

Patrick Vincent, ed., *The Cambridge History of European Romantic Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024. Pp. 684. £120. ISBN 9781108497060.

Any scholar of Romantic literature knows that the term ‘romantic’ eschews a fixed literary categorization due to its transdisciplinary purview. In fact, Patrick Vincent opens his edited volume with a reference to Friedrich Schlegel, one of the founders of Romantic literary theory, and his vision of a poetry that is universal and progressive. Romantic poetry is a universal affair and should depart, as it were, from the *ancien régime* of literature and imaginative writing should merge with questions of philosophy, theology and science. Paul Hamilton’s *The Oxford Handbook of European Romanticism* was the first to address this debate in his comparative understanding of Romantic literature across the multiple romanticisms in Europe. In his volume, Vincent substantiates Hamilton’s editorial rationale, but he insists on de Staël’s cosmopolitan view of Romantic literature to suggest that, while each European country presents different façades of the ‘romantic’, Romanticism was ‘at once national and transnational, local and pan-European’ (3). Writers like Byron, Leopardi, P.B. Shelley and Victor Hugo, to mention a few, recognised that their literature could not be understood ‘or developed in isolation’, because, as Vincent emphasises, ‘cultural exchanges within but also between nations helped define their age’ (9). Focusing on the ‘cultural exchanges’ during the Romantic era, Vincent gathers in his volume contributions that pay particular attention to ‘various forms of cultural mediation and transfer, and to the productive tensions, synchronicities, and interactions within and across borders’ (9).

This volume is divided into three main sections that cover Romantic literary culture from the 1750s to the 1850s. Contributions included in the first section outline the circulation of philosophical, scientific, literary and aesthetic ideas that kindled the Romantic discourse. For example, Kate Rigby posits in her chapter that nature took on a different meaning in the Romantic era and was reconceived ‘as a self-organising process of co-becoming’ of which humans ‘could never have final knowledge’ (77). Angela Wright and Simon Swift offer key insights in their respective contributions. Wright tells us that in the 1790s there was a consensus that the Gothic was ‘a distinctly English product’ (165), even though the Gothic bristled with allusions from Continental literary culture and this generated, for critics of the day, the fear that the English readership would be encouraged ‘to consume more Continental literature’ (168). On the other hand, Swift tactfully notes the crisis of the Enlightenment stemmed from the ‘emergence of an expressive Romantic cult of inwardness’ (199).

Nicholas Halmi opens the second section of the volume with a fascinating chapter on the intellectual revolution of the Romantic period. To describe this revolutionary turn, Halmi uses the word transcendental to ‘refer to self-conscious reflections on the conditions of thought and the questioning of given systems of thought’ (223). In his chapter, he gives us an overview of key philosophical figures (Kant, Fichte, Schiller and Friedrich Schlegel) to present, eventually, the transformation of poetry from mere imaginative writing to becoming a philosophical tool. As Halmi posits in his reading of Schlegel, philosophy supplies poetry with ‘self-reflexiveness’, while poetry represents ‘the absolute that always eludes the efforts of philosophy’ (243). Diego Saglia’s chapter from this section is equally remarkable. Saglia revisits the Classic-Romantic debate to prove that these intersections disclose ‘a rich transnational vein of writings grounded in a vision of culture as an unstable concomitance of different temporalities’ (404). In a reading of key figures who contributed to this debate, such as Schlegel and Leopardi, Saglia substantiates Ernst Robert Curtius’ argument that Romantic writers concede the timeliness of classical culture but they must rethink how the ancient presents itself to a modern audience.

Saglia's contribution is followed, in the third section, by Paul Hamilton's chapter on restoration (political and literary) in Europe. Like Saglia, Hamilton is concerned with how the Romantics converse with their past and he claims that restoration, in literature, became for the Romantics a metaphor of 'poetic revival of older forms of writing' adapting them to the 'present literary repertoire' (439). For Hamilton, an illustrative example of this form of restoration is Leopardi, whose poetry is deeply informed by classical authors. Evan Gottlieb's later chapter brings the Romantic discourse out of Europe to explore elements of a global discourse of Romanticism, which, for Gottlieb, is coupled with the phenomenon of globalization in its production of 'new ways of thinking about the world in spatio-temporal terms' (490). Vincent's volume is an outstanding attempt to europeanise the discipline of Romantic studies, so this volume will be an excellent compendium for those wanting to navigate the literary and intellectual history of Romantic literature in Europe.

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