

The BARS Review

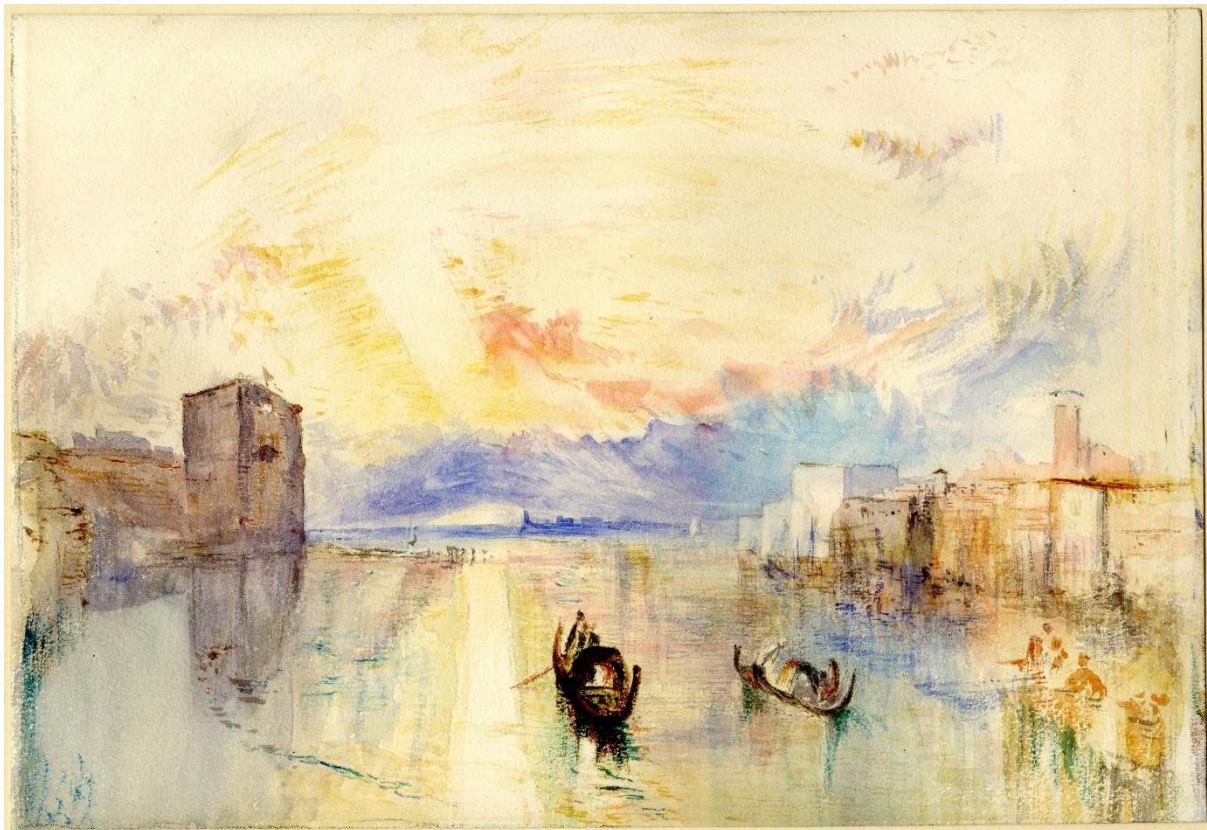
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After J.M.W. Turner, *The Giudecca, Venice*

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Contents

Reviews

1) Julia Banister on Ellen Malenas Ledoux, <i>Laboring Women: Reproducing Women and Work in the Eighteenth Century</i> . Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2023.	p. 4
2) Jake Elliott on Lucy Cogan, <i>Blake and the Failure of Prophecy</i> . London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.	p. 5
3) Gillian Skinner on Dafydd Moore, <i>Richard Polwhele and Romantic Culture: The Politics of Reaction and the Poetics of Place</i> . New York and London: Routledge, 2021.	p. 6
4) Robina Mackenzie on William Erdinger, “Genial” Perception: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Myth of Genius in the Long Eighteenth Century . Clemson: Clemson University Press, 2022.	p. 8
5) Anna Fancett on P.D. Garside and Gillian Hughes, <i>The Shorter Poems. The Edinburgh Edition of Walter Scott’s Poetry. Vol 7</i> . Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020. and Susan Oliver, <i>Walter Scott and the Greening of Scotland: Emergent Ecologies of a Nation</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.	p. 8
6) Roisin McCloskey on Robert Morrison, ed., <i>21st Century Oxford Authors - Thomas De Quincey</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.	p. 11
7) Aleksandra Koutny-Jones on Geoffrey Bond and Christine Kenyon Jones, <i>Dangerous to Show: Byron and His Portraits</i> . London: Unicorn, 2020.	p. 13
8) Sheng Yao on Rieko Suzuki, <i>The Shelleys and the Brownings: Textual Re-Imaginations and the Question of Influence</i> . Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2022.	p. 14

