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Seascape with a French cargo vessel sailing on a choppy sea at centre, fishing boats beyond, a Dutch coast seen in distance; proof before lettering; before retouchings in the sky (Gerrit van Groenewegen, 1793).

This is a compilation of all the reviews published online in Number 57 of The BARS Review. *A numbered contents list with page references is provided on page 2 of this document. Fully searchable versions of these reviews with enhanced metadata, as well as the archive of past numbers, can be viewed on* The BARS Review *website:* http://www.bars.ac.uk/review/.

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Spotlight: Repositioning Romantic Perspectives

Gillian Russell, *The Ephemeral Eighteenth Century: Print, Sociability, and the Cultures of Collecting*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. xii + 303. 24 illus. £75. ISBN 9781108487580.

Gillian Russell's prize-winning monograph offers a meticulous, comprehensive, and often dazzling exploration of eighteenth-century printed ephemera, ephemerology, and ephemerality as they shaped the modern concept of the everyday, Romanticism, and the codex-form book. Re-orienting book history, Russell traces 'how the categories of the book and ephemera as we know them created each other in the long eighteenth century' (4), making visible the formative role of print ephemera in defining literary value. She argues that the collecting of print artefacts – sales catalogues, tickets, playbills, visiting cards – was itself 'a form of Enlightenment knowledge-making' (188) that attempted to understand the paper economy that transformed eighteenth-century associational culture. After 1800, evanescent ephemera became the 'antithesis of the literary' (3) book, even as the novel came to function as an affective compendium of the everyday. Russell unfolds this long history, exposed in part by digitisation, in nine lucid sections that make a compelling case for the durability of ephemera.

The Ephemeral Eighteenth Century extends Russell's interests in theatre, war, and sociability from her previous four field-changing books. Chapter 5 on theatre playbills, playbill collecting, and the emergence of the poster addresses the centrality of the theatre to ephemera collecting and concludes with the global reach of the 1796 Sydney playbill for the penal colony production of *Jane Shore*. Chapter 7 analyses the ephemera of the 1814 Jubilee celebrating the temporary peace with France. Sociability provides stitching to bundle together the examples across all the chapters; ephemerology – 'the body of knowledge about quotidian life, associational culture, customs and amusements, the mundane and the marvellous, as documented in fugitive print and visual culture' (148) – is its science.

The invention of ephemera and its connection to the everyday (ch. 1) began with Joseph Addison's idea of accidental reading and Samuel Johnson's framing of fugitive texts as 'ephemerae'. The political deployment of the handbill in the 1790s paper wars consolidated it. Early ephemera collectors, George Thomason, Anthony Wood, Narcissus Luttrell, created their own unique assemblages (ch. 2), 'bundles' of ephemera (68) that were 'the means whereby the diversity and scope of the print revolution of the early Enlightenment was apprehended' (62), especially a new awareness of time.

At the centre of Russell's argument (chs. 3, 4; parts of 6, 7) is the fascinating, understudied ephemerologist, Sarah Sophia Banks (SSB as she signed her collections), sister of Sir Joseph Banks and cohabitant of No. 32 Soho Square, where her 'collectanea' (101), described by Russell as a Benjaminian and Deleuzian 'assemblage' (103), lived in tandem with her brother's scientific ones, creating a kind of 'sociablarium' in the manner of the herbarium (123). In her vast collections of tickets and cards, SSB not only documented polite social life after 1760 – frost fairs, ballooning, social visits, balls – but also created her own 'natural history of sociability', 'an informal, expansive, science of the present' (107). Situated in the context of past and contemporary ephemerologists, SSB appears as the 'first historian of fashionable sociability' (103).

Eighteenth-century print ephemera, like the ticket and the visiting card, raised questions of what and who belongs, from home to public event to museum archive. Russell interprets the visiting card (ch. 6) as a liminal contact zone, invested with affective meanings that (con)figure eighteenth-century hospitality. Prefiguring text messaging, the visiting card 'act[s] as a prosthesis of individual identities and a filter of relationships between people' (186-7), producing a 'virtual sociability' (194) that regulates polite culture. Maria Edgeworth's *The Absentee* remediates the visiting card to explore 'the scope and potential of print as a medium

of information and sociality' (208), gathering '"withinside"' (213) the full range of paper products of the everyday.

Another example, Wordsworth's Book 7 of *The Prelude* (ch. 5), reveals Romantic poetry as a 'supermedium' for assimilating ephemera to a 'poetics of everyday sociality' (165). Jane Austen's *Persuasion* provides Russell's final literary example, an 'ephemerography' (216) that embodies the novel's transcendence of its own ephemerality through its representation of the everyday (ch. 7). Situated in the forgotten ephemeral history of 1814, particularly during two key public events, the February frost fair and the Jubilee fair, Austen's novel illustrates 'how ephemerality and ephemerology were constitutive of the Romantic everyday and remediated by it' (216).

Publishing an academic monograph on ephemera performs a similar role as the novel in remediating, elegantly, the ephemeral social encounter in the codex-form of the book, a print form that is itself on the verge of becoming ephemera. This reviewer recognises, too, the irony of writing a digitised review of a book on ephemera as well as the violence she does trying to encapsulate the rich experience of reading Russell's monumental work – a reminder of what Russell calls the 'absolute ephemeral' and itself an experience, like the ephemerologists', of 'the exhilaration of preserving the traces of what was already lost' (254).

Ashley Cross
Manhattan College

Jane Spencer, *Writing about Animals in the Age of Revolution.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp. xi + 281. £60. ISBN 9780198857518.

Jane Spencer's splendid book represents the result of decades of work on approaches to animals in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and perhaps a lifetime of thought on this subject. It is in many ways a summation of the field, with enlightening revisits to some of the best-known material (original and critical) in this area; the introduction of previously unstudied contemporary works such as Margaret Cullen's novel *Mornton* (1814); and the gathering of the whole into a comprehensive, lucid, and always finely tuned exploration of what gave animals such an important place in revolutionary (and counter-revolutionary) witing in this period.

