Angela Esterhammer, *Print and Performance in the 1820s: Improvisation, Speculation, Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. x + 280. £75.00. ISBN 9781108656832.

In pondering the performativity of language and literature, no surer and more capable guide can be found than Angela Esterhammer. Her fifth book on performativity, *Print and Performance in the 1820s: Improvisation, Speculation, Identity* (2020), explores more widely and probes more deeply into the phenomena than her previous studies. Followers of her work will quickly perceive that, without repeating the analysis of past examples, she carries with her the insights and interpretive tools developed in her previous books, each appropriating aspects of speech act theory and performativity in developing new approaches to literary exposition.

In her ground-breaking book, *Creating States: Studies in the Performative Language of John Milton and William Blake* (1994), Esterhammer examined the biblical language of prophecy in the poetry of Milton and Blake, taking that methodology into a new literary arena with fresh insights into the rhetorical and poetic strategies of both poets. Her next book, *The Romantic Performative: Language and Action in British and German Romanticism* (2000), traces the historical antecedents of ideas about speech acts and performativity, subjectivity and intersubjectivity. In her next monograph, *Spontaneous Overflows and Revivifying Rays: Romanticism and the Discourse of Improvisation* (2004), Esterhammer turned to the phenomena of impromptu performativity and the Romantic fascination with the illusions of spontaneous genius and rhapsodic inspiration. In *Romanticism and Improvisation, 1750-1850* (2008), she resurrects the careers and the performances of the Italian *improvvisatori*. Shelley, Byron, and other visitors to Italy described these performances, emphasizing the ability of the *improvvisatori* to tap into the very sources of poetic inspiration and expression.

Her latest extension of literary performativity examines the three arenas indicated in her title: improvisation, speculation and identity. All three are encountered in her introduction, 'Being There, circa 1824' (chapter 1). For Esterhammer, 'Being There' is a narrative strategy and conjuring ploy: the narrative creates a story of life in London during a year in which its vital qualities were especially rampant; the story enables the reader to experience vicariously the multitude of activities confronting Londoners of the time. In *Revelations of the Dead-Alive* (1824), John Banim imagines a Londoner of his day resurrected in the future to witness the London of 2023. Esterhammer reverses the process to take the reader two centuries into London's past. Encounters with 'identity' occur in William Hazlitt's prose portraits of prominent poets and politicians who either led or obstructed the tendencies of the times ('Spirit of the Age', *New Monthly Magazine*, 1824). Byron's *The Deformed Transformed* about identity-switching had just been published, soon to be followed by the complete *Don Juan*, with alternating role-playing of author and character. The performance of identity, improvisation, and speculation, as manifest in the 1820s, is further examined in each of the subsequent chapters.

Observing how editors and authors collaborate to create a journalistic identity, Esterhammer tracks the preoccupation with performance in the periodical culture (chapter 2). Serving a readership of a religious community, a political affiliation, or social class, the periodicals adopted and performed a consistent public role. Articulated in terms of factional rivalry, that performance, she argues, contributed to the rise of the media concept in the 1820s. Among the theatrical innovations of the time were the one-man shows: Tommaso Sgricci, an Italian *improvvisatore*, would extemporize a full-length tragedy (chapter 3); Charles Mathews, a quick-

change artist adept at impersonations, delighted his audience by transforming himself into a full cast of characters (chapter 4).

Speculation, Esterhammer reminds us, has roots in Latin designations for sentry, spy, and watchman. In addition to connotating observation, speculation also referred to conjecture and surmise. In the 1820s the word took on its economic associations, as abstract reasoning applied to market trends. In the several editions of Theodore Hook's *Sayings and Doings* (1824, 1825), the disparate meanings converge. As in his melodrama, Hook developed narratives of speculative dilemma with mistaken identities, disguises, and impersonations (chapter 5). Esterhammer further links the speculation of the financial market with the speculation-based narrative as literary form, in which readers are solicited to invest belief in fiction (chapter 6). She concludes with *Walladmor*, ostensibly a German translation of a Waverley novel, in fact a forgery by Willibald Alexis. De Quincey, who delighted in the impersonation of the Great Unknown, transformed the novel into a superior counterfeit (chapter 7).

Esterhammer concludes with De Quincey's *Walladmor* as appropriate counterpart to her opening study of Banim's speculative time-travel in *Revelations*. As a tale of twin brothers separated at birth, *Walladmor* is constructed on similar strategies of self and other. Throughout the various modes of performativity, she raises awareness of the otherness essential to performance. Identity slips into alterity and imposture; speculation into hypothetical reasoning or risk-taking. Beneath the apparent spontaneity of improvisation lies the disciplined rehearsal of dialogue and plot structure. Esterhammer has extended the range and manner of performative criticism.

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