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Review of Women, Work, and Clothes in the Eighteenth-Century Novel, by Chloe Wigston Smith

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Chloe Wigston Smith. *Women, Work, and Clothes in the Eighteenth-Century Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. 269. \ \$95.00 (cloth).

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the crisis and its settlement. On the contrary, Stephen depicts the ecclesiastical revolution as a backward-looking affair: the definitive restoration of the reformed tradition in Scotland, the fulfillment of the ideals of Knox, the reformers, and the covenanters (76). There was a vision of national life permeated in its every aspect by godly Protestantism. The revolution thus arrested “the ecclesiastical see-sawing” (292) of early modern Scotland and ensured that Presbyterianism would form the basis of Scottish civic identity for centuries. Situated between the religious heroism of the Killing Time and the liberal genius of the Scottish Enlightenment, the reputation of this age in Scottish history, Stephen acknowledges, has been less than favorable. But he powerfully demands its reconsideration. After all, the Presbyterian revolutionaries of 1689 had been able to do that which eluded the likes of Samuel Rutherford or Richard Cameron: they had made their revolution permanent.

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CHLOE WIGSTON SMITH. *Women, Work, and Clothes in the Eighteenth-Century Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. 269. \$95.00 (cloth).
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Do clothes make the man? In this book, Chloe Wigston Smith answers no: in fact, she argues, eighteenth-century novels increasingly resist the confusion of people and objects in order to mount a fresh and progressive view of women as agents, rather than as dolls in dress. This book is part of the recent “thing theory” trend in eighteenth-century cultural studies that explores the representation of physical objects in a newly consumerist culture. It also participates in the field of the history of material culture and includes some treatment of prints and visual culture, as well as nonfictional prose. The book explores both the mechanics and fabrics of eighteenth-century dress from a historical point of view and by analysis of a range of texts, literary and visual, canonical and marginal. While the feminist argument centers on the representation of women’s garment work and costumes, the texts include works by Daniel Defoe, Elizabeth Haywood, Jonathan Swift, Jane Barker, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Charlotte Lennox, Mary Robinson, John Cleland, Mary Collyer, Tobias Smollett, and Frances Burney.

The book confutes most recent analyses of the way characters invest human meanings in objects, such as, among others, the essays in Mark Blackwell’s edited *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England* (Lewisburg, PA, 2007). Instead, Smith examines the rhetorical tradition associating expression and dress as well as the physical connections between clothing and print to argue for the novel’s skepticism about the revelatory aspect of costume. Rather than viewing the language of the early novel as a manifestation of the old trope identifying rhetoric with ornamentation, she turns aside from exploring the elaborate dress of masquerade and haute couture to examine instead quotidian, utilitarian, practical dress and accouterments. These, she argues, form an essential focus in the early novel: indeed, Smith’s main claim is that the novel’s resistance to fashion, and its generic allegiance to realism, are embodied in its depiction of the significance of nonmodish, plain clothing. Thus, the book traces the relationship between the new genre of the novel, struggling for legitimacy in printed culture, and its reconfiguration of the traditional, equating expression and clothing in the service of a new idea of women.

By exploring in depth the precise moments in which fictional characters encounter clothing, Smith revises the cliché that clothes transform or enhance identity. Instead, she maintains that these novels and their characters’ deployment of their ordinary dress counters the sartorial policing of the decaying *ancien régime*. Like Deidre Shauna Lynch’s superb study of the relationship

between market forces and the depiction of individuality, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago, 1998), this book makes a case for the connection between the novel as a consumer item and the development of fictional character.

Perhaps the most interesting section of the book is the first part, “The Rhetoric and Materials of Clothes,” which broadly explores the period’s rhetorical representation of clothing and its materiality. The part concludes with an original reading of Richardson’s *Pamela* that emphasizes the heroine’s pragmatic summing-up of her clothes’ value when she inhabits Mr. B’s Lincolnshire estate, yet it does not ignore the contradiction between her independent integrity, stressed throughout the narrative, and her costuming in rich attire reflecting Mr. B’s status after her marriage. Similarly, the chapter analyzing the depictions of clothes in print culture is intensively researched and gracefully presented. However, most interesting is the claim that the novel defined itself against high fashion. This is, in a sense, arguable—despite the ridicule that Fielding, for example, heaps on Lady Bellaston and the ludicrously overdressed Tom Jones as arriviste footman, Fielding surely considered his work fashionable—but the claim does forefront the consciously populist aspect of fiction throughout the period. Part 2, “The Practical Habits of Fiction,” traces the gap between women’s actual labor in the clothing trades and its representation in the novel. Contrasting Defoe’s *Roxana* with *Moll Flanders*, part 2 argues that the clothing trade permits women to alter gendered discourse by entering the work world and displaying economic agency. A later chapter examines the historical circumstances of unrest among cloth laborers in the early eighteenth century through the narratives of servants.

In the course of an argument about the emergence of a new, internal idea of womanhood, Smith concentrates on women’s clothing. However, surely men’s merit a bit more consideration than they receive here. For example, although Smith discusses the use of needlework as “a covert mask for sexual intrigue” in Henry Mackenzie’s sentimental novel *The Man of Feeling* (1771), where is a mention of the episode in the introduction in which the narrator discovers the manuscript of Harley’s adventures—the very book the reader is perusing—in tatters, being used by a beefy curate as gun-wadding, just as he himself is using an edition of a German philosopher? (148). Again, although the discussion of Henry Fielding’s distrust of fancy costumes leads interestingly to his distrust of allegory and the bonds between material and fiction, I missed a discussion of Fanny’s dress (and undress) in *Joseph Andrews* (1742), and some local readings might draw criticism. For example, Smith maintains that Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* resists “the intimate ties between sex and stealing,” yet the novel may be read as consistently identifying theft with adultery (12).

Nonetheless, this is a strong and interesting contribution to eighteenth-century cultural studies, engaging and intelligent. Perhaps it could have used a title less blandly descriptive and more focused on the book’s thesis. However, finely illustrated, well researched, and clearly written, plump with telling examples, intriguing details about eighteenth-century dress, and insightful readings, this is a delightful study of the early novel from a new and important perspective.

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BRITT ZERBE. *The Birth of the Royal Marines, 1664–1802*. Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2013. Pp. 302. \$99.00 (cloth).
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A half century ago this reviewer concluded that by 1750 the Royal Navy had acquired the essential administrative foundation on which its subsequent success was based. During the remainder of the century, the only truly important innovations were copper sheathing of