Animal studies has come a long way since the 1990s, when I found that my 'animals and Romanticism' PhD topic – perhaps because of the assumed connection with writing for children – was sometimes regarded as not really erudite enough for doctoral level study. Since those ground-breaking days, Professor Spencer has contributed importantly to the developments that have seen the standing of animal studies in this period rise to become a well-respected, wide-ranging, and burgeoning field, approached through many disciplines both in the humanities and the sciences, and in notable cross-disciplinary ways. Her own previous work on the literary tradition of animal writing, and on gender and women's writing in the long eighteenth century, as well as her exploration of kinship and the canon, informs her approach here, with particularly interesting studies in the areas of religious tradition about animals; women's approaches to animals in this period; and the debates over the extent of kinship between human and non-human animals.

In the biblical field Spencer's discussion gives special attention to Balaam's ass from the *Book of Numbers* as a traditional lesson in which a humble and potentially ridiculous animal is the means of showing an arrogant man the error of his ways. She traces this theme from the mediaeval period through philosophical and moral prose writing such as that of Humphry Primatt (1766) and via Sterne, Cowper, and Coleridge, to a fine close reading and revelatory

re-evaluation of Wordsworth's much-mocked *Peter Bell*. 'There is no doubt within this poem of the animal's potential to address the human: what is in doubt is the man's capacity to understand it' (68), Spencer writes.

Aspects of religious tradition and belief are also given prominence in Spencer's study of Mary Wollstonecraft's struggles with the place of animals in her arguments for women's rights, where Christian theology comes into conflict with the work of Buffon and other Enlightenment naturalists. The question of the degree of analogy between human and non-human animals was, Spencer shows, a difficult one for Wollstonecraft, because it threatened to undermine her contention that women equally with men have rights, 'as rational creatures, who were raised above the brute creation by their improvable faculties' and received from God, meaning they can never be undermined (127). 'Despite [Wollstonecraft's] insistence on the sharp divide between rational, improvable human beings and instinctive, static brutes, she accorded sufficient weight to theories of mind-body determinism, and to naturalists' related analogies between human and animal behaviour, to be troubled by them' (127), Spencer points out.

These analogies were at their most contentious in the arguments about race and slavery, especially in what the 'Sons of Africa' (a group of men of African origin who wrote to the press about a recent work on slavery) called 'the Oran Otang philosophers': those who claimed 'that African peoples looked like, were no more civilized than, or even interbred with, orang-outangs' (145). Spencer studies Edward Long's now-notorious *History of Jamaica* (1774) which argued that the 'negro' was a different species: 'Of other animals, it is well known, there are many kinds […] and why shall we insist, that man alone, of all animals, is undiversified', Long queried (153). One of the strengths of Spencer's work throughout her book is the way in which material that now seems contentious or offensive is cited unflinchingly and in detail, allowing us to see these arguments in their full extent, bringing their chilling force much more powerfully to the fore than any polite paraphrase would do.

Long's ideas were taken all too seriously at the time, although by 1817 they were being subjected to urbane mockery by Peacock's Sir Oran Haut-ton – a non-speaking but polite, gentle, and brave baronet elected as MP for the rotten borough of Onevote. Burke's famous description of the populace as 'the swinish multitude', in contrast, provoked immediate outrage and satire, and the rich field of 'pig literature' with which working-class and other writers and artists responded to Burke is one of the most entertaining sections of a book that is a must-have for anyone studying and teaching in this field.

Christine Kenyon Jones
King's College London

Caroline McCracken-Flesher and Matthew Wickman, eds., *Walter Scott at 250: Looking Forward.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021. Pp. xi + 227. £75. ISBN 9781474429863.

Daniel Cook, *Walter Scott and Short Fiction.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021. Pp. 200. £75. ISBN 9781474487139.

As 2021 marks two hundred and fifty years from the birth of Sir Walter Scott, it is not surprising that there have been numerous publications and events about The Great Unknown. Two of these are the focus of this review.

Walter Scott at 250: Looking Forward is a collection of ten chapters by established Scott scholars: Ina Ferris, Penny Fielding, Ian Duncan, Anthony Jarrells, Celeste Langan,

Alison Lumsden, Fiona Price, Caroline McCracken-Flesher, Susan Oliver, and Matthew Wickman. As the title suggests, the book is concerned with how Scott is a 'theorist of tomorrow' (5), presenting ways in which his work intersects with twenty-first-century concerns and trends. Although each chapter stands alone, cohesion is created through the authors' links to relevant issues, and the use of key clusters, which are outlined in the introduction.

The first cluster focuses on time and space, opening with Ina Ferris' discussion of unclosing the past in Scott's oeuvre, which 'makes visible what has been smoothed out or over in the historical past [and] directs attention to its compaction' (17). Penny Fielding similarly considers time, arguing that Scott draws attention to the fissures in the idea of stadial time through his use of the future anterior. She shows through a close reading of *The Bride of Lammermoor* that this novel suggests 'history is not something given, but an epistemological-temporal structure that depends on continual reinterpretation of the past imbricated in conjectures about the future' (42). The third chapter in this cluster is by Ian Duncan and considers anachronism, arguing that there are three types of anachronism in Scott's 1814-1819 novels: necessary, comic anachronism, which 'brings history home to the "eternal or existential present"' (60); an uncanny mode created by 'anachronism's alienating, dislocating force' (60); and 'a critical and utopian mode of anachronism' which 'unspools into utopian longing' (60-61). The reader is the primary force of these three modes, thus ending the cluster on time in the present moment of reading.

The next two chapters focus on value. Anthony Jarrells opens by noting that Thomas Piketty's bestselling *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* considers fiction by Honoré de Balzac and Jane Austen, but not by Scott, and thus concludes that meritocratic values were undermined by early nineteenth-century commercial society. If Piketty had considered Scott, Jarrells argues, his conclusions may have been different. Many of Scott's characters, Jarrells contends, 'achieve success through study and effort […]. At the same time, however, Scott connects this success […] back to property and rank, justifying the latter, we might say, in the process' (71). Celeste Langan compares a debt-laden Scott to contemporary knowledge-workers, producing page after page of text. By comparing Scott's journal to his *Life of Napoleon*, Langan demonstrates the links between Napoleon as military-leader, Scott as writer, and academics as textual producers.

