

Ian Newman, *The Romantic Tavern: Literature and Conviviality in the Age of Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. xiii + 279. £75.00. ISBN 9781108470377.

At the height of the White Terror of the 1790s, a British government Secrecy Report warned that ‘seditious toasts, and a studied selection of the tunes which have been most in use in France since the revolution’ were ‘endeavouring to render deliberate incitements to every species of treason familiar to the minds of the people’. This was not bluster or mere scaremongering, as ‘seditious’ tavern songs were used as evidence against London Corresponding Society leaders Thomas Hardy and John Thelwall at their trials for treason in 1794. The prosecution tried to prove that toasts and songs were dangerous precisely because their live performance was so captivating, communal and (one of the key words in this book), convivial. Popular-radical genres such as the re-versioned national anthem were both memorable and fun: we can imagine the rollicking atmosphere which must have accompanied the singing of ‘God save The Rights of Man’ and its rousing chorus, ‘But now the Lion roars, / And a loud note he pours; / Spreading to distant shores, / Liberty’s flame’ (183) – a choric blast which reverberated all the way to the exiled Shelley in 1819.

Ian Newman’s *The Romantic Tavern* does an excellent job of contextualising this rise of revolutionary boozing and baiting, a sub-culture borne out of eighteenth-century masculine sociability, popular politics and expanding networks of print. Building on the pioneering work of Iain McCalman, James Epstein and Christina Parolin, Newman shows how London taverns were unique venues in which both polite and popular forms of conviviality interacted with politics and literature in significant ways: extending the social reach of the Habermasian coffee house, taverns such as the famous Crown and Anchor constituted a ‘convivial public sphere’ (107) of oppositional politics and entertainment. Taverns were literal sites of political meetings and social gatherings, but they also circulated overtly and implicitly in visual and textual representations: caricatures, song books, Anacreontics, and collections of toasts and sentiments. Their cultural presence is in many ways unsurprising as they were prime examples of Georgian civic pride, built by renowned architects on a grand scale, and signifying ‘the epitome of fashionable neoclassical refinement’ (11). Neither an inn nor a plebeian ale-house, they were ‘multifunctional’ (21) venues for respectable dinners, balls, concerts and – more contentiously – political meetings. The taverns were available for hire and to that extent were politically neutral – indeed, Newman reminds us that both the London Corresponding Society and the counter-revolutionary Association for the Protection of Liberty and Property against Republican and Levellers held meetings at the Crown and Anchor on the same day in 1793 (28-31) – but the case studies of *The Romantic Tavern* emphasise the liberal and radical agendas of tavern culture.

Chapter 1 proposes that the promiscuous mingling of merchants and intellectuals in the London Tavern may have influenced Burke’s anti-revolutionary polemics, while Chapter 2 discusses more familiar depictions of the radical associations of the Crown and Anchor by James Gillray and William Godwin alongside a tantalising episode in which women’s attendance at an Anacreontic Society meeting caused an uproar. Chapters 3-6 look at four ‘tavern genres’ in relation (wherever possible) to Romantic literature: political ballads by the redoubtable songster Captain Morris, with particular attention given to the famous 1784 Westminster election in which women played a prominent role; anacreontic odes or ‘drink poetry’, including examples by Thelwall, Thomas Moore’s *Irish Melodies* and Keats’s *Ode to a Nightingale*; bawdy and ballads, in which *Lyrical Ballads* is positioned as a ‘moderate’ response to Thelwall’s seditious squibs; and a final chapter on toasts which argues for the genre’s important presence in Scott’s *Waverley*. These well-researched examples encourage us to think afresh about the relation between eighteenth-century and Romantic configurations of

respectability and pleasure, and between mainstream and popular culture. In the 1780s, it seems that men and women of diverse social classes could enjoy a recitation of Captain's Morris's famous porno-comic 'The Plenipotentiary', both in live performance at the Shakespeare Tavern and in print (James Ridgway's edition of Morris's songs was enormously popular into the 1790s); moreover, bawdy humour was tinged with Whig populism in contrast to the frigid, icy authoritarianism of Pitt's Tories (132). But as the Romantic era progressed, 'tavern genres' could only survive by either fleeing to the fugitive 'radical underworld' so ably mapped by McCalman, or cleaning up their act, as witnessed by Moore's nationalistic sentimentalism (164-172) and Wordsworth's ambivalence towards plebeian speech (194-201). However, Percy Shelley's unpublished response to Peterloo, *Songs Wholly Political and Destined to Awaken and Direct the Imagination of the Reformers* (not mentioned by Newman) shows that the political song still had considerable force, and the form was revived enthusiastically by the Chartists.

In his essay 'Pleasure: A Political Issue' (1983), Fredric Jameson argues that the political left has often vacillated in its ideological approach to pleasure, shifting back and forth between the two extremes of individualist hedonism and high-minded puritanism. *The Romantic Tavern* gives us an animated picture of how the Romantic period negotiated these issues. We should toast that.

Ian Haywood
University of Roehampton