

ENGL 3041 – Assignment 2.

James Douglas, *The History of Julia D’Haumont: or the Eventful Connection of the House of Montmelian with that of D’Haumont*

The Reverend James Douglas is not known for his novel writing. His fictional work was published with one edition; no demand for any more indicates that it was not particularly well received. Perhaps as a result, Douglas’ work has joined the hoards of forgotten novels of the 18th century, where only the very successful writers such as Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding and Ann Radcliffe, produced work that has endured the long span of time and is still in literary consciousness today.

Douglas led a varied life. After the death of his parents he moved from London to Manchester with his elder brother, and acquired his education at Manchester Grammar School. The rest of his early life is somewhat unclear, but it is known that he was sent abroad, joined the Austrian army, and toured some of Europe in 1773. After being sent on a mission back to Britain, Douglas decided to stay, and worked as a lieutenant restoring the Chatham Lines in Kent. He married in 1780, and it was at this point that he first began to write. In 1781, he translated a two-volume work *A General Essay on Military Tactics* ‘by an officer’¹, in 1782 another anonymous text *Travelling Anecdotes, Through Various Parts of Europe*, which was popular enough to have had further editions in 1785 and 1786, and a further in Dublin in 1787, when his name was added. These anecdotes recorded Douglas’ experiences in Austria and the rest of Europe he had toured, and the style was said to be reminiscent of Lawrence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*. Douglas addresses this claim in his preface, ‘In shewing part of this work to a friend – an imitation of Sterne was buzzed in my ear. I deny the charge – and as I disclaim all endeavours to imitate; so, I hope, the Public will see no reason to accuse me of stealing from his inimitable work’². This addresses the argument amongst critics and scholars of innovation versus imitation, involving debate on which displayed a genuine talent. The neoclassical theory was that to

¹ Dennis R. Dean, ‘Douglas, James (1753–1819)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Oct 2005 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7902, accessed 28/11/08]

² James Douglas, *Travelling Anecdotes, Through Various Parts of Europe*, 1782. [http://galenet.galegroup.com/servelet/ECCO, accessed 30/11/08]

imitate a great work was a skill, against the opinion that originality was more worthy of praise. Douglas appears to be siding with originality.

From the success of *Travelling Anecdotes*, Douglas moved on to writing on the subject of antiquity – he became a fellow of The Antiquity Society at the same time he was ordained, in 1783. He published *A Dissertation on the Antiquity of the Earth* (1785) and *Nenia Britannica, or, The Sepulchral History of Great Britain* (1786-1793). These works had great influence on how scientists assessed fossils; that the tropical animals and plant fossils found in Britain had not been moved by a great flood, but had existed there when the area had a different climate. This was a significant discovery, and though it was not unique to Douglas, would have gained him respect in learned circles.

Following this, Douglas began to write fiction. The only novel that is attributed to him without question is *The History of Julia D’Haumont* (1797). This is the only work *The English Novel 1770-1829*³ has recorded with James Douglas as the author. However, there are two other works the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography mentions that Douglas had supposedly written earlier, *Fashionable Infidelity, or the Triumph of Patience* (1789 or 1790) and *The Maid of Kent* (1790). Unlike *The History of Julia D’Haumont*, these works were published anonymously, so their attribution to James Douglas may not be accurate. But there are some indications that he could have written them. Firstly, while Raven states *The Maid of Kent* is an anonymous work, he does mention that it is advertised ‘by the Author of *Travelling Anecdotes*’⁴, which, as previously mentioned, Douglas has been confirmed as the author on ECCO and the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. In addition, a review of *The Maid of Kent* by the *Critical Review* states ‘This seems to be the work of a man unhackneyed in the profession of novel writing, and with abilities to soar above it. There are traces of learning and knowledge occasionally scattered in this performance; but as a novel it is romantic, improbable and uninteresting’⁵, a description which fits Douglas, as he was an educated man who had not been specifically trained in novel writing – which is

³ James Raven et al (eds.) *The English Novel 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles. Volume 1 1770-1799* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

⁴ Raven, p. 495.

⁵ Raven, p.495. From *The Critical Review*, Volume 69, p. 592 (May, 1790)

perhaps why he apparently is not inhibited by the normal conventions. With regards to *Fashionable Infidelity*, there is less evidence that Douglas had written it, but there is a comment from the Monthly Review, saying that ‘we have nothing to commend in a writer who seems unacquainted with almost every rule of grammar – but his “good intentions”’. The volumes may, however, on account of the morality which generally pervades them, be perused by the younger part of the community with some advantage’⁶, Douglas’ position as a Reverend would suggest that his work would certainly encourage morality, though his good education makes the criticism of his use of grammar a little perplexing.