Spotlight: Romanticism Abroad

9) Michaela Vance on Cian Duffy, <i>British Romanticism and Denmark</i> . Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022.	p. 16
10) Francesco Marchionni on Patrick Vincent, ed., <i>The Cambridge History of European Romantic Literature</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024.	p. 17
11) Jerónimo Ledesma on Brecht de Groote, <i>Thomas De Quincey: Romanticism in Translation</i> . Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023.	p. 18
12) Peter Francev on Richard Cronin, <i>Byron’s Don Juan: The Liberal Epic of the Nineteenth Century</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023.	p. 20
13) Chris Townsend on Matthew Leporati, <i>Romantic Epics and the Mission of Empire</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023.	p. 21

14) Cynthia Scholar Williams on Tristram Wolff , <i>Against the Uprooted Word: Giving Language Time in Transatlantic Romanticism</i> . Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022	p. 22
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Ellen Malenas Ledoux, *Laboring Women: Reproducing Women and Work in the Eighteenth Century*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2023. Pp. 290. \$29.50. ISBN 9780813950280.

Ledoux positions this absorbing study of working motherhood as a feminist project inspired by personal experience of the intersecting ‘demands of productivity and reproductivity’ (1). The core strength of the book comes from Ledoux’s decision to focus on women workers on whom those demands bore most heavily. The chapters cover a wide range of women who laboured by necessity for their, or at least someone’s, economic gain: actresses, midwives, women who enlisted in the military, enslaved women, street sellers and prostitutes. The breadth of such varied forms of labour makes for a stimulating account of the twinned topics of motherhood and work.

Ledoux crystallizes her range of concerns in two core questions: ‘how did they do it?’ and ‘how did they get away with it?’ (19). The first question leans into the difficulties that beset ‘history from below’, difficulties made even more complex by the fact that the principal texts under discussion are, as Ledoux acknowledges, genre-bound productions for the literary marketplace: memoirs by Sarah Siddons and Mary Robinson; midwifery manuals; narratives of soldiering women; Mary Prince’s history; accounts of the Magdalen hospital’s inmates. The study does offer fascinating glimpses into how they did it, such as Sarah Siddons’ recollection of attempting to work alongside her noisy children and Ann Yearsley’s claim to have always settled her children to sleep before she tried to read and write. Looked at from the reader’s position, however, the key concerns of this book can also be expressed in two slightly different questions: ‘how were they supposed to do it?’ and ‘how far could they comply with those expectations?’

This study enters into the conversation about working motherhood in the eighteenth century by connecting the separation of the spheres and the rise of a ‘cult of motherhood’ (3). Ledoux’s central argument is that ‘*most* mothers—because of pressing economic and political conditions—have no choice but to fall short of this ideal’ (13). Readers less familiar with this area of study might have benefitted from a more extended account of the cult of motherhood, and particularly the development of this cult in the time between the earliest and latest texts covered in the chapters, i.e. from the 1730s to 1830s. The opening chapter offers Sarah Siddons’ careful cultivation of sentimental motherhood in the 1780s as the ‘measuring stick by which the less privileged women’s experience in the ensuing chapters can be understood’ (26), but the fifth chapter, which examines images of street sellers, works equally well as an anchor for the argument. In this chapter, Ledoux skilfully contrasts highly unrealistic images of mothers as ‘grateful, civilized vendors’ (16) in ‘orderly, polite ... commercial life’ (167) with Hogarth’s hostile representations of working mothers as abusive and distracted and Rowlandson’s sexualized depictions of mothering-aged women selling their wares on the city streets.

