1581) … one … [in which] the hero Tancred stabs a tree only to discover that he has stabbed his beloved Clorinda, imprisoned in it" and a second in which "the hero Rinaldo witnesses the 'marvel' of trees giving birth to young women."[47] Romance continues to serve as a reference point throughout the entire poem. It manifests itself, for instance, in Barbauld's descriptions of the birds who "haunt the rushy moor" and "lonely woods" (25); "[t]he tawny EAGLE" who "seats his callow brood / High on the cliff, and feasts his young with blood" (31–32), and "forms" "his lonely kingdom … / Amidst the gathering clouds, and sullen storms" (35–36); and the purple-crested "silver PHEASANT" (48) who originates "[o]n Asia's myrtle shores, by Phasis' stream" (49) but who has now become a "beauteous captive" (53) in his current alien environment. With the pheasant, we enter specifically into the realm of Oriental romance. Equally evocative of Oriental romance are the butterflies with "wings" of

> … azure, green, and purple gloss'd,
> Studded with colour'd eyes, with gems emboss'd,
> Inlaid with pearl, and mark'd with various stains
> Of lively crimson thro' their dusky veins. (105–108)

Immediately following this gorgeous image of brightly coloured butterfly wings, we are self-consciously returned to the realm of medieval romance with "the proud giant of the beetle race" (113) whose "polish'd limbs" (114) are enclosed in "shining arms" (114), "[l]ike some stern warrior formidably bright" (115). Barbauld indirectly suggests a continuity between the world of modern science and that of medieval romance elsewhere in "Verses written on the Back of an old Visitation Copy of the Arms of Dr. Priestley's Family, with Proposals for a New

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Dissenting academy include Irene Parker, *Dissenting Academies in England: Their Rise and Progress and Their Place among the Educational Systems of the Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914) and Joe William Ashley Smith, *The Birth of Modern Education: The Contribution of the Dissenting Academies 1660–1800* (London: Independent Press, 1954).

47. See footnote 1 in Barbauld, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, 48.

Escutcheon" (according to the editors, probably written around 1769 and not published until 1994), where she teases her friend, the noted experimental philosopher Joseph Priestley, that he needs to update his family arms, proposing a design with a blue background and a substitution of the following elements: "lightnings" (20), "meteors" (20), and "Liberty" with "her cap and spear" (22) "[f]or the plum'd helmet, and the broken lance" (21); "the mild sceptre of the pastoral crook" (24) for "the rude compulsive grappling hook" (23); and the figures of Science and Fame for the "lions guarding hostile towers" (25).[48] In "The Invitation: To Miss B*****," romance comes together with modern technology in the description of the Bridgewater canal system that prominently features as part of the landscape around Warrington. Following a brief account of the canal system's construction, the poet imagines a passing traveller, who

> … with pleasing wonder sees
> The white sail gleaming thro' the dusky trees;
> And views the alter'd landscape with surprise,
> And doubts the magic scenes which round him rise.
> Now, like a flock of swans, above his head
> Their woven wings the flying vessels spread.… (67–72)

To the amazed traveller, the appearance of the vessels making their way through the Bridgewater canal system in this passage evidently resembles the swan chariots of fairy tale. As we know, fairy tales provided a rich ongoing source of material for romance, especially of the medieval variety, and continued to exert a powerful fascination over the collective imagination well after the eighteenth century, as witnessed by the success, for example, of the Brothers Grimm (Wilhelm and Jacob), Hans Christian Andersen, Andrew Lang, and many others. The traveller who mistakes the Bridgewater canal system for a magical mode of transportation invites direct comparison to the audience for medieval romances that Barbauld discusses in "On the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing," whose taste for this kind of fiction was nourished by the wonder its members experienced in real life

48. My source for this particular poem, not included in the Broadview edition, is William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft, eds. *The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld* (Athens, GA and London: University of Georgia Press, 1994), where it appears on pages 30 to 32. Again, line numbers are indicated parenthetically.

encounters with superior scientific knowledge and skill.[49] A different kind of modern technology produces a similar moment of wonder in "Inscription for an Ice-House" (1795; 1825). The poem begins with a direct address to a "Stranger" (1), whom the poet bids enter the "iron door / Thrice locked and bolted" (1–2) in order to admire the "rude arch beneath / That vaults with ponderous stone the cell" (2–3) where "man, the great magician, who controls / Fire, earth and air, and genii of the storm" (4–5) and who "bends the most remote and opposite things / To do him service and perform his will" (6–7), has imprisoned the giant Winter and made him "fair Pleasure's minister" (20). The mingled images from Oriental romances and chivalric romances such as Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1596) signal yet another entry into the world of romance.