Assuming that Douglas did write the two novels before *The History of Julia D’Haumont*, his decision to write a third novel at all, especially making the choice to lose his anonymity, is interesting considering his work had not previously had the best reception, judging by the reviews. However, as Douglas had a source of income from his work in the church, he was not writing for profit, and may have continued to write as an endeavour to spread the moral messages referred to in the review of *Fashionable Infidelity*. Raven does not feature any reviews of *The History of Julia D’Haumont*, reasons for which are unclear, as even if critics thought a text was terrible, they were often willing to produce a scathing review. Perhaps, as Douglas’ religious status was made evident on the book’s title page, a poor review may have been deemed disrespectful.

As for the physical book itself, both volumes have board binding, which was the most common at the time, with a marbled effect and leather spine. The paper used was not of a very high quality; the ink from the page overleaf can be seen as it is so thin, and it is pulpy in texture. This could be because Douglas did not have a bookseller willing to invest in the text or sufficient funds of his own to pay for higher quality paper, or it could be due to the fact that such a high volume of novels were published in the 1790s, and good quality paper was simply unavailable.

In regards to paratext, Douglas has chosen to keep this to a minimum; there is only a title page. This consists of the text’s full title ‘The History of Julia D’Haumont: or the

⁶ Raven, p. 457. From Andrew Beckett, *The Monthly Review*, Volume 81, p. 364 (October 1789)

Eventful Connection of the House of Montmelian with that of D'Haumont',⁷ with larger font that adds emphasis to the word 'History' and the name 'Julia D'Haumont'. The name is likely to be emphasised to highlight the fact that she is the main character, and so the reader should pay attention to her thoughts and actions. The genre is much more interesting. This text has now been classified as a novel, for if it really was an accurate history it would not appear in Raven's *The English Novel*, yet that is in conflict with Douglas' claim that it is a history. The trend of stating that a text is 'true' was popular in the earlier part of the century, with novels such as Richardson's *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady*, but had nearly died out in the 1790s. This was due to various factors, the main one being that novels were much more acceptable, so there was no need to pretend the text was truthful and, therefore, respectable. In fact, having a false 'history' at this point in the novel's development, when a 'novel' and its characteristics had been established, was often controversial, generating a lot of criticism. Perhaps Douglas chose to insist that his work was a true history because he was somewhat 'old-fashioned', as is the fact that he specifies his position as a reverend on the title page. As in the earlier part of the century, women writers, for example, made it known if they were married to show that they were a respectable writer and therefore their text was respectable too. Similarly, with Douglas' religious status, he is indicating to prospective readers that the work will be morally sound – this may not have worked as the best advertising strategy when the public were craving to be terrified by an outlandish gothic story.

Linked with this and Douglas' genre claim, is the fact that he is apparently rejecting the idea that his work is romantic, and claiming instead that it is a work of realism. This, too, was an issue in the earlier part of the century, when romance was considered folly – it was too fantastical, this is why authors such as Aphra Behn went to such lengths to convince readers that their works were devoted to realism, such as with *Oroonoko; or the History of a Royal Slave*. At the time Douglas was writing, however, Ann Radcliffe in particular, had caused somewhat of a resurrection of romance, with her very successful gothic novels brazenly labelled as 'a romance' on

⁷ James Douglas, *The history of Julia d'Haumont: or the eventful connection of the house of Montmelian with that of d'Haumont. By the Rev. James Douglas, ...* London, 1797. 2 vols. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale Group. <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO> [Accessed 22/12/08]

their title pages, and ensuing fantastic adventures. Considering Douglas shares several similarities with Radcliffe, it is interesting that he has chosen a different genre to her.

Also featured on the title page is the publisher, ‘G. Cawthorn, British Library, 132, Strand, 1797’⁸, a relatively successful publisher, who is recorded in the British Book Trade Index as trading from 1790 to 1834. The year Douglas’ book was published, 1797, was Cawthorn’s busiest year, with eleven other novels having been produced. Cawthorn was listed as working as a ‘bookbinder, bookseller, stationer, printer, publisher, librarian, and owner of a circulating library’⁹, but despite his varied work in the publishing trade it is thought he briefly went bankrupt in 1801. In terms of the general state of England’s publishing trade at this time, this was likely to have been a common occurrence due to the abundance of novels being released into a saturated market, bringing little revenue for the novelists or publishers, apart from the particularly successful works. This could also be the reason for *The History of Julia D’Haumont* being Douglas’ last novel. If he is responsible for writing the two other texts, it is interesting to note that, in both cases, T. Hookham was the publisher. Hookham was one of the most prominent publishers in the late 18th century when novel production rapidly grew, he ‘was not adverse to publishing new novels, even by unproven authors, when the purchase of rights was so cheap and the market apparently so good’¹⁰. Hookham had retired when *The History of Julia D’Haumont* was published, but perhaps Douglas also had to turn to the less successful Cawthorn due to the lack of success of the two novels he had (possibly) released with Hookham.

