

**Andrew Burkett, *Romantic Mediations: Media Theory and British Romanticism*. New York: SUNY, 2016. Pp. 195. \$85. ISBN 9781438463278.**

In his important new study *Romantic Mediations*, Andrew Burkett sets out to explore the implications of William Gibson and Bruce Sterling's *The Difference Engine* (1990), stating that 'there might be some grain of truth in [the novel's] claims about the connections among media, technology, and British Romanticism.' (2) The key question being: 'what, if any, role did the Romantics play in the history of media and other technologies?' (2) This question is very well justified, because the majority of historical media studies tend to focus on later historical periods, beginning with the invention of photography, the phonograph, and film in the second half of the nineteenth century, as 'the modern notion of a 'medium' as a technological channel of communication was a concept introduced only late in the Victorian period.' (3) The Romantics, by contrast, were the last generation never to be photographed and whose voices were never recorded. Far from delivering a pre-history of modern media, Burkett maps out the possibilities of a thorough media-theoretical investigation of British Romanticism. His state-of-the-art theory, developed in the introduction of the book, takes into account the most important developments not only of a media theory of literature, but also of recent developments within Romantic studies. Burkett, however, shies away from writing *the* media theory of Romantic literature and culture, focusing on mediation, remediation, and network theory instead. In doing so, his media archaeology refers to such important contributions by the likes of Clifford Siskin and William Warner, John Guillory, Celeste Langan, Maureen McLane, and Lisa Gitelman, whilst also taking into account theorists as diverse as Niklas Luhman and Gilles Deleuze.

The book's chapters focus on four key Romantic writers – Lord Byron, John Keats, William Blake, and Mary Shelley – as well as four different historical phases and technologies of mediation. Through his sophisticated approach Burkett carefully avoids writing a history of progress. Rather, he takes posterior adaptations and remediations as his starting point for his revisionary readings of Romantic literature from a media-theoretical perspective. In his first chapter, 'Photographing Byron's Hand,' Burkett investigates a picture of a handwritten manuscript of Byron's *Ode to Napoleon*, taken in 1840 by William Henry Fox Talbot, and its implications for the 'literary phenomenon and system known as Byronism.' (29) Burkett plausibly describes the process by which '[o]ne form and phenomenon of mass mediation ('Byronism') thus helps to create part of the conditions for the possibility of the emergence of another (photography).' (37) The general implication here is that 'new' media never bring about revolutions or paradigm shifts, but are introduced into a network of already existing forms of mediation. The second chapter moves from vision to the aural sense, but also enhances the historical gap by moving into the twentieth century, investigating a phonograph recording of John Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' by F. Scott Fitzgerald. This chapter draws a connection between the sense of hearing as a topic in Keats's ode, the influence of Laennec's introduction of the stethoscope – which Keats might or might not have come across during his medical education – and the technology of sound recording, showing how such remediations 'participate in the posthumous life of Keatsean verse.' (67) The third chapter moves even closer to the present day by investigating William Blake's prophetic illuminated books in the context of film – Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man* (1995) and the experimental film *The Vision of William Blake* (1958) by Guy Brenton. Providing a *tour de force*-overview of Blake studies, Burkett analyses Blake's nonlinear works not as singular narratives but as establishing a complex and flexible network. Applying phenomenology and vitality studies, Burkett makes a strong point arguing that 'his images must be recognized and investigated as "moving".' (90) With the investigation of *Frankenstein* in the fourth and final chapter, Burkett rounds up his outline of Romantic

mediations, arriving at the present day with hypertext editions of Mary Shelley's novel as a starting point. This most persuasive chapter starts out by asking why it is *Frankenstein* in particular that lends itself to digital adaptations and remediations. The answer is as original as it is utterly plausible: the cybernetic conception of information – abstract (Victor) and embodied (the creature) – that Burkett traces back to Leibniz's monad system and is, in turn, mirrored in the novel's complex narrative structure through which 'Shelley is urging her readers to recognize the simulacrum of "real information" that the text itself purports to be. *Frankenstein* thus ultimately directs readerly attention to the virtuality of the novel's narrative form and structure in its desire to become transparent.' (131)

Andrew Burkett's book is a masterful study of the possibilities of a media theory of Romanticism. With media archaeology at its centre, Burkett maps out the entire theoretical field, while at the same time providing thought-provoking and striking new insights into specific Romantic writers, their preoccupations, and practices.

*Ralf Haekel*  
*Georg-August-Universität Göttingen*