

Mike Goode, *Romantic Capabilities: Blake, Scott, Austen, and the New Messages of Old Media*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp. 302. £77.00. ISBN 9780198862369.

Mike Goode's *Romantic Capabilities: Blake, Scott, Austen, and the New Messages of Old Media* demonstrates the value of placing older media ecologies in conversation with newer ones. As the Epilogue succinctly puts it, '*Romantic Capabilities* advocates analyzing what a text *has become* in one media ecology and leveraging it into a historicist research strategy for recognizing and perhaps discovering for the first time what the text *potentially was*' (p. 251, emphasis original). Goode offers a sort of reverse engineering of the medial complexities of William Blake, Walter Scott, and Jane Austen by beginning with later responses to and experimentations with their work: Blake-based movies and coffee mugs, Scott-inspired nineteenth-century panoramas and stereographs, and Janeite fanfiction. Across the book's three parts, Goode argues that preoccupations with mediality – what new media scholars often describe as 'hypermediacy' – are key 'capabilities' of Romantic texts, with these dormant capabilities waiting to be surfaced and actualized in later media. Thus, Goode demonstrates that concepts like virality and virtual reality associated with our twenty-first century 'new media' landscape are hitherto unrecognized components of Romanticism's 'old media' environment.

Goode's ideas shine in his examinations of virality and Blake in Part I's two chapters. Goode argues 'against the idea of an initiated Blake reader', and instead points to the powerful (political) potential of the viral spread of Blake's work, especially his proverbs (p. 61). Tracking Blake through a variety of unexpected places, including *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* and computer viruses of the 1990s, Goode shows that Blake's proverb forms create unstable reading formations that also create 'an enormous rhizomatic formation of readers, hearers, reciters, writers, and co-opters' (p. 61). Goode offers a new perspective on popular culture and reception history through the lens of media studies and media archeology.

Focusing on the visual elements of Walter Scott's poems and fiction, Chapter 4 (the only chapter in Part II) highlights the immersive aspects and hypermediacy of Scott's work as well as of the panoramas and stereographs that drew directly and indirectly on Scott. In their hypermediacy awareness, works from poems and panoramas to Scottish histories and stereographs call attention to themselves not just as media but as visual, immersive media. Goode offers an especially engaging history of the stereoscope and its importance as both a new media form and a tool that fundamentally altered nineteenth-century understandings of vision – understandings of vision that Goode suggests were present in Scott's works and Romantic discourse well before the advent of the stereoscope.

The two chapters in Part III focus on Austen's fanfiction and landscape. Rather than seeing the 1990s internet boom (and Colin Firth's wet-shirted Mr. Darcy of the same era) as the instigators of Janeite fandoms, Goode sees modern media as helping to actualize elements already within Austen's novels. This approach, building on work by scholars like Deidre Lynch, Devoney Looser, and Kathryn Sutherland, recognizes that Austen's recent reception in many ways replicates earlier fannish behaviors and, importantly, the novels themselves. Goode contends that fanfiction focused on reimagining and expanding Austenian estates highlights how Austen's fiction itself functions 'as a design medium whose medial relation to the potentials of canonical place or universe is contingent' (p. 212).

Goode's final chapter explores the rich question: 'To what extent is Austenian realism theorizing itself through, or in relation to, Regency landscape gardening, a highly visible form of

contemporaneous design that, whatever its sinister political effects, was advancing a philosophically novel and potentially radical conception of reality?’ (p. 232). Goode’s answer draws on a wealth of Romantic-era theories of landscape design to inform an exciting interpretation of *Mansfield Park*. Yet other questions remain, particularly in the context of ongoing reassessments of Austen’s engagement with imperialism and the racism of some Austen fandoms. One wonders, for instance, how the ‘philosophically novel and potentially radical conceptions of reality’ that Goode thoughtfully explores were informed by the ‘sinister political effects’ that he acknowledges. While Goode believes that ‘close attention to the political commentaries that fanfictions make deflects critical attention from the messages of fanfiction’s mediacy’ (p. 233), there might be a middle ground – one that seeks to understand how philosophical questions about mediacy and media ecologies are informed by and also shape political ecologies.

Perhaps, though, these remaining questions embody Goode’s own generative concept of ‘capabilities’ – possibilities that remain present, waiting to be activated. Building on Goode’s interdisciplinary examination of hypermediacy in Romanticism, future scholars will be better positioned to realize new approaches to old media. Indeed, Goode’s important book speaks to a growing trend to recognize the theoretical and historical capabilities of placing our own media moment into conversations with the nineteenth century and, in doing so, he invites us to uncover additional capabilities within Romantic and media studies.

Lindsey Eckert
Florida State University