

Cian Duffy, Peter Howell, and Caroline Ruddell, eds., *Romantic Adaptations: Essays in Mediation and Remediation*. Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013. Pp. 175. £54. ISBN 9781472414106.

The very idea of a collection of essays on the topic ‘romantic adaptations’ – counter-intuitive for an era whose ideology of originality is infamous – makes this an appealingly contrarian volume from the start. It is well set-up by an able critical, theoretical, and historical introduction that deconstructs various commonly accepted hierarchies: those of ‘original’ source material and adaptation, as well as high art and popular culture. Offering a wide definition of the Romantic period (encompassing the eighteenth to the late nineteenth centuries) and an even wider sense of what constitutes adaptation or remediation, its nine essays focus on the genres of Romanticism, and on Romanticism itself as a ‘cultural genre’ in history (140).

What readers will not find here are the usual straightforward case studies so common in adaptation studies of film and literature. When adaptations or remediations (the distinction is not always clear) of individual works are analysed, it is usually with an intriguing twist: for example, *Frankenstein* is read in the context of the discourse of today’s stem cell technology/embryology (in ‘The Monstrous Hybrid as Object of Scientific Experiment’ by Allyson Purcell-Davis). Similarly Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is read by James Vigus, in ‘Adapting Rights’, as a discourse of rights that is simultaneously parodied and politically appropriated by Thomas Taylor’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes*. Readers will also not find much new theorizing of adaptation, although Matthew Sangster’s ‘occlusive adaptation’ model of competition (58), in his ‘Adapting to Dissect: Rhetoric and Representation in the Quarterly Reviews in the Romantic Period,’ is a welcome addition to the field.

What is especially innovative and valuable here is the study of genres and forms such as reviews, anthologies, and criticism as kinds of ‘adapting agents’. Reflecting an ambition to dominate and shape literary culture, the *Edinburgh Review* writers are said by Sangster to have, first, adapted the form of the review itself with their ‘felicity of style’, ‘frequent censure’, and radical selection of what to reveal and what to conceal of the work under review (62). This last point made the review itself into an adapting, or at least remediating, agent, argues Sangster. Similarly, Daniel Cook, in ‘The Beauties of Byron and Shelley’, shows how the nineteenth-century ‘Beauties’ anthology collections remediated texts of the past, shaping and ‘purifying’ even salacious works for their present-day ‘polite consumers’ (87). In an essay provocatively entitled ‘The Imprisonment of Foucault’, Peter Howells argues that a critic too can take on this agential role in adaptation: Richard Rorty, he claims, remediated philosopher Michel Foucault into a ‘Romantic intellectual’ (125) who had himself remediated Jeremy Bentham in theorizing the Panopticon.

Peter J. Kitson’s essay “‘Reason in China is not Reason in England’: Eighteenth-Century Adaptations of China by Horace Walpole and Arthur Murphy’ brings to the fore the intercultural dimensions of adaptations, engaging the role of fashion and translation in the transculturation of both texts and artefacts from other nations (here, respectively, a fourteenth-century Chinese drama and the then popular vogue of chinoiserie). Others take this transculturation idea in different social directions – involving both gender and class, rather than national culture – by examining how new markets were opened up and new audiences created through adaptations. Joseph Crawford’s ‘Through a Glass Darkly: Gothic Adaptation in the Eighteenth-Century Novel’, argues that the ‘lost past’ (23) of medieval and early modern romances was remediated with a pedagogical intent in Gothic fiction for female readers. This is, of course, the same

readership that was also offered those sanitized versions of morally questionable literature in those 'Beauties' anthologies of 'treasured maxims' (89). In 'The Miniature Sublime: Later Fortunes of the Cockney Aesthetic', Michael Bradshaw reads the remediation constituted by the thematic 'miniaturization' (73) of the Keatsian sublime in the Cockney aesthetic in terms of 'changes in the commercial distribution and social consumption of literature' in the period (73). A later example of the impact of the economic and social context of adaptation can be found in Annika Bautz's "'In perfect volume form, Price Sixpence": Illustrating *Pride and Prejudice* for a Late-Victorian Mass-Market.' The inexpensive illustrated versions of this and other works, intended for a working-class readership, show how Romantic era texts were adapted to various social ends, including offering (through the illustrations) a very morally conservative reading of the novel, appropriately adapted (it was believed) for a mass readership.

A varied but always engaging collection, *Romantic Adaptations* by and large succeeds in its editors' dual aim of renegotiating both 'the cultural topography' of the Romantic period and the 'place of "romanticism" in subsequent cultural history' (6).

Linda Hutcheon
University of Toronto