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Christopher Flynn

Dismembering Anglo-America: the
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Christopher Flynn

Dismembering Anglo-America: the Body Politic and the First English Novel about the American Revolution

The Critical Review's praise for Samuel Jackson Pratt's *Emma Corbett; or the Miseries of Civil War* (1781)¹ placed this now largely forgotten novel firmly in the sentimental tradition. Pratt's heroine, wrote the reviewer, 'formed upon the models of Clarissa and Eloisa,' was 'in point of literary composition...hardly inferior to either of those characters.'² The novel enjoyed a significant readership on both sides of the Atlantic for about twenty years, with five editions appearing in England and four in the United States before the end of the century.³ But despite its contemporary popularity, *Emma Corbett*, like so many sentimental novels of the late eighteenth century, has vanished from critical consciousness. This neglect needs reassessment. *Emma Corbett* was the first English novel about the American Revolution. Its subject matter and the fact that several novels in the decades following its first publication represented the Anglo-American community similarly make it significant in the emergence of an English discourse about America. Pratt's explanation of the war with the colonies through the rhetoric of sympathy and metaphors of the body and family politic began a trend that dominated popular fiction concerned with the Revolution

1. Samuel Jackson Pratt, *Emma Corbett; or the Miseries of Civil War* (Bath: Pratt and Clinch, and London: R. Baldwin, 1781). References to this text from here on will be cited parenthetically in the text.

2. *The Critical Review* (1781): 460–62.

3. Garside, Peter, James Raven and Rainer Schöwerling, *The English Novel, 1770–1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000–02): 2 vols.; and the *English Short Title Catalogue*.