Kristina Mendicino, *Prophecies of Language: The Confusion of Tongues in German Romanticism*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2016. Pp. 281. £95.00. ISBN 97808232740424.

The argument of this rich and demanding book is difficult to encapsulate. Taking language as its topic, and painstaking close reading as its method, it is self-conscious and occasionally playful with regard to its own use of language, resisting paraphrase even as it refuses to paraphrase the arguments of the authors discussed. In case you are now tempted to read no further, I should hasten to say that it is a very rewarding book, if approached with the requisite patience. (The fact that the learned, polylingual endnotes fill 60 pages indicates the demand placed on the reader.) Precisely owing to the unfamiliarity of its topic and style, I would recommend the book to specialists in British Romanticism. Such readers are likely to spot fruitful parallels between the German writers analysed here and, say, the radical, polyglot, prophetic language of Shelley, or Blake's 'Fiery Chariot of […] Contemplative Thought'.

In an original fashion, Mendicino connects two relatively familiar areas of inquiry in this period: prophecy and translation. Characteristically, she broaches this conjunction using a brief, teasing quotation: 'But often as a firebrand/ arises conf(used)usion of tongues' (Hölderlin). Mendicino repeatedly traces the sudden eruption of strange, 'foreign' language in a variety of poetic and prose texts, frequently noting disruptive manifestations of concern with trans-lation, or the carrying-over of meaning from a prophetic figure (whether a nineteenth-century author or a character from classical tragedy). For example, Wilhelm von Humboldt, language-theorist and translator of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, 'stressed the arrival of [Cassandra's language] as an originary, incendiary moment of language per se' (p. 104). Mendicino does not address translation merely in the sense of rendering Greek into German, though there is plenty of that. She also teases out instances of linguistic ingenuity that subsist 'between Greek and German', as when Humboldt generates a symbolic form of language by importing the rhythm of a Greek word into his translation (p. 67). Further, she considers the broader meanings of translation. An example is Hegel's declaration that, with his *Phenomenology of Spirit,* he aimed to 'teach Philosophy to speak German' (p. 20). It is interesting to read Mendicino's analysis alongside Cecilia Muratori's *The First German Philosopher: The Mysticism of Jacob Böhme in the Interpretation of Hegel* (2016): Hegel also 'translated' the 'barbaric' language of Böhme into a conceptual idiom. As Mendicino's remarkable meditation on Friedrich Schlegel's *Aurora*-project discusses, Schlegel, too, toyed with various senses in which Böhme's mystical insights might be translated. The final chapter returns to Hölderlin, and his incomplete tragedy *The Death of Empedocles*.

The closest Mendicino comes to a summary of her own work is in the 'Disclosure' (a programatically more open-ended chapter-title than 'Conclusion'): 'Without being oriented toward an end, the collection of readings in this volume was loosely drawn together via the ways in which oracular, prophetic, or mantic gestures in each text – and each time, different ones – exposed how several, seemingly monolingual writings that appear to be signed by G. W. F. Hegel, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Aeschylus, Friedrich Schlegel, and Friedrich Hölderlin, are crossed, many times over, by others. Retracing those interactions was, each time, an attempt to disclose more of what is said in each text' (p. 187). It might be questioned whether this content is adequately reflected in the book's title: *Romanticism* is an uncomfortable rubric for Hegel, as well as for Humboldt's Aeschylus; and *German Romanticism* suggests a narrower linguistic specificity than the book actually treats. In the thorough, informative bibliography, the omission of Michael Forster's *Language after Herder* (2010) is surprising. The absence of Johann Georg Hamann's conjunction of prophecy and translation is also noteworthy; perhaps this is due to the relative lack of interest

in Hamann, a devout Christian, in the Derridean tradition in which Mendicino largely operates. Hamann's declaration that 'The confusion of language is a history, a phenomenon, a continuing miracle, and a parable, by means of which God still continues to speak with us' (my translation from *Londoner Schriften*, ed. Oswald Bayer and Bernd Weissenborn, 1993, p. 282) nevertheless resonates with numerous passages in *Prophecies of Language*.

It would be unfair to conclude by dwelling on omissions from such a packed, meditative and meticulously presented book. Mendicino's linguistic virtuosity impressively supports her view that translation should not be conceived rigidly as a passage from one language to another, but can involve the co-existence, confluence and abrupt intervention of different languages. Thanks to Mendicino's English translations, no German, Greek, or French is needed to read the book; but her work should provide powerful encouragement to the polyglot and transnational study that Romantic-period scholarship certainly needs.

James Vigus
Queen Mary University of London