The book is organized into three pairs of chapters. The first pair of chapters introduces actresses and midwives as women workers who were best able to turn the sentimental ideal of motherhood to their professional advantage. The second pairing includes a chapter on the narratives of two soldier women, Christian Davies and Hannah Snell. Ledoux reads both women as queer subjects who negotiated motherhood as part of the century’s ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (112). Ledoux is clear that the following chapter on *The History of Mary Prince* is ‘categorically different’ (117), and she works carefully to examine the assaults on motherhood recorded by Prince. The third pairing moves, via a deft and illuminating reading of an extract from *Harris’s List of Covent Garden Ladies*, from images of street sellers to conflicting accounts of the Magdalen hospital’s penitent prostitutes to argue that those accounts all ultimately ‘fail to reconcile women’s oldest profession with its likely result’ (192).

Taken together, this is a wide-ranging study that draws readers into the richness of the topic and invites them to look between and across the chapters for fine threads of similarity and connection, contrast and complexity. Ledoux might have drawn the chapters together even more in her conclusion, but she ends, as she began, by bringing together eighteenth-century and twenty-first century working mothers. Her ‘Afterword’ compares ‘Enlightenment constructs of maternity’ (221) to today’s cult of the “‘supermom’”, and she finds contemporary counterparts to her examples of working women of the long eighteenth century, ending with the pressures placed on working mothers during the Covid pandemic.

Julia Banister
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Lucy Cogan, *Blake and the Failure of Prophecy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021. Pp. 219. £99.99. ISBN 9783030676872.

In *Blake and the Failure of Prophecy*, Lucy Cogan builds on the insights of Ian Balfour, Christopher Bundock, and Christopher Rowland to explore how Blake utilised various conceptions of the prophetic mode throughout his career. For Cogan, Blake’s reluctance to adhere to a fixed understanding of prophecy reflects a suppleness in his work, one which allowed him to navigate personal disappointment and historical change while retaining a belief in the power of his work to ‘open... up other minds to the visionary dimension of life’ (5). Utilising Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutic theories – particularly his dialectical contrasting of a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ and a ‘hermeneutics of belief’ – Cogan shows that Blake’s ‘failure’ to stabilise his role as prophet is central to his ‘evolving mythopoetic ideology’ (23). Blake’s shifting use of prophecy throughout his life reflects Ricoeur’s concession that no singular ‘hermeneutic approach... can uncover *the* truth’ (23), yet Blake’s ‘multiple interpretations’ of the prophetic mode coinhere within a body of work which contain the ‘glimpses of Eternity’ which continue to fascinate, and frustrate, scholars two centuries later (202).

Charting a chronological course through Blake’s oeuvre, Cogan’s monograph begins by exploring how Blake’s works between 1789 and 1793 stage the troubled translation of childhood ‘vision’ into a prophecy of ‘action’ able to bring about societal change. Contrasting the figures of Lyca in ‘The Little Girl Lost’, Thel from *The Book of Thel* (1789), and Oothoon from *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), Cogan connects a visionary view of the world with a burgeoning female sexuality in these works, ultimately exposing how both contemporary religious thought and gender constructions worked to deflect this prophetic impulse. Chapter three explores how Blake’s ‘continental prophecies’ – from the unpublished *The French Revolution* (1791) to *Europe* (1794) – trace a movement from his initial belief in a form of prophecy which can “awaken the people to a world that is freed from historical injustice” (70) to an uncertainty about whether prophetic renewal is possible in the temporal world. Reading these works within the context of the mounting violence of the French Revolution and increasing repression in Britain (culminating in the “Gagging Acts” of 1795), Cogan explores how the failure of a new visionary world to emerge from violence impacted Blake’s belief in prophecy as a mode able to initiate social change.

Chapter four explores the centrality of the figure of Urizen in Blake’s *Urizen Books* in the mid-1790s. For Cogan, these works hark back to the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible, which chart the creation of the world to the establishment of Moses’ moral law) in their portrayal of a material and moral certainty hostile to a transformative form of prophecy. However, while Blake’s prophetic agency is at a low ebb in these works, their continual re-inscription of an original, Urizenic fall exposes the contradictions and violence inherent in any

unchanging set of principles. Cogan also detects a hostility to prophecy in *The Four Zoas* (c.1796-1807), Blake's unfinished work which is the focus of chapter five. However, by tracing the development of this sprawling project, Cogan exposes it as a textual space in which prophecy emerges as connected to an external 'Divine Vision' (154) and opposed to the delusive "Female Will" (142) (in contrast with his earlier association between female sexuality and the prophetic impulse). Finally, chapter six explores how Blake's emerging reliance on a "Divine Vision" is refracted through both *Milton* (c.1804-1811) and *Jerusalem* (c.1804-1820). In *Milton*, Cogan explores how various dissolutions of the self in moments of *parousia* – in which the "prophet becomes one with a divine source of inspiration" (167) – replaces the notion of the prophet as a stable visionary conduit. While, in the *Jerusalem*, Cogan finds an increased bond between the prophetic "moment of universal liberation" and the "final, physical" act of "death" (194) as Blake entered his twilight years.

