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## Mid-Century English Quixotism and the Defence of the Novel

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### In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Mid-Century English Quixotism and the Defence of the Novel Brean S. Hammond In a forthcoming introduction to a collection of articles on the novel in eighteenth-century Britain, Richard Kroll discriminates studies of the subject into three types:1 studies that effectively accept Watt's thesis about the rise of the novel in England but seek to qualify or extend its terms;2 others that stress the ancient genealogy of the novel and do not accept the eighteenth century as a new or originary moment;3 and some very recent approaches, stressing that Watt's thesis is itself determined by ideological battles fought in the eighteenth century and won by the nineteenth, about how the novel's history should be represented.4 Feminist literary historians do not all fit comfortably into this typology. For I am extremely grateful to Richard Kroll for allowing me to

see his forthcoming introduction to a collection of essays for the Longman Critical Readers volumes on the eighteenth-century British novel. 2 *Primus inter pares* are, of course, Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) and J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1990). 3 Principally Margaret Anne Doody, *The True Story of the Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996). Doody's account is closer than is Ian Watt's to the story as it would have been told in the eighteenth century itself by, for example, Clara Reeve. 4 See, for example, Homer Brown, "The Institution of the English Novel: Defoe's Contribution," *Novel* 29 (1995-96), 299-318; William B. Warner, "The Elevation of the Novel in England: Hegemony and Literary History," *English Literary History* 59 (1992), 577-96; Warner, "Licensing Pleasure: Literary History and the Novel in Early Modern Britain" in *Columbia History EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FICTION*, Volume 10, Number 3, April 1998 248 EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FICTION more than a decade, they have endeavoured to show us what Watt occluded: large volumes of imaginative writing by British women writers. Although there is some reluctance to accept the "rise" metaphor, the effect of much of this work is to construct an alternative female tradition that is, perhaps, just as fictive in its linearity as is its brother. 5 In this respect, those who belong to Kroll's third group regard themselves as more radical. "The linear history of the novel," Homer Brown has recently written, "as having an 'origin' and 'rise,' the history we have been brought up on, with its genealogies, lines of descent and influence, family resemblances, is itself a fictional narrative—a kind of novel about the novel." 6 The novel was constituted as a category, Brown would argue, not by any set of performances in that category (novels by Fielding or Richardson, for example), but by the institutionalizing activities of major publishers and editors. Thus, as Alan Downie concludes a recent article entitled "The Making the English Novel," "what I suspect we are witnessing is not a market driven by readers so much as a market driven by publishers such as Noble and Ballantyne and critics such as Scott." 7 Such an approach is cognate at various points with the debate over the formation of the English canon, in that the novel is said not to exist before there are instruments of transmission and institutions of it. *The British Novel*, ed. John Richetti, John Bender, Deirdre David, and Michael Seidel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 1-22; J.A. Downie, "The Making of the English Novel," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 9 (April 1997), 249-66. I have not been able to read Homer Brown's book *Institutions of the English Novel from Defoe to Scott* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), which, as I write, has not yet appeared in Britain. Much of my understanding of Brown depends on Kroll. 5 One would include here, *inter alia*: John Richetti, *Popular Fiction before Richardson: Narrative Patterns, 1700-1739* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), a pioneering work even if it does not have the same ideological persuasion as later items in the list; Ruth Perry, *Women, Letters and the Novel* (New York: AMS...

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1 I am extremely grateful to Richard Kroll for allowing me to see his forthcoming introduction to a collection of essays for the Longman Critical Readers volumes on the eighteenth century British novel.

2 Primary inter-pieces are, of course, Michael McKeen, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1710* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) and J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1990).

3 Principally Margaret Anne Doody, *The First Story of the Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996). Doody's account is closer than is Ian Watt's to the story as it would have been told in the eighteenth century itself by, for example, Clara Reeve.

4 See, for example, Homer Hays, "The Invention of the English Novel: Drine's Contribution," *Novel 29* (1995-96), 299-318; William B. Witter, "The Elevation of the Novel in England: Hierarchy and Literary History," *English Literary History 59* (1992), 577-96; Warner, "Licensing Pleasure: Literary History and the Novel in Early Modern Britain" in *Columbian History*





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