**Mary Fairclough, *The Romantic Crowd: Sympathy, Controversy and Print Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. ix + 294. Hb. £59.99. ISBN 9781107031692. Pb. £19.99. ISBN 9781107566668.**

This fascinating study challenges the tendency to understand sympathy in predominantly individual terms. For Fairclough, sympathy was a 'disruptive social phenomenon' (1) manifested in collective behaviours and originating in troublingly elusive physiological operations, and hence suspicious across the political spectrum. The impact of the French Revolution on Britain politicised sympathetic communication: 'the particular association between crowd behaviour and physiological sympathy constitutes a peculiarly Romantic phenomenon' (229). The connection between sympathy and crowds plays out in the dramatic expansion of print culture. Gradually 'sympathy becomes more often associated with the press than with the physical crowd' (10).

The monograph has two sections. The first part examines sympathetic communication from 1750 until the end of the century, tracing its journey from the rarefied pages of Scottish Enlightenment philosophers to revolutionary Paris and English conservative and radical discourse during the 1790s. Chapter 1 establishes philosophical contexts. In 1751 Lord Kames confidently regarded sympathy as 'the great cement of human society' (qtd. 21). While David Hume initially regarded the 'contagious' quality of sympathy as a source of social stability, like Adam Smith he came to emphasise the necessity of its regulation. Fairclough links this to medical accounts of sympathy as a product of nervous physiology, a communicative medium within both healthy and diseased bodies (51) and, by analogy, societies. Resistant to regulation and connected to disreputable phenomena such as animal magnetism, sympathy had disturbing occult qualities which fractured autonomous personal identity and social cohesion.

In the 1770s, Edmund Burke saw sympathy as a force for political cohesion (55-56), but as Fairclough's sophisticated second chapter shows, the disruptive qualities of sympathetic communication become emphasised following the French Revolution. The discourse of sympathy 'unsettles ideological difference' between conservative and radical writers, both of whom feared its facilitation of 'unregulated collective action' (59). While Helen Maria Williams claimed it as a positive collective force, for Burke the contagious sympathy among revolutionary crowds and fostered through an unregulated press brought disaster. Nevertheless, Fairclough notes that his attempt to quarantine a moral and cohesive form of sympathy based in the family and traditional elites is undermined by features it shares with its unruly democratic rival (67). Wollstonecraft and Godwin both distrusted collective sympathy as an instinctive and pathological quality which evaded regulation by reason, thereby opening a gap between their radical principles and their realisation through collective political action. Both sought to rehabilitate it, particularly in a more abstract form as a communicative medium for Enlightened ideas (107). By contrast, John Thelwall affirmed the practical political potential of a materialist model of sympathy, uniquely insisting it was wholesome rather than pathological (107), and thereby justifying his own oratorical practice.

Part Two extends this analysis into the mid-nineteenth century, particularly linking its role to mass protests and the emergence of print culture during the Regency period. Chapter 3 shows how descriptions of crowd actions in political journalism between 1816-17 divided between the respectable press, which viewed crowds as dangerously instinctual and mindless, and the cheap radical press of Hone, Cobbett, and Carlile, which celebrated sympathetic communication as 'principled and progressive' (125), using its associated language to address its readership as a collective. Hazlitt, however, sits uncomfortably in between, closer to Godwin and Wollstonecraft than Cobbett. While the response to the Spa Fields riots largely

elicited a language of pathology rather than feeling, after Peterloo, Fairclough identifies an upsurge in the language of sympathy in radical journalism that encourages identification and participation in its readers. Radicals promoted the unruly energy of the crowd as a fundamental element of democratic 'public virtue' (158) which allows the nation to be recognised as a collective body unified by sympathy.

In the wide-ranging final chapter, Fairclough outlines sympathy's centrality to notions of a 'cohesive patriotic spirit' (167) after Waterloo. Examining shifts in the moral philosophy of Dugald Stewart, David Wilkie's celebrated loyal painting *Chelsea Pensioners Reading the Gazette on the Battle of Waterloo* (1822) and the representation of mail coaches in essays by Hazlitt and De Quincey, she shows how each tries to shift collective sympathy away from its association with disorder. In different ways and with different political implications, each aligns sympathy with the operation of the press as an agent of new notions of nationhood, but even De Quincey's patriotic account of the English mail-coach is haunted by the potential of an alternative, revolutionary form of sympathy.

Inevitably for a book of this ambition and scope there are some gaps. The fascinating point that Williams's later representations of sympathy 'exhibit a loss of confidence in […] unregulated communication' (81) is left tantalisingly unelaborated. The account of the waning of sympathy in the mid-nineteenth century in the light of medical progress is also necessarily truncated. With some valuable exceptions, the discussion tends not to descend to individual experiences within crowds, and the genuinely frightening actions of mobs in the period merit more consideration. Nevertheless, this is an impressively comprehensive and persuasive monograph, which challenges received accounts of sympathy and opens up complex new ways of thinking about the Romantic period.

*David Fallon*
*University of Sunderland*