In respect to the novel itself, *The History of Julia D’Haumont* begins in 16th Century France, under the reign of Henry III in the midst of tensions between Catholics and Protestants. The respected figure of Count D’Haumont is murdered as the result of a scheme devised by the Count Montmelian, who was having an affair with the Countess D’Haumont. Montmelian is found out, and to try and escape his punishment, he murders the Countess before turning on himself. This is where the rift between the families begins. Generations later, Julia D’Haumont finds out that her

⁸ James Douglas, *The History of Julia D’Haumont*, title page.

⁹ British Book Trade Index,

<http://www.bbti.bham.ac.uk/Details.htm?TraderID=12836> [Accessed 22/12/08]

¹⁰ James Raven, p. 78

grandfather's will states a bond must be made between the two families, or they will lose his estate at Creve Coeur, and be damned by Heaven. As her father failed to fulfil this clause, it falls upon Julia to marry master Montmelian, despite her love for the noble St Julien. Despite her deep sadness, Julia vows to comply with her father's wishes, using her faith for strength. She and her mother visit Creve Coeur – her ancestors' castle that has been neglected since the old Count's murder. The castle, in its isolated location, with gothic interiors, and lifelike portraits of the deceased inhabitants, is the perfect setting for threatening ghostly appearances from the late Count. After a battle and the abduction of the Countess and Julia, all is put to rights when the villains are conveniently disposed of. Not wanting to endorse the idea of the supernatural, but rather to highlight the importance of religion, the hauntings and many other mysteries within castle are fully explained and resolved, in concurrence with the interests of the virtuous characters.

Due to the focus on Julia, a young woman experiencing an interior struggle between her feelings and filial duty, young women are likely to have been Douglas' main intended audience. This was common, as women were thought to make up the majority of the novel reading audience, yet were deemed most susceptible to be influenced by some works' immoral themes and characters. To rectify this, many writers wrote exemplary, didactic stories to encourage young women to behave like the virtuous heroines they read about, in this case, Julia. Richardson's *Clarissa* is an example of this. However, young men would also benefit from reading Douglas' work, as St Julien's actions are analysed, with criticism of his passions ruling reason. This has dramatic repercussions, particularly when St Julien ignores the advice from the wise hermit, Rolando, and acts out of ill temper. As young men are often ruled by their passions, and a composed character was valued by society, such an example may have provided a useful way of teaching how to behave.

Didactic novels were less common in the latter part of the century, after a shift in reading habits favoured texts that excite rather than teach. One of the main works to trigger this was Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, a hugely successful gothic novel that spawned a new literary trend; written purely to shock and terrify its readers. Conversely, *The History of Julia D'Haumont* first appears to be an historical novel, from the claims on the title page, and as it opens outlining the political difficulties in

16th Century France, whilst recounting the troubled history of the D’Haumonts and Montmelians. Historical novels first came about when ‘novelists attempted to appropriate the prestige and popularity of historiography by encroaching upon its subject matter and techniques’¹¹, so, often claiming to have written a factual piece, when in fact all was fictional and just written in a factual way for monetary gain. However, whilst claiming to be an historic novel, there is a definite shift in genre as the novel progresses, becoming unmistakably gothic. Douglas fills the criterion of implementing ‘an emphasis on portraying the terrifying, a common insistence on archaic settings, a prominent use of the supernatural, the presence of highly stereotyped characters and the attempt to deploy and perfect techniques of literary suspense are the most significant,’¹² however, his style differs from the sole focus on terror in Walpole. Instead, Douglas’ style is similar to Clara Reeve and Ann Radcliffe. The text adheres to several characteristics present in Reeve’s *The Old English Baron*, such as the castle setting which ‘has a decayed set of apartments that have been mysteriously locked for years...groans and strange lights lead to a dream in which he sees a knight in armour’¹³, yet all of the confusion and fright concludes in a peaceful end where Edmund, the main character, ‘is established as the rightful heir to the castle and estates’¹⁴. These exact characteristics are used by Douglas.

