

**Sophie Laniel-Musitelli and Thomas Constantinesco, eds., *Romanticism and Philosophy: Thinking with Literature*. New York and London: Routledge, 2019. Pp. ix + 274. £36.99 (pb). ISBN 9780367870768.**

Published in 2015 and now in paperback, this impressive collection originated in an international conference held in Lille in 2012 under the auspices of the French Society for the Study of British Romanticism (SERA). In their lucid introduction to *Romanticism and Philosophy: Thinking with Literature*, Sophie Laniel-Musitelli and Thomas Constantinesco explain the two kinds of ‘thinking’ the essays explore: literature as a topic of philosophical inquiry, and as a form of thought in its own right. The volume reappraises the familiar argument that Romanticism marks the emergence of literature as a site of philosophical speculation by examining both the historical origins of this aesthetic revolution and its far-reaching implications, from German Idealism through to Deconstruction. Equally ambitiously, it moves beyond philosophical interpretation of literary works to explore ‘verse-thinking’, or ‘verse philosophy’, the workings of thought made possible by literary form (prose as well as verse), with its distinctive structures, rhythms and language.

The reappraisal begins with a critique by Christoph Bode of the book which set the terms of modern critical discussion of the literature-philosophy relationship in Romanticism, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy’s *The Literary Absolute* (1978). Bode reveals how selective a version of German Romanticism is conveyed by the texts anthologised (in the original French edition) and discussed by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, and how they misinterpret Jena theory by describing literature as ‘controlled, determined, and dependent on Philosophy’ (28), rather than as aspiring to ‘take over where Philosophy ends’ (31), Friedrich Schlegel’s more radical proposition. Far from representing the ‘absolute’, Romantic literature conspicuously fails to do so, and Schlegel’s point, Bode explains, is that it is ‘by acknowledging its limitations’ that literature ‘becomes limitless, inexhaustible’ (32).

Other contributors explore different philosophical traditions modified or inaugurated by Romanticism. Eric Dayre traces the conceptualisation of the poetry-philosophy relationship back to Aristotle and forward to Derrida and de Man, showing how de Man, in deconstructing Coleridge’s theory of the symbol, misunderstands ‘Romantic time perception’ (50), central to the concepts of both symbol and allegory. In a similarly wide-ranging essay, Arcady Plotnitsky invokes Alain Badiou and Maurice Blanchot to rethink Shelley’s Platonism, crediting him with an ultra-radical scepticism which involves ‘thinking with the unthinkable’ (76). Simon Jarvis shifts attention to Shelley’s technique, developing the idea of ‘verse cognition’ through a reading of ‘The Triumph of Life’. His subtle demonstration of how ‘meter, rhythm, and rhyme are at once constraints upon meaning and generators of it’ (110) brings into focus many of the issues raised in the editors’ introduction.

Other contributions that examine the relationship between literary thought and technique include Mark Sandy’s suggestive analysis of sound patterns and ‘spectral presences’ in Wordsworth’s *Salisbury Plain* poems, Pascale Guibert’s Badiou-inspired account of Wordsworthian metrics (a ‘thought-language of numbers’ (122), in Badiou’s terms), and Yves Abrioux’s ambitious essay on Clare, which invokes multiple critical and philosophical models to capture the ‘peculiar music of Clare’s poetics’ (142). Though the sheer number of philosophers and theorists brought to bear on some authors can be bewildering, many essays achieve insight through unexpected juxtapositions, as with Joel Faflak’s comparison of Austen and Schopenhauer as philosophers of happiness (or the social and psychological obstacles to it), Laura Quinney’s pairing of Blake and Kierkegaard as explorers of ‘existential despair’ (190), and Françoise Dupeyron-Lafay’s linking of Kierkegaard and De Quincey as, respectively, an autobiographical philosopher and a philosophical autobiographer with a shared penchant for pseudonymity and self-theatricalisation. Angela Esterhammer provides a context

for such late-Romantic performances of the self by charting the obsessive discussion of personal identity in the literary and magazine culture of the 1820s. She focuses on Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* and the performances of the comic actor and mimic Charles Mathews, both of which she claims illustrate an alternative Romantic tradition of 'fragmentary and constructed selves' (163), in contrast to the authentic, autonomous self traditionally seen as emergent in this period.

The final section, 'Transatlantic Romanticism', traces other convergences of literature and philosophy that constitute 'poetics of thought'. The most striking example is Paul Grimstad's brilliant description of Poe's prose style. Instead of the 'metre-making argument' called for by Emerson (cited by Susan Dunston on p. 230), he shows how Poe 'turns the *sound* of argument ... into a strange sort of analytical music', exemplified by the 'fantasias of ratiocination', 'faux treatises' and bizarre dialogues of his tales (241). If Wordsworth's unwritten and unwritable 'philosophical poem' is one answer to Schlegel's question of what kind of literature lies beyond philosophy, another is the 'perverse thought experiments' (242) of Poe's essay-tales. In bringing together these diverse manifestations and trajectories of Romantic literary-philosophical thinking, the book makes an important contribution to scholarship. Other valuable essays from the Lille conference were published by the same editors in *Romanticism and the Philosophical Tradition* (Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 2015).

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