

Jeffrey N. Cox, *Romanticism in the Shadow of War: Literary Culture in the Napoleonic War Years*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. 276. \$95. ISBN 978110707194.

Jeffrey Cox has written an elegant and persuasive book about literary genres considered as cultural maneuvers on the English home front during the course of the Napoleonic Wars strictly defined, 1800–1815. His central figures are Thomas Holcroft, Anna Letitia Barbauld, and Leigh Hunt, regarded as foils for major works by, respectively, Byron, the Shelleys, and Keats. Each of these authors is the focus for one of the book's six chapters; Holcroft and Byron paired under the rubric of melodrama, Barbauld and the Shelleys as instances of innovations in satire, and Hunt, Keats and the Cockney School as examples of a new openness toward foreign influences, represented as 'Italianism.'

The generic thrust of Cox's study is enlivened by a clever *schema* that links genres with some of the military maneuvers characteristic of this war. He suggests we 'should think of the Romantic period – both in its military actions and its cultural productions – as the era of small feints, limited campaigns, border raids' (4). One of the most enlightening aspects of the book is the introductory overview Cox gives of these different aspects of warfare, as heuristic types of literary practice exploited by writers who were opposed to the war, but could not speak out directly against it. Thus Holcroft's 'border raids' on Parisian theaters brought back to London a new genre, melodrama, which 'enters the English language with [his] play, *A Tale of Mystery*, in 1802' (37). Unlike established and licensed dramatic forms, melodrama (like border raids) could attack apparently impregnable political and moral targets by indirection, surprise, disguise, and sudden unsettling shifts in tone, tactics, and mode. Its naïve elements allowed dramatic geniuses like Holcroft to play artfully with its conventions.

In the chapter pairings, the first item is usually the more successful, while the second is more problematic, allowing Cox to do some masterful close reading and cross-cultural inflecting, where most of the book's value lies. Thus following Holcroft with Byron's *Manfred*, considered as a melodrama, allows Cox to connect it with similarly mixed-genre works by other authors that significantly expand our sense of the work that could be done by contested genres in very controversial times.

With satire, Barbauld's *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* leads the way. In a retrospective future-fiction, this 'brave and supremely strange poem' (104) imagines a ruined England visited by American tourists, viewing the 'faded glories' of 'fallen London' contemporaneous with her time of composition, such as the British Museum (109-110). Such a perspective could still rile English bile, and in 1812 the howls of outrage were deafening, effectively ending Barbauld's poetic career. But Cox patiently shows how its typical maneuver, the 'sally' or sudden burst of attack, followed by sudden retreat or change of course, enables its progress. Barbauld intensifies Juvenal with doses of Jeremiah, producing a species of prophetic satire breathtaking in scope and implication.

Cox extends this generic innovation into a consideration of Percy Shelley's similarly 'dated' satire, 'England in 1819,' and what he astutely called Shelley's 'England in 1811,' the unpublished Esdaile manuscript (1812). This brilliant move leads him on to an insightful reading of *Queen Mab*, followed by an explosive consideration of *Prometheus Unbound*. The chapter concludes with similarly contextualized treatments of Mary Shelley's *Valperga* and *The Last Man* – another 'dated' satire. In some respects, these works don't *mean* all they can, unless they

are seen in the context of a national cultural situation when the end of the world seemed not a fiction but a likelihood.

Similarly, the erotic, sensual, luxurious language of Hunt, Keats, and others of the Cockney School – to use neutral terms for a rhetoric which critics lambasted in far harsher language – looks significantly different when seen in a cultural context in which a tragic view of life was being urged as mere common-sense ‘realism’. Of course the Cockneys did not always succeed, but they knew very well what they were doing. The quest for eros becomes a kind of heroism when all leading public voices are counselling resignation, and despair replaces terror as the new order of the day. Cox’s framework reminds us that post-Waterloo euphoria was soon nipped in the bud by a Restoration of old tyranny, of which Peterloo stands for many other instances.

Cox’s comparatist training allows him to look much further afield than the usual ‘second generation’ rubric allows, and suggests a three-part pedagogical grid for viewing the period: roughly, 1789–1803, 1803–1815, 1816–1830. Cox is liberal with his thesis statements throughout, making the book user-friendly for undergraduates; a less expensive paperback edition would be highly effective in classroom use. If some of Cox’s intricate ‘can-be-seen-in-this-way’ defenses of the cultural work being done by these oft-neglected texts seem problematic, what is that but an open invitation to both teachers and students to pursue and test his conclusions further?

Kenneth R. Johnston
Indiana University (Bloomington)