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Olivier Delers, *The Other Rise of the Novel in Eighteenth-Century French Fiction*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2015. vii + 187 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$70.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-6114-9581-2; \$69.99 U.S. (eb). ISBN 978-1-6114-9582-9.

Review by Cecilia Feilla, Marymount Manhattan College.

Ever since its publication in 1957, Ian Watt's seminal study, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, has posed a challenge for French literary historians. It offers a compelling cultural materialist theory of the genre, but one that dismisses en gros the French novel before the nineteenth century. But this challenge dismisses en gros the French novel tradition of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[1] According to Watt, "French fiction from *La Princesse de Clèves* to *Les Liaisons dangereuses* stands outside the main tradition of the novel" (p. 30) because it does not conform to the formal realism and middle class values he equates with the genre. For this reason, he concludes that the French novel "began with Balzac and Stendhal" (p. 300). Scholars of the eighteenth-century French novel have mounted an impressive response (particularly Elaine Showalter and Thomas DiPiero), offering cogent critiques and alternatives to Watt's account that seek to unhinge the novel from aesthetic realism and bourgeois ideology.[2] Now, almost sixty years after *The Rise of the Novel* was first published, Olivier Delers enters the debate with his book, *The Other Rise of the Novel in Eighteenth-Century French Fiction*.

Unlike previous responses to Watt, Delers is less interested in refuting or amending Watt's program for the French context (this he leaves to his predecessors with whom he largely agrees), than he is in bridging the divide between the English and French critical traditions. He does so by bringing the "methodologically rich and complex body of research" (p. 4) on the English novel launched by Watt to bear on his analysis of six French novels spanning the years 1666 to 1787. Although Delers might overstate the extent to which this tradition "has been overlooked by other scholars" (p. 4) working in French literature, his study does approach the old issues around Watt's work in a new way. Delers is mainly concerned with economic behavior and motivation in the French novel, paying special attention to the shifting representation of class identity and rational individualism. What he argues is that French fiction of the long eighteenth century offers a counternarrative to Watt's account of the transition to economic modernity and aesthetic realism. The early novel in France portrays characters whose idiosyncratic notions of private interest lead them to create utopian "alternative economies" (p. 4). The novel is therefore not linked to extra-textual conditions, but rather represents an autonomous sphere of resistance, adapting to and critiquing systems of exchange that constrain the self.

The introduction begins with an imagined alternative history in which Watt, the young Cambridge graduate student, contemplates six tomes of fiction: not the English novels at the center of *The Rise of the Novel* but rather the six French novels in Delers's table of contents. This conceit allows the author to raise the question of what the resulting French-based version of *The Rise of the Novel* might have looked like and to propose his *The Other Rise of the Novel* as both that book (approaching a new set of novels through Watt's lens) and not that book (given developments in scholarship in the interceding decades,

and the specificities of the French literary tradition). The remainder of the introduction is structured according to Watt's three tenets regarding the modern novel's "rise," namely, middle class values, formal realism, and a new ethos of economic individualism.

In each section, Delers reviews the literature, particularly noting the critical responses to Watt's model, in order to position himself in relation to both English and French scholarship on the novel. To Watt's ideologically-homogenous middle classes, Delers offers a multiplicity of bourgeois identities in tension with aristocratic identities in France, underscoring "the intense integration and conciliation of seemingly antithetical modes of thought, patterns of social exchange, and forms of self-knowledge" (p. 9). Regarding realism and individualism, Delers draws upon Deirdre Lynch's notion of a "pragmatics of character" as a means to avoid the "pitfalls of the paradigmatic assumption that realism as a mode of storytelling emerged at the same time as rational individualism" (p. 13).^[3] Though Delers provides a spirited and comprehensive overview of the field, one cannot help but sense that he has painted himself into a corner by organizing the book around a debate with Watt, a model he adopts only to disavow it throughout, to the point that even he worries Watt will be seen as a "straw Englishman" (p. 3). Indeed, once we leave Watt behind, this becomes an interesting and valuable study, the central argument of which concerns what Delers refers to as "alternative economies" in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French novel (p. 4).

Chapter one pairs discussions of Antoine Furetière's *Le Roman bourgeois* (1666) and Mme de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678) around the central question of what it means to be noble. Delers's point of departure is Furetière's notion of "un homme amphibie" (p. 29), or character torn between two distinct social identities. Both novels show the way in which the unpredictability of love and court culture makes for irrational and hence dangerous economies. The protagonists are conscious of their self-worth and escape to non-economic spaces, whether convents or the elite literary culture of salons (where nobility of wit knows no class) in *Le Roman bourgeois*, or to the seclusion of a country estate as in the *Princesse de Clèves*. Both works depict the position of women in the aristocratic marriage market, the economic language of engagement and attachment, and economies of knowledge and desire. Delers "parses the economic logic" (p. 28) behind the words and actions of various amphibious characters to argue that "when old forms of action cannot be trusted, it is perhaps 'le roman'...that constitutes the best tool for teaching us how to see through ambiguous behavior" (p. 53). Delers also explores the dynamic of reception, focusing on the reader's vacillation between identification with and ironic distance from the characters and their choices.