Ultimately, Cogan's nuanced readings of Blake's works through the lens of biblical prophecy allows us to trace moments of conflict and change throughout his oeuvre, while remaining alert to Blake's continuing understanding of his work as manifesting the "performative capacity of prophecy" (3). Historical detail, close reading of Blake's poetic and visual works, and biblical references blend in an insightful work which traces the contours of Blake's career, while retaining a holistic view of Blake's polymorphic visionary worlds.

Jake Elliott
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Dafydd Moore, *Richard Polwhele and Romantic Culture: The Politics of Reaction and the Poetics of Place*. New York and London: Routledge, 2021. Pp. x + 206. £108. ISBN 9780367651572.

Richard Polwhele's notorious poem, *The Unsex'd Females* (1798), is, Dafydd Moore affirms, 'an axiomatic point of reference for scholars interested in radical women' (1). Polwhele's polemic exemplifies the vitriol such women and their work provoked, but beyond this I knew little of his long career and varied writings. *Richard Polwhele and Romantic Culture* has changed that, and I am all the better for it. Not that Polwhele turns out to be much-maligned, or any more appealing than *The Unsex'd Females* suggests: 'while there is more to Polwhele than the anti-Jacobin misogynist of popular repute, he was an anti-Jacobin misogynist, and quite a lot of that "more" is equally unpalatable.' (2) Armed with this caveat, I finished the book with some respect and sympathy for Polwhele, if no closer to embracing his views.

Polwhele's politics, Moore argues, should be examined in their regional and social context, rather than simply labelled 'reactionary conservatism' (187). Born in Truro, Polwhele lived in the far south-west for most of his life. After Oxford and ordination, his clerical career took him first to Exeter and then to West Cornwall, offering insight into the pursuit of a literary career from one of the furthest extremities of the British mainland. Moore favours the 'archipelagic criticism' of recent decades that challenges conventional understandings of centre and periphery, but cautions that this reorientation of criticism can itself exclude: Polwhele is absent from Alan Kent's *The Literature of Cornwall* (2000), his 'politics and ecclesiology' as a 'Church and King man' not 'easily accommodated within' the 'radical dissenting and labouring class tradition' identified by Kent (12). Moore's key aims are to 'contribute to the ongoing effort to establish a genuinely archipelagic approach to the literary culture of the period' and to consider the 'range and complexity of loyalist literary activity and culture', countering 'the predominant interest in more radical or at least progressive perspectives' (2). Five chapters examine the social context of Polwhele's literary life in the south west, his

conceptions of loyalism and heroism in poetry spanning his career, the meaning of place in his work, his involvement in the religious controversies of the day and, finally, his self-fashioning in letters and memoirs.

Chapter One concerns Polwhele's involvement in *Poems Chiefly by Gentlemen of Devonshire and Cornwall* (1792) and *Essays by a Society of Gentlemen at Exeter* (1795). Disagreements between contributors illuminate 'the tension between coterie publication and the world of professional print' (38), exposing the limits of collaboration and differing conceptions of intellectual property. In correspondence, Polwhele sees himself as a literary professional hardly used by amateurs. His 'disdain for the pretensions of the gentlemanly amateur and with it the identity of the social class whose political interests he otherwise defended' (49), troubles a simplistic assessment of his political affiliations.

Subsequent chapters explore this ambivalence further. Examining his poetry, from *The Fate of Lewellyn* (1777) to *The Fair Isobel* (1815), Chapter Two examines Polwhele's loss of confidence in the landowning classes' capacity to embody virtues of patriotism and heroism, at the same time as he was unable to 'contemplate a viable alternative' (80) to the decline of the Tory ideals he espoused. Polwhele's critique skewers the failings of social structures he wishes to thrive and to which, nevertheless, he remains attached. Discussing first Polwhele's long poem, *The Influence of Local Attachment* (1796/1798) and then his seven-volume *History of Cornwall* (1803-1808), Chapter Three finds further evidence that Polwhele's methods push his conventional treatment of inherited forms to a point at which 'they ultimately deny the very stability and indeed authority they seek' (113). The search for universal values founders on the dominance of the subjective and personal.

