

**Martin Blocksidge, *The Banker Poet: The Rise and Fall of Samuel Rogers*. Brighton, Chicago and Toronto: Sussex Academic Press, 2013. Pp. 344. £25. ISBN 9781845195809.**

Martin Blocksidge's biography of the poet Samuel Rogers is not only a much needed work in the field of recovery studies, but also highlights both the poetic and political networks that are foundational in our understanding of Romantic sociability. Rogers was born in 1763 and died in 1855; he started publishing in the 1780s and continued until the 1830s. His poetic fame and popularity transformed his poetic works into commercial items, and it is indeed through bestselling authors such as Rogers that we can understand the nature of the bookselling market and the book-buying public of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Although the popularity of Rogers's works speaks for their public attraction, the character of Rogers is far more difficult to discern, with many speculative rumours about his personal life neatly investigated by Blocksidge. Rogers's relationship with women (and often young girls) cannot be ignored, as highlighted by Jeffrey W. Vail in 2011. Blocksidge proposes that allegations were made against Rogers, which he then quashed through social and financial influence, and rigorously explores the position that young girls occupied in both Rogers's life and his poetry.

Despite this, Rogers remained a constant companion of many prolific political and literary figures. Blocksidge's subtitle of 'The Rise and Fall of Samuel Rogers' aptly describes Rogers's relationships with writers: these often began promisingly but rapidly deteriorated. For example, in 1813 Lord Byron placed Rogers alongside Walter Scott on the poetic hierarchy of the 'Mount of Parnassus' and even published *Lara* alongside Rogers's *Jacqueline* in 1814 (albeit anonymously), as well as dedicating *The Corsair* to him. However, Byron eventually claimed that Rogers was a 'back-biter', and in a posthumously published poem which he originally only intended for the eyes of his publisher John Murray, called him a 'vampire, ghost or ghoul'. Coleridge, on the other hand, had never particularly cared for Rogers, and was dismissive of Rogers's 1792 poem *The Pleasures of Memory*. Meanwhile Wordsworth, pragmatic about the business of publishing and selling poetry, corresponded with Rogers for insights into publishers.

As intriguing and crucial as this contextual and biographical information is, Blocksidge does not neglect to discuss the style and appeal of Rogers's writing. He rightly points out that Rogers was not just a poet, but also a travel writer. Rogers was immensely well travelled and traversed the United Kingdom from Edinburgh to Tunbridge Wells, as well as travelling internationally to Switzerland and Italy, the country that was to bring about one of his most extensive travel journals and also his collaboration with J.M.W. Turner.

Both Turner and Stothard illustrated Rogers's 1834 *Complete Poetic Works*, with Turner providing the illustrations of the picturesque, attesting to Rogers's knowledge that the public were buying volumes of poetry as aesthetic commodities. Although Blocksidge's title *The Banker Poet* juxtaposes Rogers the capitalist and Rogers the artist, these two facets of Rogers's character were not necessarily as opposed as they appear. An undying passion throughout Rogers's life was his love of art, into which he invested a lot of capital. Not only was it a motivation behind his multiple trips to France throughout his life, but his residence at 22 St James's Place contained his renowned art collection, in front of which he hosted legendary literary breakfasts, as demonstrated in the engraving by Chris Mottram (c.1823) held at The Tate. His collection included Reynolds, Holbein, Rubens, Rembrandt and Titian (among many others). The literary and the artistic worlds met in front of these paintings purchased by a poet-banker.

Blocksidge's exploration of the life of Rogers details his many meetings with some of the canonical as well as the still unrecovered figures of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Blocksidge discusses the friendship between Rogers and arch-Tories such as Southey, whilst also acknowledging the position of Rogers as 'The Oracle of (the Whig) Holland House'. Rogers embodies Romantic sociability as an individual who participates in disparate networks, proving how necessarily well-connected individuals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century were.

Although Blocksidge has clearly consulted a wide range of invaluable resources and archives, *The Banker Poet* highlights how Rogers's literary and social standing was framed by these acquaintances. The more recovery research that is undertaken into his fellow poets and politicians (both canonical and non-canonical), the more we will consequently know about Rogers. It is, therefore, a welcome addition to studies of Rogers but also reveals that there is still a great deal of work to be done.

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