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Review of *The Afterlives of Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, ed. Daniel Cook and Nicholas Seager (CUP, 2015)

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DANIEL COOK and NICHOLAS SEAGER (eds). **The Afterlives of Eighteenth-Century Fiction**. Pp. x + 304. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Cloth, £65.

Adaptations, appropriations and associated ‘afterlives’ abound in recent scholarship on the ‘long’ eighteenth century, not least in discussions of fiction. Books such as Jane Spencer’s *Aphra Behn’s Afterlife* (2001), Ann Rigney’s *The Afterlives of Walter Scott* (2012) and M-C. Newbould’s *Adaptations of Laurence Sterne’s Fiction* (2013) take their place among a raft of studies that explore, among other things, the illustration, European reception, and screen adaptation of works by Defoe, Swift, Sterne, Austen and Scott. Austen, notoriously, has her own mini-industry of afterlife studies, which includes such titles as *Uses of Austen: Jane’s Afterlives* (2012) and *The Digital Afterlives of Jane Austen* (2014). A related if more thematic study, much-referenced in the book under review, is David Brewer’s *The Afterlife of Character, 1726-1825* (2005). ‘Afterlives’, we may surmise, are in modish rude health in the academic discourse on the eighteenth-century novel.

Yet in some ways this remains a rather sprawling field of enquiry, encompassing as it does a broad body of imaginative responses, produced in various media across a number of centuries. *The Afterlives of Eighteenth-Century Fiction* looks to draw together some of these disparate strands and to give greater focus to the subject. The editors set out their conceptual stall in a smart introduction, which flags critical resistance to the ‘tyranny’ of the ‘original’ text (p.5), and in Daniel Cook’s wide-ranging opening essay, which critiques a notion of ‘proprietary’ authorship that depends upon historically-specific constructions of legal copyright and creative originality. Intriguingly, the two pieces that follow consider not afterlives but origins and precursors. Enquiring, teasingly, whether the novel might itself be the ‘afterlife’ of romance, Michael McKeon traces the convention of ‘family romance’, or ‘discovered parentage’, from the Norman Conquest up to Austen. He is especially engaging

on Richardson's misleading hints concerning Pamela's higher birth, and the heroine's 'mock-discovery' that 'her real parent is her actual parent' (pp.68, 56). In a discussion of the 'afterlives of the picaresque', Leah Orr argues that chapbook versions of picaresque narratives and folktales, which pared away plots to focus on central protagonists, represent the 'missing link' between seventeenth-century (criminal) narratives and the Defovian novel proper. This argument has the great virtues of clarity and explanatory power while also depending on some overly neat distinctions between elements purely of plot and other narrative 'incidents' that serve to reveal character (pp.86, 80).

Two of the standout essays illustrate the collection's methodological diversity. In a deft and elegantly argued critical analysis, Sarah Raff shows how Richardson's conception of guardianship in *Sir Charles Grandison* was subtly revised by Dickens in *Bleak House*, in the figure of John Jarndyce. In a more archival piece, Nicholas Seager examines newspaper serialisations of works by authors such as Behn, Swift and Defoe. This richly researched essay attends to financial and legislative contexts, readers' exertions of taste, and the treatment of serialised works that were variously abridged, curtailed, or in some cases even expanded beyond the original narrative – as with the serialisation of *Moll Flanders* in Thomas Read's *London Post* (p.124). Subsequent essays extend this focus on dissemination and editorial alteration. M-C. Newbould explores George Kearsley's anthologies of authorial 'beauties' through the examples of Fielding and Sterne. Her essay is particularly illuminating on the successive recalibrations of *The Beauties of Sterne*, which ran through thirteen editions during the 1780s and 1790s. Dahlia Porter examines the mixed fortunes of verses originally included in late-century novels but subsequently extracted as 'portable excerpts' (p.155). Whereas sonnets from Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline* (1788) became the author's own lyrical expressions in later editions of her *Elegiac Sonnets*, Ann Radcliffe's fictions were reduced to historical footnotes in anthologies that reprinted their verses alone.

Together, Seager, Newbould and Porter foreground the re-mediation of novelistic material in other print-cultural forms: newspapers, miscellanies, anthologies, reviews. Another group of essays broadens the focus to visual and theatrical culture. Departing from strictly novelistic afterlives, David Brewer considers alternative models of personation in ‘high-end’ puppet performances of Fielding’s drama. His essay energetically conveys the challenge that these multilayered performances pose to current thinking about fictional ‘character’, although whether this adds up to a ‘vernacular theory’ of eighteenth-century fictionality is moot (p.175). Michael Burden’s assured (if somewhat condensed) piece sketches the different kinds of alterations – including the incorporation of spectacular visual effects – involved in the adaptation for musical theatre of *Pamela*, *Caleb Williams*, *Frankenstein* and *Ivanhoe*. In another of the collection’s highlights, David Taylor addresses Gillray’s celebrated 1803 caricature, *The King of Brobdingnag and Gulliver*. Registering at the outset that the print is ‘almost too familiar’, Taylor nonetheless offers a richly detailed, contextualised account of its political message – not least its innovative casting of George III as a ‘peace-loving patriarch’ (pp.212, 223).

Three further essays move us forward to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Robert Mayer’s account of Defoe on screen contains some fascinating discussion of Patrick Keiller’s post-industrial re-visionings of *Robinson Crusoe* and of the short animated film *The Periwig-Maker* (2000), an ‘essay in epidemiology’ that responds to *A Journal of the Plague Year* (p.240). Jillian Heydt-Stevenson writes persuasively about recent screen adaptations of *Sense and Sensibility* which exemplify the shift towards the kind of romantic comedy, focused on the happiness of couples, that the novel itself resists. Finally, Peter Sabor assesses similarities of subject matter and comic technique in Austen’s *History of England* (completed in 1791, but not published until 1922) and Sellar and Yeatman’s *1066 and All That* (1930).

This is a pithy and suggestive essay, if also one that hedges its bets on the question of direct influence.

The collection as a whole would have benefitted from the inclusion of an essay on eighteenth-century fiction and the novel today – on the model of Sarah Raff’s discussion of Richardson and Dickens. More attention could also have been paid to its organising metaphor. As the editors observe, ‘afterlife’ is conceived here as a ‘capacious’ and ‘inclusive’ term (p.5). The collection undoubtedly benefits from this encouragement to flexibility, but at a cost to conceptual definition. ‘Afterlives’ implies both cultural and temporal distinctions, a point that bears particularly on Seager’s discussion of newspaper serialisations, some of which followed hard on the heels of the original publications. These serialised extracts might easily be viewed as part of the works’ early histories rather than as subsequent ‘afterlives’ – particularly for those readers who first encountered the novels in this way. When, indeed, does a textual ‘life’ become an ‘afterlife’? And is it critically desirable to regard all forms of a work, beyond its initial publication, as posterior to, and distinct from, the – supposedly tyrannous – original?

While the framing concept might have been expressed more precisely – if more prosaically – as ‘other’ lives rather than ‘after’ lives, the diversity of works analysed is itself testament to the range of engagements on display in this excellent collection. The essays, which are substantially footnoted and usefully cross-referenced, are of a consistently high standard. Cook, Seager and their contributors are to be commended for helping to shape the field as well as extending it through this significant new body of research.

Shaun Regan, Queen’s University Belfast