In regards to Ann Radcliffe, one of the most successful writers in the latter half of the century, her style included ‘apparently spectral events are similarly explained after they have excited curiosity and terror over extended sections of the narrative. This use of suspense characterises Radcliffe’s technique’¹⁵, which Douglas could be said to be imitating in his work, as much of the narrative is concerned with the rumoured haunting of the Creve Coeur castle. As in Radcliffe, after a spectre actually appears, all is explained to quash any possibility of the supernatural being real, but only after

¹¹ Anne Stevens, *Tales of Other Times: A Survey of British Historical Fiction, 1770–1812* (Issue 7: 12/2001, New York University)
http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/encap/journals/romtext/articles/cc07_n03.html [Accessed 8/12/08]

¹² David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic fictions from 1765 to the Present Day. Volume 1, The Gothic Traditions* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1996)

¹³ Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996) p. 55

¹⁴ Fred Botting, p. 55

¹⁵ Fred Botting, p. 64

the idea of the ghost has invoked terror in most of the characters, and even brought untimely deaths to some of the villains. Douglas' use of emotive language adds to dramatic effect, illustrated in the way Julia's grief is described, 'Tears often gushed from her eyes, convulsive sobs, and every symptom of uncommon grief'¹⁶. Referring back to genre, this language, and the fantastical occurrences, conflict with the initial claim that it is a realistic novel, as they are classic characteristics of romance.

Douglas uses third person narrative form throughout, like Ann Radcliffe. This is well suited to the episodic plot, as focus can be divided equally between characters, and feature the various locations they move between. A first person narrative, or use of the epistolary form would be much too limited, as they tend to focus on just one or two characters. However, they do give insight into the main character's emotions and motives, whereas this is not as feasible in the third person. For example, the narrator describes Julia's sadness over her situation, but never in her own words or from her perspective. The reader has to wholly trust that the narrator is giving them an accurate account of events. This trust is a little difficult considering the outlandish supernatural occurrences, and also that part way through the first volume, it is suddenly mentioned that 'The translator was in doubt whether he should suffer this description of the draw-bridge to remain...A friend having looked over these sheets...advised the translator to expunge it'¹⁷. The reliability of this claim to merely be translating a story is tenuous, as most authors make this clear on the title page, sometimes explaining their choice for translation in the other paratextual material. Douglas does not and there is no other reference to it other than in this note. His reasons for doing this may be similar to other Gothic novelists, such as in *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Old English Baron* where 'both writers present their texts as manuscripts...of which they are, so to speak, the 'editors''. The most obvious reason for this is defensiveness'¹⁸, so if there are any criticisms of the plot, characters, or setting, the writer can attribute this to the author of the original manuscript, so their own reputation stays in tact. This would make sense when considering that, if the other two novels were indeed by Douglas, this is the first work he gave his name to, but covered himself in this way as tarnishing his reputation is clearly still a worry.

¹⁶ James Douglas, *The History of Julia D'Haumont*, Vol. I, p. 21

¹⁷ James Douglas, *The History of Julia D'Haumont*, Vol. I, p. 125

¹⁸ David Punter, p. 49

Another Radcliffean feature Douglas adopted is featuring an epigraph at the beginning of each chapter, which introduces and foreshadows the ensuing plot. Douglas perhaps used this in the hope that it would generate success on a par with Radcliffe. All verses are written by Douglas, yet some of the wording, such as the verse introducing chapter one, ‘So fiends unchain’d the brand of discord wield;/ So the shrill clarion mads the martial field;/ Prepar’d for blood, Ambition stalks the world,/ ‘Till the avenging banner is unfurl’d’¹⁹ is reminiscent of James Beattie’s *The Minstrel; or, The Progress of Genius*, which has a similar phrase ‘The dream is fled. Proud harbinger of day,/ Who scar’d’st the vision with thy clarion shrill’²⁰. The significance of this similarity could be to do with the historical aspect of *The Minstrel*’s context; ‘the contest between the houses of York and Lancaster was at its height, and places its characters in the midst of the great events of that period. The incidents, indeed, as well as most of the persons, are fictitious: but the writer adheres with fidelity to the general spirit and manners of the times’²¹. Douglas’ work could be said to be doing the same thing, but instead representing the times in France, with the references to Henry III, the Duke of Guise and the Hugonots. The use of actual historical figures was quite common, ‘many novels featured only ‘cameo appearances’ by the notable figures of an era... Sometimes these cameos serve merely to place the novel within a particular period of history’²², so not necessarily in order to create a fact-based historical text, but to give a realistic base to a fictional one.