This interest in capturing scientific wonders in poetry did not preclude a somewhat complicated attitude towards the project of Enlightenment natural philosophy. A number of critics have established Barbauld's ambivalence to at least certain aspects of eighteenth-century scientific practice.[50] In "The Invitation: To Miss B*****," Barbauld arguably distinguishes different approaches within the sciences, juxtaposing the Warrington students enamoured of "all the wonders of an insect's wing" with other students at the academy who

> … trace with curious search the hidden cause
> Of nature's changes, and her various laws;
> Untwist her beauteous web, disrobe her charms,
> And hunt her to her elemental forms.… (159–62)

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49. Although her main claim lies elsewhere, Sarah Tindal Kareem partially anticipates my argument regarding the interweaving of science and romance in Barbauld's poetry in her discussion of the poem "Washing-Day" (post-1783; 1825). See her article "Enlightenment Bubbles, Romantic Worlds," *The Eighteenth Century* 56, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 85–104. "Washing-Day" can be cited as another example of poetry in which Barbauld draws on science and technology, in this instance the Montgolfier hot air balloon, to blur the line between the wonders of science and those of romance. The image of the "silken ball" (82) that "[r]ides buoyant thro' the clouds" (83) evokes in this case the magical flying devices of Oriental romance.

50. See, for example, Penny Bradshaw's analysis, in "Gendering the Enlightenment: Conflicting Images of Progress in the Poetry of Anna Lætitia Barbauld," *Women's Writing* 5, no. 3 (1998): 353–71 and Mary Ann Bellanca's, in "Science, Sympathy, and Anna Barbauld's 'The Mouse's Petition,'" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37, no. 1 (2003): 47–67.

In this passage, experimental philosophy emerges as encouraging an attitude towards nature very different from that of natural history. It positions scientists in a potentially antagonistic and exploitative relationship with nature. Barbauld notably warns against the possible revenge of the physical world in "Inscription for an Ice-House," comparing Winter confined to the ice-house not only to a giant who has been bound in service to "fair Pleasure," but also to the Biblical Samson who has been enslaved in the temple of the Philistines. Regardless of such reservations, however, Barbauld evidently recognizes the products of modern science and engineering, such as canals and refrigeration, as no less conducive to the experience of wonder than objects in nature.

The repeated blurring of the wonders of science and romance in her writings might finally beg the question of the extent to which Barbauld, at least, is reinventing wonder. Barbauld places magic and science, like romances and novels, along the same continuum. Her writings suggest both that the taste for wonders remained undiminished in the modern world and that its sources were not necessarily that different from what they had been in the past. Yet it seems unlikely that Barbauld would have disputed Kareem's point that the Enlightenment had changed the character of romances in certain important respects. In *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Reinvention of Wonder*, Kareem posits that eighteenth-century Gothic romances such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) counted on having a readership that could discriminate between fact and fiction, and appreciate the wonders of romance as an essentially aesthetic experience. As she effectively establishes, while *The Castle of Otranto* might initially appear somewhat removed from the mainstream tradition of literary realism, it nevertheless illustrates some of the very same literary techniques as Fielding's "comic Romance."[51] In an early and often overlooked critical piece, "On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror; with Sir Bertrand, A Fragment" (1773), Aikin notably recognizes that

> [t]he old Gothic romance and the Eastern tale, with their genii, giants, enchantments, and transformations, however a refined critic may censure them as absurd and extravagant, will ever retain a most powerful

51. Kareem, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Reinvention of Wonder*, 122.

> influence on the mind, and interest the reader, independently of all peculiarity of taste.[52]

Aikin acknowledges having wondered himself at the persisting allure of such fictions and often speculating that readers were primarily motivated by the need to relieve "suspense" or satisfy "curiosity," preferring "the smart pang of a violent emotion" to "the uneasy craving of an unsatisfied desire."[53] However, he insists that he has since come around to the view that these fictions give readers genuine "pleasure," in "the excitement of surprise from new and wonderful objects."[54] Specifically with regard to fictional manifestations of the supernatural, he states that they stimulate "our imagination," which, "darting forth, explores with rapture the new world … laid open to its view, and rejoices in the expansion of its powers," and that together "[p]assion" and "fancy" "elevate the soul to its highest pitch; and the pain of terror is lost in amazement."[55] He contends, moreover, that

> the more wild, fanciful, and extraordinary are the circumstances of a scene of horror, the more pleasure we receive from it; and where they are too near common nature, though violently borne by curiosity through the adventure, we cannot repeat it, or reflect on it, without an over-balance of pain.[56]

In this way, he grants romances an enduring advantage over novels in the distance the former maintained from "common nature."

