

Shelley King and John B. Pierce, eds. *Amelia Opie. The Father and Daughter and Dangers of Coquetry.* Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2003.

Shelley King and John B. Pierce's excellent Broadview edition of Amelia Opie's *The Father and Daughter* (1801) and *Dangers of Coquetry* (1790) fills an important gap in the scholarship of Amelia Opie and the literature of the nineteenth century. *The Father and Daughter* was one of the most popular novels of the early nineteenth century: it appeared in nine editions and was subsequently translated into French, German, and Spanish and was adapted for the stage several times in several languages, thereby catapulting its author into popularity (King and Pierce 11). Despite this popularity, recent scholarship and teaching have tended to focus on Opie's poetry and her novel *Adeline Mowbray*, which has been produced in four editions since 1974, including King and Pierce's 1999 Oxford edition. *The Father and Daughter* appeared in a Garland reprint edition in 1994, but publication of these two novels together in a Broadview edition provides readers with the opportunity to examine in depth the "cultural phenomenon" (11) that established Opie as a serious writer.

Like other recent Broadview editors, King and Pierce aim to situate the novels within their broader cultural and historical contexts. The comprehensive introduction discusses issues of interest to scholars of this period, such as the literature of sensibility, female chastity and sexuality, and madness, which are further illuminated by well-chosen and relevant documents appended to the volume. As the introduction notes, "growing interest in the literature of sensibility calls for renewed examination of work such as *The Father and Daughter*, works which captured and represented for their age the culture of sensibility" (51). The introduction teases out of the novel various strands typical of the culture of sensibility with which it engages. Subtitled "A Moral Tale," *The Father and Daughter*, like many other novels of sensibility, is ostensibly didactic; however, as King and Pierce note, although "one might expect clarity and certainty in the condemnation of immoral behaviour and the commendation of correct moral action to emerge ... *The Father and Daughter* does not offer a simplified moral lesson" (16). Opie was clearly in conversation with contemporary writers, both men and women, who debated female chastity and the place of the "fallen woman" in society and her novel "tends to ... investigate and critique both radical and conservative claims with equal intensity" (20). This is a topic Opie also treats in her first novel, *Dangers of Coquetry* (1790), which, the editors point out, was not published under

her own name and which appeared in only two editions, making this edition particularly valuable. As in her later novel, Opie's engagement with the debate over female chastity is complicated: in some ways, the editors note, "the novel runs counter to the traditional critique of the coquette in the late eighteenth century" (44). Ultimately, the novel "epitomizes the radical changes in attitudes towards women's character in the latter part of the eighteenth century" (47).

King and Pierce further contextualize *The Father and Daughter* within the literature of sensibility in their discussion of the poetry included with the first edition. They also illustrate that in her poetry, as in her novels, Opie skilfully represents sentimentally moving heroines but that "one of the most interesting aspects of Opie's works for modern readers is the frankness with which she articulates female desire" (35). Their discussion also draws attention to the critical question of whether or not "the phenomenon of Opie's success emerged as much from her skill in writing poetry" (35); by including only a few selections of the poetry, the editors firmly emphasize the importance of the novel itself.

In addition to the important work of contextualizing Opie's novels in terms of literary history and discourses of gender that circulated in the period, King and Pierce's edition also historically situates the novel through a discussion of the novel's representation of madness. As the editors note, madness was a topic of interest both to Opie personally, because of an experience she had at a young age visiting a friend who was an inmate at a bedlam, and also perhaps because of her youthful associations with the Quaker faith, and with Elizabeth Fry, the well-known advocate for prison reform. Madness was a preoccupation of the age in general, particularly "in the wake of the very public mania of King George III" (23). Situating the novel at a "critical moment in the history of psychiatry," King and Pierce illustrate how the novel registers medical discourse about the nature of madness and its treatment. They also demonstrate the contemporary concern with the representation of madness in literature and on the stage, an anxiety which would dominate the various stage adaptations that the novel underwent.

Influenced by the very public discussion of the mental illness of the King, which prevented any performances of *King Lear* between 1810 and 1820, adaptations of Opie's novel were altered accordingly to make the madness of Agnes Fitzhenry's father less unsettling to an audience who, in the figure of its King, "like Agnes, was dealing with a deranged parent" (23). To illustrate, King and Pierce have included in their edition the text of three stage adaptations of *The Father and Daughter*, one of which, *The*

*Lear of Private Life*, merges the characters of *King Lear* and *The Father and Daughter*.

Like other editions produced by Broadview, this edition is carefully conceived and will be useful to both new and experienced readers of literature of the Romantic era. Informative appendices supplement the excellent introduction. The editors have included extracts from Opie's letters; contemporary reviews of and responses to the two novels; documents about chastity, coquetry, and madness; and substantive textual variants in *The Father and Daughter*. Footnotes and editorial comments usefully highlight and explain important issues, references, and allusions in the text without being intrusive. The bibliography is thorough and rich.

King and Pierce's edition demonstrates the need for, and contributes to, the important recovery work and contextualization of women writers and their texts. *The Father and Daughter* and *Dangers of Coquetry* is an important companion to King and Pierce's (1999) Oxford edition of *Adeline Mowbray*, Opie's "most political novel" (*Adeline Mowbray* viii). This edition makes available two novels that will allow readers to examine Opie more fully in conversation with her contemporaries, particularly with respect to discourses of gender. The novel will also reward the reader who is interested in nuancing his or her understanding of the literature of sensibility. Finally, as King and Pierce's discussion of madness in the novel shows, it will also appeal to critics who, following Jerome McGann, call for an increased emphasis on examining and understanding "the aesthetic character and value of ... obscured texts" (5).

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## Works Cited

- Opie, Amelia. *Adeline Mowbray*. Eds. Shelley King and John B. Pierce. 1805; London: Oxford UP, 1999.
- McGann, Jerome. *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996.