Alison Lumsden and Fiona Price consider textual excess in Scott's work. Lumsden shows how the paratextual notes to Scott's poetry are an important part of his discourse with more in common with modern hypertexts than Romantic annotation, concluding that, 'the notes to Scott's poems call into question the authority of discourse itself and the possibility of its completion' (122). Price considers performance, arguing that 'Scott's work reveals how the performance of gender structures political life, shaping our imaginary of how power should – and does – operate' (138). Caroline McCracken-Flesher investigates the roles and lives of Abbotsford's female inhabitants, challenging the erasure of these women by visitors, concluding that, 'Watching visitors' resistance to the female presences at Abbotsford gives us those women's unique gift: the gift of questioning our own positioning, our own assumptions, our own identities in formation' (156).

The final two chapters are concerned with Scott's role in the Anthropocene. Susan Oliver considers the representation of species loss and human exile across Scott's work. Finally, Matthew Wickman discusses 'How Scott brings the "unthinkable" to consciousness – the narrative techniques whereby he renders the unimaginable more palpable to us' (185), which provides us with ways to think about unimaginable issues such as the climate crisis.

All ten chapters in this book are well-written, well-developed, and interesting. They open up new ways of thinking about Scott, and highlight connections to twenty-first-century life that may initially seem unrelated. It is therefore an important book, not only for Scott studies but for literary studies more generally.

The second book in this review, Daniel Cook's *Walter Scott and Short Fiction*, provides an extensive exploration not only of Walter Scott's short fiction, but the form and development of the short story in Scotland. Working chronologically through Scott's short fiction, Cook interrogates the form of each text, showing us examples of when Scott wrote, amongst others, compressed novels, short stories, and anecdotes (which Cook interestingly positions as a forerunner of flash fiction). Genre is also of concern to Cook; he outlines how Scott used and subverted elements from genres including the Gothic, fairy tales, and historical fiction. A third aspect of Cook's exploration is the way in which Scott used short fiction to raise questions about story and authorship. Scott's short fiction, Cook argues, comes to the reader mediated through layers of tellers, making it impossible, in many cases, for the reader to establish whose words they are reading. Claiming that 'For all their diversity in style and content, Scott's short stories, like many of his novels, typically turn back to fundamental questions about the status of taletellers in the modern world. Who tells stories, especially in a commercialised world of print? Who hears – or reads – them, and why?' (158-9), Cook shows how a good understanding of Scott's short fiction enables a wider comprehension of the major themes of Scott's work.

Walter Scott and Short Fiction is a highly readable monograph that does not assume knowledge of either Scott's short fiction or the history of the short story. Along with his arguments surrounding form, genre, and metafiction, Cook provides synopses of the texts that he discusses. Some of these, such as 'Wandering Willie's Tale,' 'The Two Drovers,' and 'The Surgeon's Daughter,' are likely to be familiar to readers. Others, such as 'The Fortunes of Martin Waldeck,' and *Bizarro* are probably less so. Regardless of whether they are well-known or obscure, Cook considers each piece of fiction in depth, providing context about its sources, writing, and publication, discussing it in relation to its form, and explaining what happens in it while bringing to the fore relevant points about its shifts in genre, the way it subverts the reader's expectations, and how it engages with questions of authorship and narrative relatability. The final chapter, 'Afterword: The Modern Scottish Short Story', provides a pertinent and far-reaching overview of Scottish short fiction from Scott to the present day. In addition to tracing elements of Scott's influence, it makes a strong case for an increased recognition of Scottish contributions to short fiction.

Cook's monograph is an excellent contribution to the study of early nineteenth-century short fiction. It employs theories of the short story and its tributaries with context on the background of each text studied and detailed close readings. The overall argument that Scott uses short fiction to engage with questions of '"storiness"' (9), narratability, and authorship is a well-argued addition to the current state of Scott studies.

These two books are part of an increased interest in The Great Unknown that coincides with his two hundred and fiftieth birthday. As Walter Scott's popularity with general readers has waned over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it would be easy to see him as an author with limited relevance today. However, both these books have firmly situated Scott in the middle of issues that affect life, literary and otherwise, in 2021. These books argue that Scott shows us the importance of not smoothing over history, of recognising value, and of the effect of the Anthropocene. In terms of literature, they argue that Scott demonstrates the importance of slow reading and defies the idea that a literary text could be one complete, self-contained, unproblematic whole. They are therefore both excellent additions to studies of Scott and Romantic literature.

Anna Fancett
Academy of Distance Learning

Tim Fulford, ed., *The Life of Nelson, by Robert Southey*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2021. Pp. xxxi + 368. £115. ISBN 9780367023089.

Few Romantic-period biographies have been republished and reprinted as frequently as Robert Southey's *Life of Nelson*. The first edition was published in 1813, eight years after the death of its subject, Horatio Nelson. In a letter to his uncle Herbert Hill, Southey noted that 'this was a subject I should never have dreamt of touching, if it had not been thrust upon me', and proceeded with the aim of 'making the narrative continuous & clear'. As Southey predicted, this has undoubtedly been integral to the biography's success, and is an aspect that Fulford's new edition celebrates.

Fulford's editorial introduction acknowledges Southey's discipline as a writer. Focused, well-researched, and attentive to deadlines, Southey noted the limitations offered by previous biographies of Nelson, such as those by James Harrison (1806), John Charnock (1806), and T. O. Churchill (1808). These biographies were written to respond to the public appetite and offer personal insights into the developing idolatry of Nelson as a war hero. Fulford discusses how Southey, however, seemed sensitive to Nelson's still-living wife Frances Nelson (1759-1831), and saw his role as biographer as an ethical one, which excluded details of Nelson's marital infidelity whilst also attempting to include Emma Hamilton's 'positive effects on Nelson in his last years' (xv).

Through this discussion of politics, networks, and the responsibility of the biographer, Fulford recovers Southey as an author who worked in collaboration with others to achieve the accurate and concise narrative he aspired to. As Fulford discusses, a dedication to the patriotic poet and First Secretary of the Admiralty John Wilson Croker enabled Southey to publicly align his biography with an individual who had both naval and poetic experience, whilst also thanking Croker for the promotion of Southey's brother Thomas which he had supported. Thomas Southey, in turn, helped with proof-checking, which was of particular importance for naval terminology.