Chapter Four explores Polwhele's religious writings: hostility to both Methodism and the evangelical wing of the Church of England is exceeded only by frustration with 'those amongst the Establishment he identifies as sleep-walking into [...] the destruction of the Church of England and the social order' it supports (147). Writing from his own 'corner of Cornwall' in *Anecdotes of Methodism* (1800), Polwhele exploits his limited vantage point, which becomes 'the means by which the imagination can extrapolate local events on a national scale' (139), regardless of evidence.

The final chapter examines Polwhele's (auto)biographical writings, including his publication of letters (such as those he received from Scott) and volumes such as *Traditions and Recollections* (1826) and *Biographical Sketches of Cornwall* (1831). In the latter, Polwhele's approach of publishing subjects' letters with the minimum of editorial intervention replaces, Moore suggests, 'the tyranny of the great man and his biography' with 'a participatory co-creation of meaning' in which the reader can author a life from the letters: again the 'tension between the Tory Polwhele's ostensive cultural and indeed real politics and the ideological logic of his favoured literary methods' is evident (172).

Copy-editing slips frustrated this reader throughout the book. But they don't detract from the interest of this engaged and detailed study that argues persuasively for Polwhele's importance in a richer understanding of Romantic culture.

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William Erdinger, “Genial” Perception: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Myth of Genius in the Long Eighteenth Century. Clemson: Clemson University Press, 2022. Pp. 287. £104.50. ISBN 9781638040224.

In *Genial Perception*, William Erdinger offers a compelling philological approach to, and understanding of, ‘critical naturalism’ (1) pivotal to the critical work of Wordsworth and Coleridge. At the heart of critical naturalism are the keywords nature and genius and it is specifically here that Erdinger seeks to strip away the modern perspective and instead, take an approach consistent with critical thinking of the long eighteenth century. Erdinger is fully aware his modern standpoint leaves him a ‘permanent outsider’ (3) when attempting to interrogate older discursive environments, yet he reasons that the perspective of ‘insider/outsider’ (3) offers a unique opportunity to engage with aspects of ‘surplus meaning’ (4). He suggests that both Coleridge and Wordsworth’s tendencies to assume their own critical originality and discoveries may well have come from unconscious recognition and adherence to cultural predispositions inherent within the very tropes, language and traditions they sought to dismiss.

Chapters one, two and three provide a solid foundation by initially defining the term genial and then offering an insight into the perception of both poet-critics that genius by definition must be unmediated. Chapter 2 reminds us that Wordsworth and Coleridge did not see eye to eye critically in regard to the imagination/fancy debate, with Wordsworth allowing space for fancy to step outside the ‘mechanical (45) and be creative within the sphere of imagination; whilst for Coleridge the difference between the two was absolute. This then leads into an insightful delve into binary patterns, from classical style criticism through to Wordsworth’s critical use of oppositions and Coleridge’s triadic dialectical stance. This focus on binaries is continued in Chapter 3 where Erdinger considers the influence of warm and cool poetic ornaments upon the form and content. He argues that the habitual treatment of these effects by taste-critics led them to become second nature and their power to shape the later critical work of the two Romantics went unnoticed.

Chapter four builds upon this subconscious acquiescence to earlier taste-critic work by highlighting the sunlight trope and its centralised position in descriptions of unified effects in poetry. Erdinger demonstrates how Coleridge whilst outwardly appearing to embrace new experiences of imaginative unity in *Biographia*, actually enlists many of the keywords of the Addisonian tradition.

Chapters five and six take Wordsworth as their focus and extend the theory of unconscious assimilation to his take on ‘unmediated experience’ (101) within genial perception. Erdinger presents Wordsworth’s issues with the nature and terminology of the picturesque and his ‘absolute’ (103) rejection of its previous commentators. Once again, we are offered the sense that the poet’s clear familiarity with these views cannot allow him to completely rid himself of their influence.

By considering their ‘unacknowledged discursive influences’ (12), chapters 6 and 7 seek to position Coleridge’s theory of imagination and Wordsworth’s imaginative perception historically. Chief amongst these is the long neglected Shaftesburian tradition, to which Erdinger argues, Wordsworth’s capacity to convert ‘borrowed ideas into lived experiences’ (137) is indebted.

