

**Tom Mole, *What the Victorians Made of Romanticism: Material Artifacts, Cultural Practices, and Reception History*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017. Pp. 317. \$45. ISBN 9781400887897.**

Tom Mole's startlingly original new book asks what the Victorians made of Romanticism. Mole offers his book as a protest against the dominance in critical studies of what he terms 'punctual historicism', the notion that a literary work is best understood in relation to the moment of its composition or publication. But he is not the first student of Romantic afterlives. It is the aggressively materialist framing of the question that indicates the crucial difference between this and earlier studies of the reception of the Romantics in the later nineteenth century. Mole is not interested in tracing the influence of the Romantic poets on the work of their successors or in tracing the vagaries of their critical fortunes. He is interested instead in how the Romantics were accommodated within Victorian cultural practices. He is not concerned with how Walter Scott influenced the development of the Victorian novel but in how he was commemorated in a grandiose Edinburgh monument, and how that monument was itself reproduced not just in engravings but on postcards and cigarette cards.

Mole pursues his enquiry in four areas, only the last of which has been the subject of earlier critical attention. He examines Victorian illustrated editions of Romantic poets, the Victorian effort to Christianize candidates as unlikely as Byron and Shelley, who feature with surprising frequency in the sermons of Victorian evangelicals, the physical monuments to the Romantic poets erected by the Victorians, and the representation of the Romantic poets in Victorian anthologies. Victorian anthologies have been discussed before, but Mole in a prodigious display of the scholarly energy that characterises the whole volume, has examined 210 of them published between 1822 and 1900. His book opens up a new scholarly field and inevitably leaves much of it uncultivated. He looks at four areas, and others will immediately suggest themselves: references to the Romantics in Royal Academy paintings, in commercial advertisements, and so on. His is a book that achieves much and it will prompt still more.

I have some minor caveats. Mole supposes that the Victorians and the Romantics were separated by a generation gap to which the Victorians responded by incorporating Romantic poets into Victorian technologies, by the production, for example, of a volume of photographs designed to illuminate Wordsworth's poems. In Mole's terms the Romantics retained their cultural vitality only by being 'remediated'. But Shelley and Keats, even Jane Austen, were little known in their lifetimes and only became culturally prominent in the Victorian period, and Blake was scarcely known until Gilchrist's 1863 biography. Mole supposes that the Romantics were encountered by their contemporaries in the volumes that they published, and this may be true of Scott and Byron, but not of many others. When Byron asked James Kennedy whether he had read Shelley, Kennedy admitted that he had never seen any of his writings but had encountered some 'extracts' in the *Quarterly Review*. One of Jane Austen's characters remarks that Wordsworth had the 'true soul' of poetry, but it would be rash to infer from this that Austen had ever held in her hands a volume of Wordsworth's poems. Most of the work we now think of as Romantic was not just encountered by the Victorians 'remediated' in some other form. It had been encountered like that by the Romantics' contemporaries.

In his analysis of Victorian anthologies Mole employs a 'quantitative methodology' in order to call into question the 'exemplary' method more usually employed by literary critics, but in the rest of the book Mole is an extravagant exponent of the exemplary method that he here holds under suspicion. He includes a discussion of the relationship between frontispiece and title page, the two pages often separated by a page of tissue paper, in illustrated editions of Byron and Hemans. In the frontispiece a portrait, often neoclassical, monumentalises the

author, whereas the title page features a vignette that evokes the author's living presence. The two pages work together to satisfy the two contradictory demands that Victorian readers made of the literature of the past. The discussion shows Mole at his most brilliant, and it is based on three volumes, two of them from the same series. When Mole works quantitatively the discussion seems by contrast somewhat staid. The practices of Victorian anthologists turns out to have been almost exactly what one had always supposed. It is something of a relief when Mole reverts to the exemplary method in a sparkling coda that shows the process of remediation ongoing in the twenty-first century. Taxis in the Olympic closing ceremony were papered with fragmentary and scarcely decipherable quotations from 'Ozymandias' and 'She walks in beauty like the night', and Byron's lyric also provided the text for the graffiti artist Arofish's slinky pedestrian stencilled on various London buildings outside the stadium. *What the Victorians Made of Romanticism* is a major achievement.

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