The recognition that the eighteenth century never saw a straightforward shift from romance to realism and that wonder remained a crucial aspect of the experience of fiction well beyond the end of

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52. John Aikin and Anna Lætitia Barbauld, *Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose*, 3rd ed. (London, 1792), 122. For the sake of simplicity, Aikin is given straightforward credit for authorship in this article. Lucy Aikin explicitly claims this piece for her father (see *The Works of Anna Lætitia Barbauld*, 1.xiii–xiv). However, a number of sources credit Barbauld or both siblings. Among those who posit that Barbauld and Aikin engaged in a generally collaborative mode of writing in the collections they published together are Daniel E. White in "The 'Joineriana': Anna Barbauld, the Aikin Family Circle, and the Dissenting Public Sphere," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32, no. 4 (Summer 1999), 511–33 and Michelle Levy in *Family Authorship and Romantic Print Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

53. Aikin and Barbauld, *Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose*, 123.

54. Ibid., 125.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid., 126.

this period invites continuing reappraisal of "the rise of the novel" narrative. Margaret Anne Doody explains how the effort to distance the novel from romances during the eighteenth century and to exploit the criteria of "'[p]robability' and 'verisimilitude'" formed part of an attempt "to discipline the … [novel] and make it acceptable," allowing it to "enter the Kingdom of Literature—or the Republic of Letters."[57] As already noted, the critical writings of Fielding and Johnson can be identified as part of this effort. In *The Rambler* No. 4, Johnson claims that novels "are written chiefly to the young, the ignorant, and the idle, to whom they serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions into life."[58] It is the perceived role that novels play in providing juvenile readers with knowledge of the world and moral guidance that apparently interests him as a critic rather than any strong sense of their artistic merit. That said, Johnson still clearly much prefers novels to romances, and, like Fielding, he is fully prepared to sacrifice romances in order to give the novel some modicum of literary respectability. In elevating the novel at the expense of romance, Fielding and Johnson seem to be positioning the former as an inherently masculine genre, although, as Doody underlines, the gender politics of romances and novels were never straightforward, and if "[o]ne way of looking at prose fiction before the eighteenth century is to assume that it is an old-fashioned, feudal, and feminine thing, which it is necessary to turn into an appropriately modern and manly thing," and "another way of looking at the same process of history is to assume that prose fiction before the eighteenth century was manly and heroic, while in the new era it is domestic and feminine."[59] In the twentieth century, Fielding's and Johnson's similar accounts of the history of the novel can be seen as indirectly picked up by Watt and others. One reason seems

57. Doody, *The True Story of the Novel*, 286.

58. Johnson, *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, 3.21. He acknowledges exceptions, such as Richardson, to whom he allows the possibility of appealing "occasionally" to "the busy, the aged, and the studious" (Samuel Johnson, *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Bruce Redford, 5 vols. [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992–1994], 1.48).

59. Doody, *The True Story of the Novel*, 274. Johnson's definitions of the "romance" and the "novel" in his famous dictionary imply significant continuity in the persisting preoccupation with love. As genres, Johnson defines "romance" as "[a] military fable of the middle ages; a tale of wild adventures in war and love" and the novel as "[a] small tale, generally of love" (*A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols. [London, 1755], n.p.)

to have been an interest in the novel as a product of Western European modernity. It remains indisputable that the forces identified by Watt as having produced the novel have significantly shaped its development. Situating the novel historically in relation to an emergent commercial capitalist order has continued to generate insights. An excellent recent example is Mary Poovey's analysis of how interests connected to a new system of financing contributed towards the establishment of a category of fiction separate from that of non-fiction.[60] However, as Doody points out, circumscribing the story of the novel in this way equally runs the risk of obscuring what she calls "the true 'Great Tradition' stretching back not only to [Giovanni] Boccaccio but to Apuleius and Heliodorus."[61] The novel has been too easily reduced to an artefact of Western European modernity, associated with the rise of bourgeois, commercial capitalism and secularization, ignoring not only past but also non-Western European contributions to the development of the novel as a form.[62] To some, it might further seem that a rather mundane, as well as incomplete, sense of the novel has prevailed, and that we are overdue for a re-enchantment of eighteenth-century fiction.

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60. Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

61. Doody, *The True Story of the Novel*, 288.

62. Another objection might be to the perceived class politics of "the rise of the novel" narrative. While the novel has been celebrated as a middle-class form that sets itself in opposition to aristocratic romance, it has been condemned (or ignored) for this very reason. Terry Eagleton observes that the call for realism in art can be seen in some sense as an elitist move by those who do not require escape from the harsh reality of the workaday world, leading him to reflect: "The irony is that the novel as a form is wedded to the common life, whereas the common people themselves prefer the monstrous and miraculous." (Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel: An Introduction* [Oxford: Blackwell, 2005], 5.) Barbauld would probably beg to differ at least to some extent, pointing to limitations of female existence in every station and "complaints" from which no one, of whatever class, can escape. As already noted, she regards escapism as something to be found and appreciated in both novels and romances, and Eagleton himself fully accepts that the novel "has never entirely cut" its "roots" to romance and that the question of class politics in literary "realism" is complicated. See Eagleton, *The English Novel*, 2 and 9.