By detailing the composition and construction of Southey's *Life of Nelson*, Fulford makes the reader critically aware of what the narrative tells us about Southey as a writer, and not just Nelson as the subject. This is complemented by sections on the Romantic-period and later reception of the biography, and Fulford includes details of how even Byron – who would later write about dunking Southey in Derwentwater, amongst worser things – admired Southey's 'perfect' prose.

Of course, this biography did not just popularise Southey as a talented biographer but marked a significant moment in the formation of the Nelson myth. Fulford's discussion of key themes in the text opens with how it contributed to the popularisation of 'the Romantic hero; because it relocates patriotism in the professional middle classes; because it idealises the nation; and because it pioneers psychological biography' (xxvii). Within this, the paradox of Nelson's naval victories causing the decline of his physical health but the increase of his mental resolve became a key argument in the developing narrative of the Nelson myth. Fulford articulates this as 'bravery and effectiveness are relocated from the martial body to the determined mind', consequently accruing 'some of the mythic power traditionally possessed by Christian martyrs' (xvii).

Much like the developing myth of Nelson during the Romantic period, Fulford ensures that the reader is aware that the *Life of Nelson* was an evolving text, adapted by Southey to reflect his changing politics, exhibiting a 'sceptical independence, critical of government past and present whilst also alarmist about popular democracy' (xxix). This is when Fulford makes one of the most important points about Southey's depiction of Nelson: the admiral resembles Southey himself. In Fulford's words, 'Southey made Nelson a romantic embodiment of the national character as he wished it to be' (xxix).

The text of this edition is from the first edition published in 1813, critically justified by the cultural impact of its initial publication, but also by the correspondence and ephemera in which Southey discusses the process of composition and publication, which rightly inform the notes and editorial introduction of Fulford's edition. The last words of this review must be given to Southey himself, who in the introduction to the *Life* exhibits his motivations for undertaking the role of biographer, and the research-driven focus for his work which we, as literary historians, can empathise with: 'the best eulogy of Nelson is the faithful history of his actions, and the best history must be that which shall relate them most perspicuously' (4).

Charlotte May
University of Nottingham

Spotlight: Repositioning Romantic Perspectives

Bethan Roberts, *Charlotte Smith and the Sonnet: Form, Place, and Tradition in the Late Eighteenth Century*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019. Pp. x + 182. £19.99 (pb). ISBN 9781789620177.

Bethan Roberts's monograph, *Charlotte Smith and the Sonnet: Form, Place, and Tradition in the Late Eighteenth Century*, is one of the latest studies to be published by Liverpool University Press's 'Romantic Reconfigurations: Studies in Literature and Culture 1780-1850' series. This wonderful text does a masterful job of elucidating on two overlooked subjects — Smith and the sonnet in the early Romantic period — by wedding them together in a clearly written, thoroughly engaging study that sheds light on Smith *and* the sonnet form as important subjects at the end of the eighteenth century. Roberts places Smith's sonnets in their structural, geographical, and traditional spaces whilst demonstrating the Petrarchan, Shakespearean, Spenserian, and Miltonic sonnet forms. This grounding affords Roberts the ability to frame her ideas within the contexts of time and place, and also allows her to demonstrate just how Smith is, arguably, the best sonneteer in several hundred years.

After an insightful introduction, which examines recent literature as well as Roberts's outline for the text, chapter one (called 'The Eighteenth-Century Sonnet') 'tells the story of the sonnet in the eighteenth century, and Smith's role in it' (11). Here, Roberts demonstrates the ways in which Spenser and Milton become Smith's 'poetic precursors' (to borrow Harold Bloom's phrasing) and how her sonnets would come to later influence Wordsworth and Coleridge.

Chapter two ('Tradition') 'focuses on the first (1784) and third editions (1786) of *Elegiac Sonnets*, which are steeped in the highly literary environs of the nightingale and the river' (29). In the nightingale section, Roberts asserts that Smith places herself within the pantheon of Romantic poets who use geographical location to situate the subject matter of their poems. A section on the River Arun takes up most of the chapter's analysis and provides the 'clearest sense of the topography of Smith's childhood' (43). Like Wordsworth, Smith draws upon familiar landscapes as a way to bring the reader into the spatial location of the sonnet and the subject. Roberts defends the notion that it is Wordsworth who, after reading Smith's poetry, championed her as a seminal figure at the time.

Chapter three ('Innovation') looks at the fifth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1789), where 'the sea becomes the prevalent poetic figure, and its presence then increases with each subsequent edition' (71). Roberts believes that 'it is in her sea sonnets that Smith's distinctive voice and innovative use of the sonnet form really emerges' (71). In this chapter, Roberts argues that structurally Smith uses the alexandrine form coupled with the rhyming couplet of Alexander Pope in order to bring the sonnet to a close; then, she argues that Smith utilises the sublime as a means to emphasise 'the sheer size and apparent limitlessness of the sea' (82). Moving onto land, the second half of the chapter looks at the elegiac qualities of Smith's sonnets within the parameters of Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard'. Roberts does a great job of continuing connections between Smith and her contemporaries. This not only situates Smith amongst her poetic peers, but it illustrates her importance and relevance.

Chapter four ('Wider Prospect') discusses contemporary biases against the sonnet as a 'legitimate' poetic form and then argues that it is primarily Smith's success with the sonnet that affords its reintroduction into the British poetic canon. Roberts goes on to say that the sonnet 'further illuminates and clarifies Smith's "place" in literary tradition' and will argue for the 'afterlives' of Smith sonnets (99). Roberts compares Smith to William Bowles as a fellow

sonneteer. She elucidates that Bowles 'follows Smith formally' and furthers the idea that Smith, being a legitimate poet, deserves the respect that has been bestowed upon her male counterparts.

Chapter five ('Botany to Beachy Head') is the culmination of the monograph, in which Roberts shows 'that in the final edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1797 and 1800) several sonnets display an involvement with nature in rather a different mode from the vast seascape, steeped, in contrast, in the close-up observation of the botanist or naturalist' (133). Roberts then argues that this line of thinking aligns with Smith's poetry that was intended for children. In what is, arguably, one of the most enjoyable sections of the book, Roberts argues that Sonnet LXXIX 'grounds Smith's engagement with botany explicitly in the context of suffering' and places Smith with Milton and Rousseau 'as writers who turned to botany for respite' (135).

