Lily Gurton-Wachter, *Watchwords: Romanticism and the Poetics of Attention*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016. Pp. xiii + 270. £48.00. ISBN 9780804796958.

In 'Once a Jacobin Always a Jacobin,' published in the *Morning Post* in October 1802, Samuel Taylor Coleridge objects to the indiscriminate use of '[t]his charitable adage … in the ministerial circles,' accusing 'Mr. Pitt himself, in one of his most powerful speeches,' of giving it 'every advantage that is derivable from stately diction.' 'Jacobin,' Coleridge argues, along lines that resonate with contemporary critiques of political rhetoric, 'has either has no meaning, or a very vague one.' As Pitt employed it, ''*Once a Jacobin always a Jacobin*,' signifies no more … than *such a one is a man, whom I shall never cease to hate*.' The phrase is, as Coleridge claims and Lily Gurton-Wachter observes in her excellent book *Watchwords: Romanticism and the Poetics of Attention*, 'a blank assertion.' First used among government ministers and then weaponized by the reactionary press, it is an example of the class of 'floating and obscure generalities' that engender and sustain '[p]arty rage' and 'fanatical aversion.'

Coleridge's response to rage and fanaticism is to give the demonized and divisive term 'Jacobin' a degree of nuanced and desynonymizing attention that diffuses its talismanic power. Gurton-Wachter does something similar with 'attention' itself throughout this absorbing study, which examines attention's many registers and meanings in the Romantic period. The book's broad argument is that in its engagement with a diverse range of wartime discourses of attention, Romantic poetry participated in 'a volatile interdisciplinary moment in attention's history' (2) in a way that exemplifies 'an interdisciplinary thinking that understands itself as constituted by modes of attention that it also criticizes' (3). Alongside close readings of Romantic texts, Gurton-Wachter surveys contemporary attempts in various fields to understand and mobilize attention. Chapter 1 reads William Blake alongside accounts of the physiology of reading. Chapter 2 examines poems by William Cowper and Coleridge in the context of the politics and poetics of alarm. Chapter 3 argues that Wordsworth's poetic encounter with revolutionary France, and his conception of the intersection of poetry and history, is inflected by his thinking about the relationship between attention and inattention. Chapter 4 provocatively suggests that Charlotte Smith's attention to the experience of 'just' watching during wartime in *Beachy Head* 'both undermines the militarization of attention during the period and causes the prospect poem to come undone' (112). Chapter 5 turns to John Keats, reading his 'Hyperion' poems as a meditation on a painful form of attention also explored in Scottish moral philosophy, medical literature, responses to the Elgin Marbles, and accounts of epic (as well as modern) warfare. An afterword, 'Just Looking,' traces the afterlife of a distinctively Romantic method of 'reading as a minimal mode of mere attention' in Simone Weil, Emily Dickinson, and Paul Celan (180).

This brief synopsis cannot do justice to the careful construction of Gurton-Wachter's readings or the elegant clarity of her prose. Nor does it reflect the breadth of her references to such fields as aesthetics, theology, rhetoric, and military propaganda. Finally, it leaves out the book's compelling insights about other Romantic writers, including Joseph Priestly, William Collins, Anna Barbauld, William Godwin, Erasmus Darwin, and many others. Part of the interest of attention as a subject is its multiplicity. *Watchwords* makes it clear that attention does not merely take a variety of forms in the Romantic period; it also names conflicting or even antithetical qualities or states.

The multifarious nature of the book's subject (and Gurton-Wachter's intellectual and critical flexibility in attending to it) is one of its many strengths. But it is occasionally a

shortcoming as well. Because attention means so many things, it is sometimes difficult to tell exactly how it signifies in a particular instance. Like 'reading' and 'self-referentiality' in deconstructive criticism, 'attention' is for Gurton-Wachter at once a powerful analytical tool and a capacious analytical category. In general, however, *Watchwords* is a provocative and stimulating study; it tells a compelling story about attention in the Romantic period and opens avenues of inquiry which suggest that there are many other stories to be told. When Gurton-Watcher observes, for example, 'we say that we *pay* attention for the same reason we *pay* anything: to pacify our creditors' (24), her claim suggests that we might also be understood to 'pay attention' in the same way that we 'pay money.' And the idea that attention becomes a powerful form of cultural, political, and poetic currency in the Romantic period is one of the key insights of Gurton-Wachter's enlightening study.

Andrew Franta
University of Utah