Chapter two is devoted to Prevost's *Manon Lescaut*, identifying Manon as the amphibious creature who poses problems for the classical ideals of nobility represented by the character Des Grieux and others. Delers explores the tension between forms of nostalgic (premodern) idealism and the modernity of characters' understanding of the self in the economy. Des Grieux does not have the social knowledge (Delers uses Bourdieu's term *habitus*) to negotiate his surroundings, whether in Paris or America, suggesting that what constitutes noble action is in flux in this period. Again, Delers addresses the reader's response to these characters as a tension between identification and caricature (p. 86), a technique that, for Delers, forces the reader to recognize the limits of individual will in the face of implacable social structures. Des Grieux turns to noble idealism in what Delers claims is a reverse Bildungsroman (p. 90).

Chapter three explores the alternative economies of the *Lettres portugaises* and *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*. In both novels, the female protagonist seeks forever simpler relations with others, Zilia by reimagining the gift economy, Julie through an escrow economy. For the former, Delers draws on Marcel Mauss, Derrida, Bourdieu, and Spinoza to lay bare the economic dynamic of courtship. He demonstrates how the gifts Déterville gives Zilia create an imbalance in the relationship that puts an obligation on her to respond in kind. Zilia questions the logic of the gift-giving economy she experiences in French society

and exposes the self-interest rather than virtue at the heart of noble ethics. In the end she retreats to a safe place free from obligation, where friendship and conversation can be freely given.

In *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Delers continues his exploration of the way the heroine (now Julie) seeks to protect herself from unequal transactions (p. 113). Delers's discussion here hinges on the notion of *dépôt*. He brilliantly traces the various meanings of the term as it develops over the course of the novel to reveal a concept of escrow employed by the main characters to suspend exchange through trust. That is, things are given, but only for safekeeping, to be given back at a later time. This notion of *dépôt* is first established when Julie entrusts her love and virginity to St. Preux in order to safeguard them from the dangers of physical desire, and then is expanded to include friendships and the utopian economy of Clarens. Delers's exegesis comes full circle with Julie's death, revealing her body as the final *dépôt*. These utopic spaces offer alternative forms of social and economic exchange, but ones that are increasingly remote from historical reality (p. 123).

The fourth and last chapter focuses on the Marquis de Sade's first novel, *Les infortunes de la vertu*. For Delers, the libertine narrative pits Adam Smith's "invisible hand" concept of economics (the rational liberalism embodied by Justine) against the "invisible hand of the network" (embodied by her abusers) (p. 132). Arguing against deterministic readings of Sade, Delers highlights the role of unpredictability, hiddenness, and indeterminacy to show how desire and libertinage function to subvert economic rationality in the novel, marking the replacement of *homo economicus* with what Delers names "*homo sadicus*" (p. 132). He applies concepts of the "network" and "connectionism" from Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's *The New Spirit of Capitalism* to argue that Sade's novel "stages the virtual disappearance of the idea of reciprocity underlying interpersonal and contractual relations and highlights new forms of exploitation that are at once highly rational and inevitably plagued by bouts of irrationality" (p. 131).^[4] For Delers, Sade depicts the forced complicity between exploited and exploiter in a way that illuminates not only Sade's world and late ancien régime society, but also "the disappearance of trust and the dislocation of reciprocal interpersonal relationships in late modern capitalist societies" (p. 155). In other words, Sade diagnoses the ills of his time and ours and thus, according to Delers, tells us more about the actual world and its functioning than mimesis.

The book's conclusion contains three sections drawing separate historical, literary, and methodological conclusions. If the English novel is a cognitive map for an emerging middle class, then the French novel, Delers concludes, highlights a "counternarrative to economic modernity and a decidedly nonmodern way of thinking about economic relations" (p. 169). In other words, Delers posits French fiction as an autonomous realm of ideas that responds to economic modernity differently than the English novel. Ultimately, each work explored in *The Other Rise of the Novel* creates its own alternative economy to free the self from the limitations of existing systems of social exchange in which interest plays a key role. Had Delers embraced this intriguing formulation from the start and defined his own terms (economy, interest, rationality) rather than restricting himself to Watt's, it would have made for a more cohesive and convincing book. As it stands, this is a fine study of alternative economies in eighteenth-century French fiction and their contribution to the "evolution" of the genre in France. The book is at its best in the perceptive close readings of primary texts, and will be of interest to anyone working on the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French novel, and economic and sociological approaches to the novel.

NOTES

[1] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 30.

[2] Elaine Showalter, *The Evolution of the French Novel, 1641-1782* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972) and Thomas J. DiPiero, *Dangerous Truths and Criminal Passions: The Evolution of the French Novel, 1569-1791* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

[3] Deidre Shauna Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[4] Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (New York: Verso, 2007).

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