Roberts's monograph is a lively, thoroughly engaging labour of love. It deserves its placement alongside Stuart Curran's edition of Smith's poetry and Jacqueline M. Labbe's equally important Smithian studies, and it will be an important Smithian resource for years to come.

Peter Francev
Victor Valley College

Eliza Borkowska, *The Presence of God in the Works of William Wordsworth*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2021. Pp. xviii + 191. £120. ISBN 9780367608125.

Eliza Borkowska, *The Absent God in the Works of William Wordsworth*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2021. Pp. xviii + 196. £120. ISBN 9780367608132.

On first encountering 'Lines Written a few miles above Tintern Abbey', 'Elegiac Stanzas', or the Immortality Ode, bright students sometimes ask, 'what was Wordsworth's religion?' My necessarily piecemeal response is usually prefaced with a disclaimer along the lines of 'that is a huge and complicated question'. One reason why it is difficult to offer an answer is that Wordsworth's personal affinities, affiliations, and opinions changed over his lifetime; another is the manner in which he deals with religion; another is the caution needed to separate the man from the poet. All of these obstacles are addressed at length in *The Presence of God in the Works of William Wordsworth* (subsequently referred to as I). Eliza Borkowska's complementary volume, *The Absent God in the Works of William Wordsworth* (subsequently referred to as II), then explores the nature of the poet's struggle to balance his chequered personal experiences with a solid poetic legacy.

The works are unique in their scope, approach, and organisation. *The Presence of God* tackles 'the theme of religious faith' (I.3), which covers references to God, the Church, church buildings, and worship throughout the whole of Wordsworth's career (in poetry, prefaces, letters, and notes) from start to finish, before and after revision, and 'including the work that was never written' (I.7). A study of such scope has not been attempted before. (Critics have tended to focus on one stage in the poet's life or writing – William A. Ulmer's *The Christian Wordsworth*, for instance – or one strand of ideas, such as Richard E. Brantley's *Wordsworth's 'Natural Methodism'*.) Borkowska's 'statistical' approach is also highly unusual. It involves calculating, for example, the occasions on which Wordsworth mentions prayer or the proportion of his verse that references Christ. The types of comments Borkowska offers throughout *The Presence of God* – for instance, that 'Catholic figures appear more commonly and persistently in Wordsworth's poetry (and certainly in his prose) than the figure of Christ'

(I.37) – would not be possible through close reading of any part of Wordsworth's oeuvre. In this sense, the first volume in particular functions as a survey or concordance as much as a piece of critical interpretation; indeed, the ratio of quotation, documentation, and description (on the one hand) to literary critical analysis (on the other) is pretty high.

While the work contains more mathematics than most Romanticists would care to muddle through, the shape of the volumes is artfully conceived. The first monograph consists of eight chapters; the second includes six: together these sections equate to the octave and sestet of a sonnet such that the entire work becomes 'a tribute to Wordsworth as one of the most prolific sonneteers in history' (II, n.p.). Each chapter takes a view of the whole body of work and each 'statistical' observation is made within a holistic context. As a consequence, there are few occasions on which Borkowska gives any single poem or prose work sustained attention. In *The Presence of God* this happens only in Chapter 6 (*The Excursion*) and Chapter 7 (*The Prelude*). The same poem might be discussed briefly in two or three separate chapters, each time from a different 'angle'. The thematic treatment also means that readers coming to the volume without a fairly comprehensive sense of the chronology of Wordsworth's life and work will struggle not to feel disorientated. Nonetheless, the trends that Borkowska identifies will help sharpen scholarly understanding of the patterns and nuances of Wordsworth's manner of expressing religious ideas.

The ambitious design leads Borkowska to work almost entirely from Ernest de Sélincourt's (digitised) one-volume edition of *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* (1904). For the prose, she takes Alexander Grosart's three-volume edition of 1876, a decision based on the 'accessibility of this edition in a number of handy electronic formats' and its thematic rather than chronological arrangement (I.xvii). The Cornell Wordsworth volumes are given short shrift for not representing final authorial revisions and the Oxford *Prose Works* (prepared by Owen and Smyser in 1974) are discounted. Borkowska's first volume is steeped in Christopher Wordsworth's *Memoirs* (1851), the 'Reminiscences' recorded by Grosart, and Isabella Fenwick's 'Notes'. But with the exception of Stephen Gill there is little close engagement with recent criticism. Again, the design of the project precludes the enormous discussion this would require.

Chapter 1 of *The Presence of God* tackles the issue of separating the man from the poet. Borkowska concludes that while 'the poet' has often been read as an exponent of various Christian positions, Wordsworth did not strike his friends and Rydal neighbours as a religious man. Chapter 2 considers 'religious signposting' within Wordsworth's poetry which, Borkowska notes, is indeterminate. She asks whether poems count as 'evidence' of religious belief (I.33) and concludes that they do not. Chapter 3 takes 'Allusiveness' as its topic, a term Borkowska uses to capture Wordsworth's habit of making religious exclamations parenthetically (rather than to denote Wordsworth's use of literary or biblical allusion). That Wordsworth often makes 'bracketed allusion[s] to religion' (I.44) is an original observation; it is used by Borkowska to explain the poet's preference for the sonnet, a form that does not lend itself to extended exposition. While Chapter 4 offers a staid treatment of Wordsworth's prose, Chapter 5 is an interesting survey of references to prayer and church buildings, in which Borkowska demonstrates the lyric speaker's reluctance to enter into such. The main argument of Chapter 6 is that the Poet of *The Excursion* represents Wordsworth himself and that this 'blank character' epitomises Wordsworth's systematic practice of depersonalising all expressions about (or addressed to) God. Yet *The Excursion*'s dramatic framework, Borkowska concludes, gives Wordsworth the space to 'elaborate on the subject of religious belief' precisely because *all* of its characters are reflective of him (I.140). The seventh chapter contains a clear, careful account of the nature and extent of *Prelude* revisions and will perhaps become the most enduringly useful section of these works. Borkowska's interest in Wordsworth as a sonneteer pervades Chapter 8, which argues that Wordsworth 'attempted to build his

compositions, regardless of their length or genre, upon the structural principles of the sonnet' (I.160). That is to say, he sets the groundwork in the opening lines before introducing a 'turn', after which he lets 'religion' briefly enter. Such comments on sonneteering are important to the cohesion of the two volumes, and will be of interest to scholars of Romantic sonnets.

