

Amanda Jo Goldstein, *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Logics of Life*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2017. Pp. 219. \$35. ISBN 9780226484709.

Romanticism and the science of biology emerged at around the same time. Amanda Jo Goldstein's *Sweet Science* demonstrates that the 'new logics of life' in both fields have a shared point of influence in an ancient text, the didactic poem *De rerum natura* by the Roman poet Lucretius. More than a simple influence study, *Sweet Science* traces the presence of Lucretianism in the Romantic period and beyond to recover a counterdisciplinary materialism that operates '[a]gainst organicism's teleologically insular ideal' (22). In five chapters and a coda, Goldstein's superb book illustrates how Lucretian materialism supplies the terms of scientific and literary practice for the period, as well as an ontology, ethics, and politics for Romantic authors including Blake, Goethe, Erasmus Darwin, and Percy Shelley.

In the Epicurean theory of perception that Lucretius expounds, all perceptible bodies emit 'skins' or films called *eidola*. Granting a phantasmatic, figural character to material things, and conferring reality on shadowy phenomena in turn, Lucretian materialism makes poetry a 'technique of empirical inquiry' (7) and turns empiricism into a 'poetic' practice of apprehending and being moved by transient phenomena. As Goldstein shows, Lucretianism thus blurs the boundaries between poetry and science precisely in the period when these emergent disciplines were becoming distinct.

Recent scholarship on Romanticism's sciences of life has tended to emphasise the period's vitalism; accounts of epigenesis or embryonic generation have accordingly focused on vitalist self-formation of the sort described by Blumenbach, Kant, and post-Kantians such as Coleridge. The subject of Goldstein's first chapter, Blake, is like Lucretius in regarding living forms not as ontologically distinct individually developing powers, but as composed of atoms in acts of combination and recombination. As Goldstein demonstrates, the self-organising epigenesist form is symptomatically embodied in the figure of Urizen, his autonomous development doomed to failure. Blake presents alternatives to Urizenic insularity in accounts of the living being as a composite form, with beings in formation 'exquisitely, even dangerously susceptible to manipulation' (50) by circumstance and milieu.

Goldstein's next pair of chapters examines Goethe's poetic science and scientific poetics, focusing on Goethe's journal *On Morphology* and the poem 'Dauer im Wechsel' ('Permanence in Change') in Chapters 2 and 3, respectively. Chapter 2 attends to how Goethe's late scientific publication presents 'a nonvitalist biology' (74) in which metamorphosis is not a force but a condition, and 'life' is made visible only in the falling away of living forms through fraying, senescence, and decay. Goethe's poem posits a relationship between figuration and materiality, the word and the world, that conforms neither to Paul de Man's accounts of the self-mystifying symbol nor the demystifying allegory. Both the scientific journals and the poem exemplify an intellectual practice to which Goethe gives the name 'tender empiricism', in which the knower is implicated in and transformed by objects known.

Chapters 4 and 5, each dedicated to a major poem by Percy Shelley, attend to how the poet limns the atmosphere of the historical present. In Chapter 4, Goldstein reads the post-revolutionary history of Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life,' arguing that 'life' is characterised in that poem not by the production of the new but by 'mortal, wrinkled, terrestrial corporeality' (142). Chapter 5 moves into directly political territory with a poem Shelley characterised as 'wholly political', 'The Mask of Anarchy'. While most influential recent writing on 'The Mask'

has emphasized the political claims and limitations of the poem's lyric aesthetics, Goldstein makes a powerful case for reading the poem in relation to Lucretian didacticism, offering a brief for didactic verse as enabling the 'pedagogical politics' (173) of the poem.

Sweet Science ends with a coda on the Epicurean/Lucretian materialism of the early, 'Romantic Marx'. Some of Marx's fiercest advocates have sought to exclude these early writings from the canon of 'mature' Marxist thought. Reading and taking seriously Marx's account of human bodies and senses as 'shapers and bearers of human circumstance' (210), Goldstein indicates how much historical materialism owes to the 'old' materialism, and may look different in light of it too.

Goldstein's scholarship is comprehensive, rigorous, and impressively wide-ranging; her engagement with Romantic criticism is generous even in disagreement. I was delighted to find in Goldstein's book, in addition to bold, precise, and persuasive argumentation, some features that do not consistently appear in scholarly work, and whose intermittent presence enliven the whole: impassioned lyricism, sly wit and wordplay, and in the last chapter especially, expressions of political anger and hope. A startlingly original study, *Sweet Science* sets a new standard for scholarship on Romantic poetry and sciences of life.

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