The final chapters bring the focus to language and the limitations of the *ut pictura poesis* theory. Ultimately, there are fundamental practical difficulties within the claims of both poet-critics for genial perception because the ‘burden’ (158) they place on language cannot be supported. Where a painter can present a form or image of something new or novel to their viewer, the poet, in spite of his ‘gleam’ (161), can only ever evoke images that are already familiar to the reader. Erdinger compares Coleridge’s ability to draw upon and rephrase his

own vast internal library of acquired written descriptions and writing as a form of ‘bricolage’ (166), and Wordsworth’s unconscious reshaping of literary sources as a ‘poetic intertextuality’ (167) based on intellectual traditions rather than the visual ones so often explored over the last 50 years. The final chapter applies Erdinger’s self-coined ‘philological close reading’ (17) to the Snowdon episode of *The Prelude* in order to present the revisions as evidence for the literary influences of Milton, Akenside and Collins.

Whilst Coleridge and Wordsworth viewed their positioning of nature and genius as allowing them to effectively ‘leave language largely out of account’ (187), Erdinger challenges this stance and his complexly argued, philological approach offers a persuasive reading of the taste critics. Erdinger’s positioning as historical outsider gives him capacity to present the contemporaneous long eighteenth-century critics and classical predecessors whose critical influences can be mapped onto the work of Wordsworth and Coleridge and as such, belie their claim to autonomous genial perceivers operating outside a place in history.

Robina Mackenzie
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P.D. Garside and Gillian Hughes, *The Shorter Poems. The Edinburgh Edition of Walter Scott’s Poetry. Vol 7. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020. Pp. 655. £100. ISBN 9781474424431.*

Susan Oliver, *Walter Scott and the Greening of Scotland: Emergent Ecologies of a Nation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. 229. £75. ISBN 9781108831574.*

These two texts, which were initially published around Walter Scott’s 250th anniversary, take the scholarship of Scott in new and interesting directions. *The Shorter Poems* brings together Scott’s short poems, many of which were previously hard to access. *Walter Scott and the Greening of Scotland* reads Scott through an ecocritical lens, opening up both Scott studies and ecocritical studies to new perspectives. Although very different, they are both testament to the way in which research on this pivotal author is central to Romantic studies.

The Shorter Poems is one of ten volumes which form the Edinburgh Edition of Walter Scott’s Poetry. While six of the volumes each feature one long narrative poem, four of the volumes, including the one currently under review, include a selection of Scott’s work. In this case, the editors endeavour to include all of Scott’s poems that are not published elsewhere, spanning his earliest metrical output to verses written immediately before his death: 134 in total. As the editors have followed a chronological structure, the development of Scott’s poetical career can be traced; the early poems are heavily influenced by balladry, translations, and youthful love, whereas the ones nearer the end of the collection are social, frequently written for or about friends and acquaintances. Along with this development, it is also striking to notice how Scott returns to the same themes and ideas throughout his career. Other than the patterns made apparent by chronology, there are no thematic groupings in the main part of the text, leaving it to the readers to develop their own responses. In addition to the 134 poems, the volume begins with acknowledgements and a general introduction by the series editor, Alison Lumsden. The poems are followed by an ‘Essay on the Texts’ which explains the editors’ decisions; ‘Combined Editorial Notes’ which include textual, historical and explanatory notes for each poem, as required; an appendix, which includes poems attributed to Scott which the editors have found were not written by him or which cannot be proved to have been written by

him; an index of titles; and an index of first lines.

The poems are well presented, printed in a clear, large font with enough white space, allowing the reader to approach each poem on its own terms. Although the quality of the poems varies, the overall impression the reader gets is of Scott's competence as a poet, his engagement with and development of Romantic themes, and his interaction with his historical and social context. In particular, Scott engages with supernatural tradition and history in multiple poems, meaning that his poems provide a useful illumination to his historical moment. The editorial information is also useful and well-written. The 'General Introduction' starts by stating 'the neglect of Scott's poetry is curious' (x) and discussing its significance in relation to the more widely read Wordsworth and Byron. Lumsden goes on to explain the editorial decisions taken in the series. Unlike the novels, Lumsden explains, 'Scott's poetry, being published under his own name, was subjected to considerable social pressure' (xii), meaning that the manuscripts do not usually provide a comprehensive representation of Scott's final intention. On the other hand, she explains that '[c]ollation also revealed that while Scott may have been "improving" his poems at an early stage, they were also simultaneously deteriorating' (xiii). The challenges this caused editors and the solutions they employed are briefly explained. The volume editors continue this discussion in the 'Essay on the Texts', detailing their editorial decisions and providing transparency and clarity to the reader, along with justifying the structure and presentation of the texts. The attention-to-detail of these two sections is continued in the 'Combined Editorial Notes' which includes a wealth of information.