One of the frustrations of reading *The Presence of God* is that it offers little sense of the relationship Wordsworth perceived between religion and the imagination. Wordsworth's energy and aspiration, his striving after 'something evermore about to be' makes the imagination itself a divine phenomenon. The frustration is remedied in *The Absent God*. The volume attempts to explain why Wordsworth was cautious, allusive, and personally disengaged when addressing or discussing God, why 'all his religious discourse turns out to be a record of his encounters with absence' (II. 8). The first chapter marks out what Borkowska defines as Wordsworth's poetry of past and future encounter: God is always either a memory or an anticipation. The following three chapters work cumulatively to build a picture of Wordsworth's understanding of the imagination. Chapter 2 explores the significance of Hartley's Associationism and Chapter 3 recounts the importance of Coleridge's influence before Chapter 4 contends that, without Coleridge and his notes for *The Recluse*, Wordsworth's poetry begins to lack imagination. Here Borkowska makes an insightful comparison with George Crabbe and frames Wordsworth as a poet with Popean tendencies. Chapter 5 expands these ideas by examining the place of 'imagination' in Wordsworth's 1815 categorisation of his poems.

The sixth and final chapter states that Wordsworth is 'statistically' the poet of God but he is reticent, allusive, and hesitant; he turns to God only when it is too late to say anything thorough, conclusive, or decided. The reason for this, Borkowska suggests, is that Wordsworth's method of locating God in the past or the future (his method of 'absence') is connected with an anachronistic, eighteenth-century disposition towards the imagination: Wordsworth tried and failed to encounter a version of God that had become outdated. Borkowska's most important contribution, then, is her appraisal of Wordsworth as a poet crossed (or cursed) by his position in time, at a turning point in history when the imagination began to replace God. But, Borkowska concludes, Wordsworth struggled to give religion up; he wanted to believe or, at the very least, he wanted his readers to believe that he believed. This is the source of the paradox of the present absence (or absent presence) of God in his works.

With hindsight and the benefit of electronic editions it *is* possible to extract a poet's 'method' (and perhaps Wordsworth's awareness, or otherwise, of the habits and processes Borkowska attributes to him is unimportant). The general impression of these volumes, however, is of Wordsworth as a methodist (so to speak); as a man who calculated and weighed, who followed certain structuring patterns, who did not allow himself the space or time to say what he really thought and felt. This mechanical study seems to take away the life of the poet, his felt experiences and sympathies, his humanity. But perhaps that is the valuable lesson of Borkowska's tireless work: that when it came to God, Wordsworth was not himself.

Jessica Fay
University of Birmingham

Bysshe Inigo Coffey, *Shelley's Broken World: Fractured Materiality and Intermitted Song*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021. Pp. xxi + 220. £90. ISBN 9781800855380.

Merrilees Roberts, *Shelley's Poetics of Reticence: Shelley's Shame*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2020. Pp. xi + 237. £120. ISBN 9780367256432.

These two exciting author-focused studies of Percy Bysshe Shelley have an idiom in common. That is, a language of gaps, aporias, limits, interstices, vacancy, irresolution, and indeterminacy that their authors render as an affirmative provision. Coffey and Roberts rehabilitate such typically negative terms from their association with poststructuralism in literary studies. A Promethean Shelley is being recast within a new situation: a world(view) both of 'limit-points' (Coffey, 194) and of future, altered prospects that exceed their creator's capacity to enjoy (Roberts).

This work is done with assurance by Coffey, in terms of Shelley's relation to contemporaneous, and earlier, science, philosophy, and poetic repertoires. The touchstone that 'absence is an unreliable guide to non-existence' (14) offers a responsive register for analysis, and strikes a balance between wit and incisive judgment. It not only throws off the unhelpful grasp of theory (though Coffey can be too cavalier in his dismissals (10)): the allowance of 'non-manifest materiality' (29) also guides an original overview of seventeenth-century ideas. Shelley read about *materia subtilis* (subtle matter) and *vis inertiae* (the force of rest and motion as states), precursors and alternatives to today's trendy vibrant materialisms (10, 195). Indeed, to support his main argument that '[t]he inactive is powerful' (60), Coffey allots much of the first half of his book to the reclamation of Newton's physics against the widespread notion that Newtonian space is a void (55). The book's comparative frames are scientific and philosophical instead of poetic, excepting a reduced Wordsworth in a notably careful investigation of whether and how Shelley read Kant, in Chapter 5, on *Peter Bell the Third*. There are hints that by way of a poetics of 'fruitful vacillation,' Coffey has in mind a Coleridgean sensibility freed from the debilitation from which Coleridge suffered. When this excellent study of Shelley ends on the summation that, '[i]n reading him we actuate a poetry of interruption and experience it as the very condition for living a continuing life. Shelley writes of a beautifully broken world' (195), that brokenness does not involve historical catastrophe, but something more like the plenary pause at breaking into and out of song, and even the sociable breaking of bread. Though it would be a break of catachresis to move between these two options for metaphor.

This convivial aspect holds in a professional and not just thematic sense, as Coffey works closely within the Shelley editorial circle. Belying the book's lyrical title (which generously acknowledges the visionary company of Harold Bloom and Hart Crane), the provenance of the many insights in *Shelley's Broken World* is impressively evidence-based. Coffey has an archival ace in the hole: the 'virtually unknown' and not yet published 'Marlow List' of Shelley's library from March 1817 to February 1818, during that anomalous period of domestic stability (17). With this list in hand (and shared in numerous textual figures), Coffey is able to pursue surprising investigations, and to shore up the grounds of several internal questions long held in Shelley Studies. At the same time, Coffey is a giftedly creative critic who can leap to his insights straight off. In his judgments, not simply pro or con, of historical Shelleyans and Shelleyphobes, he begins with an instance of the latter – F. R. Leavis's accusation that he possessed a 'weak grasp upon the actual' (1). For Coffey, however, that charge serves as a means to access something integral to Shelley's distinctive philosophical intelligence and aesthetic practice: his 'firm grasp upon the weakness of the actual' (2). Hence the 'weakness of the actual' is revalued as earned description. Like the subject-object genitive in grammar, the witty reformulation pivots on Leavis's familiar criticism not just to bestow a

more generous interpretive enthusiasm, but to argue in well-backed earnest that Shelley as a poetic thinker had a considered grasp of the discursively 'objective' sciences available to him. Coffey's methodology tacks amongst subfields of editorial caretaking, book history, and philosophical poetics. He cites first – or first relevant – editions, and in original languages. Sometimes, keen arguments are raised and then sidelined as tactically irrelevant. This could be due to overlapping adjudications among these several areas. For instance, Coffey takes pains to discuss the editorial history of pointing (punctuation) in Shelley's texts – and this makes sense given his métier is the language of pauses – but then concedes that '[t]he principal works I discuss in this book are relatively free from textual cruxes' (23). But we are shown Coffey knows all the cruxes. *Shelley's Broken World*'s greatest strengths are its professional content and its style, aligning scholarly argument to a temperament that redeems belles lettres through meticulous research.

