Reading Smell in Eighteenth-Century Fiction by Emily C. Friedman (review)

Rebecca Tierney-Hynes

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ambitions and nationalistic fashions of Europe, Montagu welcomes Turkey’s hybrid population and freeing versions of femininity. However, when the women of North Africa reinscribe limits on her tolerance for the other, she retreats to a Eurocentric perspective.

The subsequent chapter sees Defoe’s Crusoe enact a similar movement of identification with, then recoil from, the lions of Africa and the wolves and bears of Europe. Drawing on animal studies, this chapter tackles several uneasy episodes toward the end of Crusoe’s adventures. His destruction of an animal idol, Van Renen concludes, fails to “reestablish a hierarchy between himself and natives/animals,” because the vandalism is an irrationally inhuman act, and because it exposes the way the human depends on (the erasure of) the animal (222). This illuminating reading of these puzzling episodes exemplifies the way the grounds of this book’s argument seem to shift within and between its chronologically ordered chapters. The coda on James Thomson’s *The Seasons* leaves us with a more familiar account of a writer celebrating both the landscape and the commercial activity which threatens that environment. We seem to have travelled some distance from Milton and Marvell, yet these were eventful decades. If *Nature and the New Science* generates contradictions, it does so partly to emphasize the dynamic multiplicity of the longer Enlightenment.

**Megan Kitching** is a research assistant and tutor in English at the University of Otago, New Zealand; her research interests include eighteenth-century and contemporary poetry and the natural sciences.

*Reading Smell in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* by Emily C. Friedman

Review by Rebecca Tierney-Hynes, University of Edinburgh

Emily C. Friedman presents an enormous wealth of information about smells, fair and foul, addictive and absent, in the long eighteenth century. Sampling texts ranging chronologically from Daniel Defoe’s *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) through Jane Austen’s juvenilia, she traces scents and the reactions they provoked across a huge number of novels and plays, setting them carefully in their richly evoked historical context.

Outlining the difficulty of approaching such an evanescent thing as scent in literary texts, let alone the challenge of recovering its long-ago significance, Friedman explains both the inevitable incompleteness of her recovery of eighteenth-century smells and the importance of her attempt. Her stated aim is to explore “the collection of meanings that
accreted around scents in the period, and how those meanings formed a vocabulary that writers could draw on” (4). In the end, she finds no consistent thread of meaning around particular smells, and thus no coherent vocabulary for scent. The nature of the project seems to have precluded a focused argument about the significance of smells, driving the book instead toward an exploration of instances of smells and smelling gathered together under general rubrics. In themselves, these instances are often funny, charming, or revealing, but the absence of an overarching narrative detailing the cultural meaning of eighteenth-century smells felt a little unsatisfying. Friedman’s excellent concluding argument about the middle-class gentility of scentlessness seemed to suggest the possibility of an argumentative thread that did not quite make a clear appearance earlier in the book.

Chapters on tobacco, smelling-salts, body odour, and sulfur—“Clouds of Smoke, Huffs of Snuff,” “Running to the Smelling-Bottle,” “The Smell of Other People,” “The Age of Sulfur”—gather illuminating examples of eighteenth-century stinks. Passing readily beneath the critic’s radar, these instances of smells, when brought together, grant us an enriched understanding of how powerful a role they played in the newly sensual and tactile worlds of eighteenth-century fiction. Friedman’s survey of tobacco-use crosses class and gender lines, as she assesses the varied cultural responses to this new and “new-world” commodity. Smelling-bottles, so closely associated with feminine fragility, are revealed not simply to have their more obvious affiliation with affectation and over-refinement, but also to have medicinal uses as plague preventative. Friedman shows that smelling-bottles were often used as smell-blockers, interrupting the relationship of fictional characters to their over-scented worlds. Her chapter on personal stinks, focused appropriately on Jonathan Swift and Tobias Smollett, explores the class associations of particular bodily odours. Friedman notes acutely that Swift associates Gulliver’s disordered “olfactory categories” (74) with his loss of reason: “Gulliver’s loss of mental stability and identity is at last a failure of his most instinctive sense: his sense of smell” (73). Next, a chapter on sulfur, the smell of which is the brimstone of hell, explains its further associations with the industrial revolution and with the spectacularly destructive Lisbon earthquake of 1755. The book’s conclusion, “The Great Unscenting,” offers readings of Samuel Richardson and Austen, suggesting the virtues of cleanliness and the unscented domesticity of new middle-class values.

The orderliness and care with which Friedman has gathered this immensely important body of evidence makes for a pleasurable read. This illuminating topic, so timely in its address to the importance of the senses and the role of material experience in literary historical writing, has been
treated with great sensitivity. The range and depth of Friedman’s reading, and the context she has brought to bear, make the value of this material eminently clear. The book’s wide and thorough survey, supported by solid historical detail, owes its methodology to cultural studies. And, perhaps inevitably, it shares the feature sometimes associated with this school of criticism: it has a tendency to fall short in the depth and nuance of its analysis in favour of presenting a greater volume of data.

Rebecca Tierney-Hynes is a lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Edinburgh. She writes primarily on eighteenth-century fiction and drama.

Mother Goose Refigured: A Critical Translation of Charles Perrault’s Fairy Tales, ed. Christine A. Jones
Review by Bronwyn Reddan, Deakin University

Taking the classic figure of Mother Goose as her starting point, Christine Jones’s critical edition of Charles Perrault’s Histoires ou Contes du temps passé offers new perspectives on Perrault’s tales and their cultural legacy as titans of the fairy tale canon. The eight tales featured in this volume are (to use their common titles) Sleeping Beauty, Little Red Riding Hood, Blue Beard, Puss in Boots, The Fairies, Cinderella, Ricky with the Tuft, and Hop o’ My Thumb. The tales were first published in French in 1697 after circulating in a handwritten manuscript with the iconic title Contes de ma Mère l’Oye from 1695. As Jones’s careful reconstruction of the publication history of Histoires ou Contes shows, Perrault’s tales have not suffered from a lack of attention from translators, publishers, or readers, so why publish another edition of the Mother Goose tales? The answer lies in the quality of Jones’s translations and commentary on interpretation of the tales, their author, and their place in fairy tale history.

Mother Goose Refigured seeks to unburden Perrault’s tales from “the weight of [their] celebrity” by asking, “What would the stories look like if they were relieved of the great responsibility to be classics?” (79). Jones’s response is to give the tales a modern facelift designed to remove the signs of ageing left by their three-hundred-year-old history. Her translations use a modern English idiom to present the tales as “innovative relics” (79) that are at once “foreign and familiar” (87) to fairy tale readers. In doing so, Jones does not shy away from difficult semantic decisions. Her facelift is a radical one as it revises deeply ingrained conventions of the anglophone reception of Perrault’s tales, including character names and, therefore, tale titles. For example, “Little Red Riding Hood” becomes “The