Overall, this edition exhibits the excellence that we have come to expect of the Edinburgh Editions of Scott's work. It is easy-to-read, engaging, and illuminates aspects of Scott's work, life, and historical moment. It is especially valuable because it brings together poems that have been difficult to access and creates opportunities for further research.

Susan Oliver, the author of *Walter Scott and the Greening of Scotland*, has a well-established reputation as the expert on Walter Scott and ecocriticism. In this monograph, the first on its subject, Oliver brings together her extensive knowledge to explore the connections between environment, history, society and story in a range of Scott's writings. By drawing from his ballads, poems, novels, letters, and personal life, Oliver weaves a complex and colourful tapestry of significant details. The monograph is split into six chapters: 'Introduction: Walter Scott and the Environment', 'Shifting Ecologies: Grasslands, Rivers and Shorelines', 'Toxic Ecologies, Ecogothic and Violence against the Land'. 'Wild Places, Rarity and Extinction', 'Trees'. and 'Stone, Water, Air.'

The density of Oliver's research is apparent from the introduction, in which she outlines the historical context of Scott's life (including historical and political events alongside agricultural and ecological changes), elements of ecocritical theory, and a preliminary exploration of how Scott's literary endeavours recognise the entanglement of people and the world which they inhabit. She explains that her 'aim has been to provide a preliminary investigation of how his storytelling drew public attention to real ecological problems, and how the agency of his writing mediates relationships between memory, mythmaking and the biosphere' (25). In the second chapter, Oliver draws on scientific understandings of land and chronology, showing how Scott, who 'almost always links human events with environmental factors,' (31) depicts a landscape that is haunted by the ways in which land use was changing, from both ecological and human perspectives. Case studies prove Oliver's point: her excellent analysis of the anthropomorphic riparian environments in *The Monastery* is a case in point.

The connections between ecocritical theory, Scott's work, and his historical context continue in the final four chapters. Chapter three is concerned with the ecogothic and ecophobic, engaging with ecocritical approaches while providing in-depth analysis of ballads and novels. As with chapter two, Oliver explores how Scott was interested in the effect of environmental violence on both the land and the people who inhabit it. Likewise, Chapter four

'looks at Scott's representation of lost or endangered species and human social forms that cannot remain static but must either evolve or perish' (90). Oliver begins with the caveat that although there is no such thing as 'wild,' she will use the term as it was used in the early nineteenth century. From there, she explores the representation of wild places and peoples whom Scott describes as wild, focussing particularly on the representation of near extinction whether that be of tribal life or packs of wolves. Chapter five looks at Scott's relationship with trees, considering how 'he explored connections between people and the woodlands, forests and individual trees with which they lived' (113), and compares his tree-planting campaign in Abbotsford to his early work as a ballad collector. Oliver concludes that 'Scott longed for a transhuman magnificence that he felt Scotland was losing through depopulation, deforestation and the planting of foreign monocultures. Although anticipating Jeffers, Scott's environments do not exclude man so much as 'situate humans in a vital relationship with other living things' (139). The final chapter continues exploring the connections between people, ecology and literature. Oliver focuses specifically on stone, water, and air, providing case studies and historical context to illuminate Scott's work. In lieu of a conclusion, Oliver provides a one-page 'final word' in which she brings her arguments together, claiming that '*Walter Scott and the Greening of Scotland* seeks to raise awareness of how the sense of belonging for which Scott has long been known is vibrantly and marvellously ecological' (180).

Walter Scott and the Greening of Scotland is a far-reaching and ambitious monograph, which pulls together knowledge from different scientific, historical and literary spheres. It provides new insight on both Scott's work and human engagement with the environment – both in the Romantic period and now. It challenges its readers to extend their understanding of timely issues by understanding how they were engaged with by a seminal author from the beginning of the Anthropocene (if the Anthropocene is understood to have begun at the start of the Industrial Revolution). However, at times, the variety of scientific knowledge combined with the numerous examples from Scott's work causes the author's overall argument to become obfuscated. Readers interested in learning about ecocriticism and Scott might find Oliver's articles on the subject a more accessible starting point.