Roberts historicises Shelley's constructions of the Romantic subject per se, concerned with the predicaments of history and ideology as inescapable recursive structures. Here the key and often-repeated terms – textual strategies of reticence, Sartrean 'bad faith,' and the affect and subject position of shame – display their speculative character. *Shelley's Poetics of Reticence: Shelley's Shame* is rewarding but challenging to engage with. The book required further proofreading; and in a few moments this concern reaches to content (such as one error in a scholar's name, one on a poem's title, and the dating of 'On Life'). Roberts hammers key concepts of bad faith, reticence, and shame, and rivets home the argument that 'textual strategies of reticence' in Shelley 'perform a phenomenology of shame' (225). Bad faith and strategies of reticence aside – why ground the study exclusively in the feeling of shame? Roberts deploys from Giorgio Agamben the concept of the 'subject-in-shame.' Agamben's dynamics of subjectification and de-subjectification meet with Shelley's own practice, based on his relay of surrogate poet figures (32), of a future hermeneutics inveigling the reader to participate in their continual *re*subjectification (107, 213). Thus shame, as Roberts says frequently, can or should be of 'productive' utility. In view of Jerome McGann's and Paul de Man's charges that Romanticism pursues the illusory possibility of future hermeneutics – but flipping these valuations – Roberts argues that the acceptance of 'bad faith' in future-oriented hermeneutics is Shelley's proper creative legacy and authentic position (18): 'This is why his texts are so strategically reticent: asking their reader to carry on, to humanise, their affective work' (19).

Most recent theoretical engagements with Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'intersubjective' imagination view his future-oriented, open-ended, non-sovereign, affectively distributed, even atmospheric poetics as diverse mediums of radical thought that resist co-optation by increasingly dominant liberal thinking. But Roberts sets Shelley squarely amidst the problems of the utilitarian 'liberal subject' (228). This is a utility-ethic to which she commits him. Roberts also gauges the possibilities of Shelley's writing much more narrowly than do the radical readers of Shelley's indirect or otherwise 'reticent' lines of flight, through application of Wolfgang Iser's reader-response hermeneutics. At the end of the book's most rangy chapter, Roberts describes how this encircling hermeneutic strategy develops across texts, as 'the dialectic of reticence and impersonation which characterises all the works I have discussed' (170). In the chapter at hand, this choice of texts means *A Defence of Poetry*, 'Ode to the West Wind', 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' (not 'Ode,' as is multiple times wrongly said (150, 159)), and *Adonais*. Across the full study, chapters develop analytical close readings of *Alastor, The Cenci, Julian and Maddalo*, the 'Jane poems', and *The Triumph of Life*. Each chapter's interpretive argument is impactful and distinctive, and the chapters' movements are well digested and substantially linked.

Clear ties between chapters in part emerge because each is a moment in an unfinished dialectic that must not be won. The study's philosophical bases – half post-Romantic

philosophy from Kant to Hegel, half Sartre's existentialism (provided with no context; and there is a bridge – Alexandre Kojève's Hegel lectures – that Roberts does not mention) – are set in place through familiar schema. More grappling with the philosophical texts that ground this book would have taken away from the territory of Shelleyan criticism, but would have surmounted the problem of Roberts's nearly interchangeable, fleet references to the famous names of 'literary' moments in philosophy. These include the passages on bad faith and metastability in Sartre, and Hegel's 'unhappy consciousness' and 'master-slave' relation (mentioned late). Nevertheless, stepping back, Roberts's study displays ambitions for a kind of thick phenomenological rendering of Romantic authorship and, further off, for a psychically 'productive' Romantic literary history of ideas: worthy aims once manifest in the works of Geoffrey Hartman and M.H. Abrams, and (I add) in Lionel Trilling's uncited *Sincerity and Authenticity*. *Shelley's Poetics of Reticence* forces through its terms as an undertaking of major critical argument. I admire the way Roberts's book struggles for a poetics of 'life' at the risk of merely successful conceptualisations in 'theory'.

Eric Lindstrom
University of Vermont

Ian Brown and Gerard Carruthers, eds., *Performing Robert Burns: Enactments and Representations of the 'National Bard'*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021. Pp. iv + 210. £75.00. ISBN 9781474457149.

Adam White, *John Clare's Romanticism*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. Pp. 332. £89.99. ISBN 9783319538587.

Performing Robert Burns: Enactments and Representations of the 'National Bard' offers thirteen chapters on various forms of representation and performance related to Robert Burns. This volume is wide-ranging, where classical music, folk music, theatre, film, and public events are discussed, while also traversing the decades immediately following Burns's lifetime, before concluding with a contemporary performer's account.

The volume begins with a chapter by the editors, Ian Brown and Gerard Carruthers, offering a broad picture of Burns's cultural prominence, not just in Scotland, but globally, where songs such as 'Auld Lang Syne' have been performed from Glasgow to New York. This chapter, as throughout the volume, stresses Burns's importance as a songwriter, noting he either wrote or edited 'more songs than poems', and touches on the significant impact Burns has had on Scottish folk traditions as well as American ones; songwriters such as Bob Dylan have hailed Burns as a vital influence (1). The second chapter, by John Burnett and Carruthers, examines the possibilities of considering the role of editor as a form of curation or performance. This chapter also touches on Burns's calculating presentation of his own image, as seen in the prefaces to his Kilmarnock and Edinburgh editions of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. The third chapter, by Jim Davis with Tracy Cattell, focuses on Burns and theatre. Although Burns's literary engagements with theatre were limited, this chapter discusses Burns's various forms of support for the theatre, including a prologue he wrote for the actress Louisa Fontenelle (1769/73-1799) that contained 'potentially subversive' lines, drawing from Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (36). This chapter draws from Burns's letters and correspondences to give some sense of his interest and awareness of drama and the stage, despite never producing any dramatic works.