The relevance of Douglas’ novel being set in France may be a response to the turbulent social environment he was writing in. In England, throughout the tensions leading up to, and during, the French Revolution,

‘pressure on the notion of the heroic leader surged from within and without, a cliché harnessed by newspaper commentators of the day to address domestic

¹⁹ James Douglas, *The History of Julia D’Haumont*, Vol. I, p. 1

²⁰ James Beattie, *The Minstrel; or, The Progress of Genius: with Other Poems* (London, 1811)

http://books.google.com/books?id=7lQOAAAIAAJ&pg=PA183&lpg=PA183&dq=shrill+clarion+the+minstrel&source=bl&ots=k_wbRxOO8q&sig=mSsqo_kL9Alnu5k5w5QlrspzYQsU#PPR1,M1 [Accessed 28/12/08] p. 183

²¹ Anne Stevens

²² Anne Stevens

and foreign policy. Bombarding an already fraught social climate, the first shock wave of news from France deepened suspicion as to the ‘naturalness’ of leadership. As alarm about violent reaction grew, so, too, did the need to reshape social vision and redefine heroism.’²³

This novel has several heroes, which complies with the idea of heroism needing to be redefined. St Julien is one; the stereotypical hero from romance who recklessly tries to save a young damsel in distress. Count D’Haumont is another, more uncommonly he is arguably the reason for Julia’s ordeal – she would not have been faced with marriage to master Montmelian if he had fulfilled the terms in the will earlier – yet he is his family’s saviour too, as it is he who disguised himself as a ghost and gave an opportunity for the Montmelians to be shot. The third hero is Rolando the hermit, full of wisdom that benefits characters when they listen to him, yet they suffer if they ignore it. Ultimately, Rolando is the true saviour of the piece, as the whole ordeal would have been avoided if Count D’Haumont had followed his advice years before, but he still helps to eventually resolve it. Through Rolando, Douglas conveys his opinions on how people should live ‘Reserve to yourself an ample bounty; let the remainder be employed in the encouragement of useful labour; extend your power for the punishment of vice and the support of the meritorious. By this means you will see your dependants prosper in moderation and virtue, your estates flourish, for the example of mankind’²⁴, readers would only take on board his advice if he was a truly good and heroic character.

The History of Julia D’Haumont, with its Gothic influences and encouragement of virtue, is a typical example of the abundance of gothic fiction published in the 1790s. Also typical is the fact that an untrained writer like Douglas was able to publish his work, as there was an explosion of new novels during the decade, though very few managed to survive to a second edition. This suggests that there certainly was quantity of novels, but a lack of quality amongst them. Mary Robinson’s *The Natural Daughter* gives a humorous account of the nature of the book trade in the 1790s,

²³ Toni Wein, *British Identities, Heroic Nationalisms, and the Gothic Novel 1764-1824* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) pp. 97-98

²⁴ James Douglas, *The History of Julia D’Haumont*, Vol II, p. 189

when ‘the market was already over-stocked’²⁵, yet more and more publications were being produced. The order of the day was for satire, scandal, excitement, yet Douglas’ apparently unpopular novel may be an example of the ‘few old, hum-drum novelists, who convert sermons into romances’²⁶. Considering Douglas’ official profession, and the fact that the novel concludes with such advice as ‘how human prudence, sagacity, and moral virtue can obtain the summit of human wishes’²⁷ this could easily be the case, and accounts for why there was no demand for a second edition.

Despite *The History of Julia D’Haumont* being so similar to hoards of other Gothic novels that did not achieve the same level of entertainment and success as Ann Radcliffe, Douglas’ work has perhaps been unfairly overlooked. Throughout the novel it is clear that the writer is an educated man; the castle’s setting is intricately described, situated within ‘a wide extended sheet of country, crowded with thick and impervious forests, intersected with fertile plains, and bounded by the lower hills’²⁸ Douglas’ travels may have enabled him to experience such places first hand. He also displays knowledge on the traditions executed by high class families like the D’Haumonts, and in several asides these are more fully explained, ‘There are few ancient castles, retained by succession in noble families, but that are decorated with portraits of their ancestors. It is a splendid and flattering mark of ancient dignity’²⁹, also probably due to his being learned in antiquaries and foreign customs. There is definitely something to be gained from reading this novel that innocently encourages its readers to live by their morals. It is no masterpiece, but does not really deserve to be forgotten and banished to literature’s dusty back shelves.

²⁵ Sharon M. Setzer (ed.) *Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination : □And, the Natural Daughter* (London: Broadview Press, 2003) p. 208

²⁶ Sharon M. Setzer, p. 209

²⁷ James Douglas, *The History of Julia D’Haumont*, Vol. II, p. 187

²⁸ James Douglas, *The History of Julia D’Haumont*, Vol. I, p. 118

²⁹ James Douglas, *The History of Julia D’Haumont*, Vol. I, p. 129

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