Spring 2004

Matched Pairs: Gender and Intertextual Dialogue in Eighteenth-Century Fiction by Joseph F. Bartolomeo (review)

Deborah D. Rogers
University of Maine - Main, DRogers@maine.edu

By defining the Swiftian signature in denotative intellectual terms, however, the critic loses the visceral Swift. All of the book's discussion of savages and the poor is from the standpoint of the European cultured class. A Swiftian dimension is missing. How the savages and the poor feel in return or even a sense of commiseration is no part of this book. Mr. Rawson makes no excuses for holding to the rulers' perspective. Every control from that elitist point of view is a mind game up to and including mass extermination that looks unfeelingly on the laboring, beggarly, or idle poor as a mercantile commodity. Mr. Rawson's book is itself an intellectual exercise and a fully documented one.

Even if Swift's layered meanings in the *Travels* turn out to be velleities, that is, mild wishes without action, on mass extermination of Irish savages, and even if he sends indefatigable researchers like Mr. Rawson rummaging among the satirist's literary and travel sources for Yahoohood, Swift deserves the last word. Swift composed his own signature on his epitaph. It is about the feeling disposition and temper and not the mind, about freedom and not colonial power. He is buried ''where savage indignation can no more lacerate his heart. Go, traveler, and imitate if you can one who strove with all his might to champion liberty.'' Heart triumphs over mind in this last word. In his 1985 biography of Swift, David Nokes notes the Roman courage, daring, and challenge to the rest of mankind to match him.

The nonintellectual connotations of *savage* in this feeling epitaph include wild, fierce, furiously angry, unsparing in speech, indomitable, and valiant. As for *indignation* it implies righteous anger and contempt at what is unworthy or wrongful, including meanness, injustice, and wickedness. In passing, Mr. Rawson discusses Swift's black humor. The proud, feeling, and challenging epitaph exactly coincides with Andrè Breton's notion that Swift initiated black humor, which Breton defines as a savage, funereal jest. Like the epitaph, black humor suggests empathy for, and identity with, the downtrodden.

Kenneth Craven *New York*

JOSEPH F. BARTOLOMEO. *Matched Pairs: Gender and Intertextual Dialogue in Eighteenth-Century Fiction*. Newark: Delaware, 2002. Pp. viii + 242. $44.50.

At first glance, this book, which is admittedly influenced by Ann Messenger's *His and Hers* (1986), may conjure up images of monogrammed towels or jammies. Mr. Bartolomeo's comparative approach across gender lines is, however, no gimmick. Rather, it is in the same spirit as his previous book, *A New Species of Criticism*, which argues that dialogue among and between authors and critics reflects inconsistencies that constantly remake the novel.

In *Matched Pairs*, Mr. Bartolomeo links eighteenth-century women novelists to their male counterparts. He attempts nothing less than to give the *coup de grace* to feminocentric approaches to the canon. To this end, he reconsiders the contribution of female writers by examining cross-gender critical discourse and carefully reading complementary texts. These are set against the historical and cultural circumstances that helped produce them. Mr. Bartolomeo considers gender and genre by comparing *David Simple* with *Joseph Andrews*, *The Female Quixote* with *Clarissa*, and *Evelina* with *Roderick*

Random. He illuminates the frequently explored connections between *The Italian* and *The Monk*, problematizing attempts to categorize Gothic fiction as Male or Female Gothic.

As the comparison between Radcliffe and Lewis may suggest, Mr. Bartolomeo is at his most convincing when he focuses on influence. Thus, his argument that Eliza Haywood's *Idalia* influenced Daniel Defoe's *Roxana* is compelling. More important, however, than the comparative intertextual examination of early male and female novelists is Mr. Bartolomeo's argument against essentialism. Applauding (at the same time that he contributes to) efforts to uncover forgotten women writers, Mr. Bartolomeo nonetheless argues against excluding men, and against a separate female tradition in literature.

Since the mid 1980s women novelists have, of course, been the focus of much critical attention in the interest of arriving at a more balanced assessment of the rise of the novel. Mr. Bartolomeo suggests that while the recent exclusive concentration on female novelists may have been necessary to counteract their previous exclusion from the canon, this limited focus provides a skewed view of literary history, replicating ''essentializing tendencies that feminist critics themselves generally deplore.''

If Mr. Bartolomeo attempts to debunk the essentialist argument for a separate female literary tradition, it is this very perspective that may now allow him the luxury of his discomfort: Fewer than twenty years ago, many texts written by women, which had long been out of print, were accessible only in selected rare book libraries. That these works are now more widely available is due to the scholarly effort to recover eighteenth-century women's fiction. It was this project that led to the (still inadequate) reprinting of works by eighteenth-century women, allowing the scholarly community not only to re-evaluate the canon but also to write books like *Matched Pairs*.

According to Mr. Bartolomeo, many critics argue against essentialism only to focus exclusively on female novelists. They fail to walk the walk. Here I think it fair to consider whether it may be possible in practice to distinguish between exclusivity and essentialism.

Although a separate female literary tradition may be impossible to prove, or at the very least, be passé, much can be said for this perspective (however essentialist it may be), which is inspiring the recovery of fiction by women. It is, however, still difficult to access many texts by early female writers. Most of these works have yet to be reprinted. Although we can praise the recent efforts of presses like Oxford, Kentucky, and Broadview to publish modern editions of these authors, relatively few have come out.

Mr. Bartolomeo provocatively attempts to sound the death knell for a literature of our own. Indeed, his intertextual comparison of female and male novelists constitutes a brilliant contribution to our understanding of the importance of gender in the development of the novel. For him, the time has come for a more balanced and integrative history of the novel. Yet this effort may be premature. Echoing my children, I would ask, ''Are we there yet?''

Deborah D. Rogers *University of Maine*