Paul Maloney provides the fourth chapter on Burns and Music Hall. Maloney covers a number of subjects, including parody, where in one instance, 'Tam o' Shanter' is (liberally) transformed onto a football pitch, illustrating the reach of Burns in the Scottish cultural imagination and the willingness to keep him there. Maloney and Adrienne Scullion discuss 'Tam o' Shanter' on the stage in the fifth chapter. Stage productions of this well-known poem used the audience's familiarity to adapt and rework the story, often as a way of commenting on Burns's legacy. Ronnie Young discusses 'Performing Identity and the Burns Supper', where the ritual elements of Burns Suppers provide a complicated – and changing – negotiation of national symbols and traditions. Christopher A. Whatley's chapter focuses on 'Burns, Public Ceremonial and Civic Scotland' in the long nineteenth century. Whatley shows Burns as a stabilising force for Scottish society, where he was publicly celebrated and commemorated across the political and class spectrum, often in 'large-scale' events (116). Rhona Brown provides a highly engaging account of three twentieth-century plays on Burns. Brown illustrates the uniqueness of each play, as well as the shared, near obsessive, focus on womanising as central to depicting Burns.

Alistair Braidwood looks at Burns and film and discusses several early biopics. Braidwood reminds us that nearly all of the Burns biopics are at least fifty years old, and rightly calls for a 'serious attempt to bring Burns back to the big screen' (147). Kirsteen McCue examines Burns within orchestral repertoire from 1879 to 1959. As with other modes of performance, representing Burns via orchestra proved 'as contradictory as Burns was himself', where the desire to perform Burns never wavers, though a consensus about the poet remains elusive (157). Katherine Campbell explores the performance of Burns's songs in the folk tradition. Campbell draws from an illuminating definition of folk music, while also discussing several important folk collections containing Burns's songs. Campbell highlights how Burns's verses were themselves amalgamated from other songs, and subsequently underwent further variations in the hands of others, a feature essential to the 'folk process' (179). Moira Hansen examines the life and work of Scottish folk musician Jean Redpath. Although Burns was not central to Redpath's work, he remained a vibrant presence throughout. Hansen also details the importance of Redpath to both the Scottish and American folk traditions. The volume concludes on a touching personal note with a piece by celebrated traditional singer, Sheena Wellington. Wellington's account links nicely with the work on Redpath and provides an insight into what it means to perform Burns's music in the twenty-first century, often to a global audience.

The chapters in *Performing Robert Burns* offer a coherent and consistent theme, where Burns provides a vehicle for Scottish culture and identity as much as he is celebrated in his own right as an artist.

Adam White's monograph, *John Clare's Romanticism*, undertakes a detailed analysis of important themes, terms, and ideas, central to locating various Romantic concerns within Clare's poetry, and subsequently Clare's poetic identity and place within the Romantic canon. Although the issue of canonicity is not the main subject of this study, many important arguments with implications concerning the Romantic canon are taken up carefully and convincingly. While Clare remains the major subject of this study, White reads Clare in relation to his Romantic contemporaries and near contemporaries, with extended attention paid to Wordsworth, Byron, Keats, and Burns. One of the book's central arguments is that Clare's poetry employs many of the Romantic preoccupations found in the works of the accepted major Romantic writers, such as Wordsworth and Byron, while simultaneously teasing out, through sustained close readings, what distinguishes Clare from other poets of his day. The success of this argument is made through illuminating and deftly handled critical readings of Clare's poems, across all periods of his writing, alongside poems of Keats, Wordsworth, Byron, and Burns, whilst regularly unearthing textual echoes between Clare and the other poets discussed.

White's introduction offers an important note on Clare's texts which sets out certain problems of presentation, compositional process, and intention. White acknowledges the importance of the Oxford English Texts edition of Clare, while also qualifying his praise with diligent hesitancy: 'I find the idea that he would have wanted uncorrected versions of his poems publicly printed highly problematic, not least because, as he states in an 1818 letter to Taylor: "[a]s I expect the words of the dead are venerably noticed [...] if I knew such things I disapprove of should appear in print after my death it would be the greatest torture possible"' (19). Other chapters explore terms considered fundamental to Romanticism such as 'Joy,' 'Fancy,' and 'Poesy,' as well as larger philosophical theatres such as 'The Sublime,' 'Time,' and 'Childhood,' along with 'Ruins' and 'Fragments'.

White's book is impressive because it is able to cover, in detail, so many important concerns relevant to establishing John Clare's Romanticism, without feeling stretched or forced. In chapter eight, 'Clare, Keats, Poesy, and Joy', we find an approach common to White's study as a whole: 'By focusing on the relationship between poesy and joy in Clare's poetry, I show how consistent patterns of aesthetic experience are evident in his work, and I argue that he mobilises an aesthetic vocabulary that is fundamentally Romantic, but which is given a highly distinctive inflection of his own' (242). Here, White is able to combine Romantic concerns of Joy and Poesy with Keats's engagement of these terms while drawing out how Clare both shares these concerns and, more crucially, how they are manifested differently across his poetry.

White's study also pays significant attention to Burns, in part because his fate has been in many ways similar to that of Clare: 'While Burns may have been, unfathomably, ignored in late twentieth-century Romantic scholarship, it is also the case that Clare's Romantic preoccupations still need to be fully fleshed out' (269). The example of Burns allows for a wider discussion of Clare's awareness of Scottish literary culture, and the influence it had on his writing. White looks at Clare's imitations of Burns while also looking to the larger, yet understudied, importance of the genres of song and lyric. White thus expands his argument to consider a deeper conception of British Romanticism and those that we should consider as its proponents. *John Clare's Romanticism* makes a vigorous case for establishing Clare as a major Romantic poet, while offering arguments that both affirm and complicate Clare's relationship to his contemporaries.

Jake Phipps
Durham University