These two books are a welcome addition not only to Scott scholarship but to the entire field of Romantic studies. Together, they open Scott's work up to a range of new interpretations, situating him firmly in the centre of Romanticism and current discussions on literature and life.

Anna Fancett

The Open University and University of Warwick

Robert Morrison, ed., *21st Century Oxford Authors - Thomas De Quincey*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. 602. £127.50. ISBN 9780199676897.

On a small and unassuming gravestone in St Cuthbert's Churchyard in Edinburgh are etched the words 'Sacred to the memory of Thomas De Quincey who was born at Greenhay near Manchester August 15th 1785 and died in Edinburgh 8th December 1859'. To the passer-by unacquainted with the details of the life lived between these two dates, it appears to be the simple resting place of a simple man who traversed this mortal realm much like any of us do; with difficulty, with pleasure, with humility. For those of us who have had the great fortune to have read his works, this place is a shrine to the one we call The Opium-Eater.

The first to document drug addiction in modern literature, De Quincey has become recognised for his ability to combine sunlight and subterranean, finding somewhere in between

these the mysteries of human consciousness. In a time when advances in industry gave birth to the East India Company, and opium became the quotidian anodyne for all manner of ailments, De Quincey stumbled upon what may have been his greatest and only lasting passion – the habit of opium-eating. Not eaten, *per se*, but enjoyed in tincture as laudanum, it first quelled what might have been his sudden affliction of trigeminal neuralgia, ‘here was a panacea... for all human woes: here was the secret of happiness about which philosophers had disputed for so many ages, at once discovered: happiness might now be bought for a penny...’ (37).

In *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, De Quincey describes first the pleasures of opium, followed cruelly by its pains. He paints for us scenes of serenity, of heightened intellect and explains that ‘whereas wine disorders the mental faculties, opium, on the contrary... introduces amongst them the most exquisite order, legislation, and harmony’ (39). Yet, as with all earthly pleasures there is most certainly always a penalty to pay and opium was no exception as De Quincey decries suffering ‘a deep-seated anxiety and gloomy melancholy... wholly incommunicable by words’ (60).

Although his *Confessions* may be his most notable work, it is far from his only. Regarded by poets and novelists of his time as something more akin to a ‘hack’, De Quincey’s proliferation of eloquent musings on a multitude of topics really places him as a scholar *par excellence* in his own time: ‘Stylistic virtuosity enabled De Quincey to range across a host of diverse topics, and to produce in many essays a prose of knowledge that rose – when a change of topic or emphasis demanded it – into a prose of power’ (xviii).

His impassioned prose spans measureless chasms and throws forth interminable questions such as: was De Quincey as aware of his addiction as he claims? Was his writing a mode of repentance? Or did he write knowing all too well how popular this glimpse into addiction would be and how much the reading public would revel in becoming the voyeurs of his opium habit? And it would seem almost impossible to form any one opinion in this lifetime or the next was it not for this most recent compilation of his work by Robert Morrison, surely the *legato a latere* of all things De Quincey.

Until now De Quincey’s works have only been available in any whole sense within the 21 volumes by Chatto & Chatto. Morrison has elegantly and fluently delved into the works and excavated the gems that solidify De Quincey’s place amid the firmament of Romantic writers who defined their era. His close and tumultuous relationships with Wordsworth and Coleridge, his longing for the hearth of childhood, the devastating grief that stalked him from sister Elizabeth’s death bed to the porticos of Oxford Street, the novelty of considering murder a fine art, are all experiences important to the study of his work and life and, in this collection, are made easily accessible thanks to a generous introduction, chronological dexterity and clear notes on the text, being furnished with many insightful illustrations.

To curate De Quincey’s life’s works is no mean feat, let alone to do it with such discernment and intuition. It is a task that can only be performed by one whose life has become just as infused with De Quincey, as De Quincey’s works were infused with opium. The sheer span of his interests means that ‘in addition to his work as an autobiographer and addict, [he] also published impressively as a rhetorician, populariser, aesthete, essayist, biographer, true-crime reporter, and literary critic and theorist’ (xxxii).

To arrive at the entrance to De Quincey’s opulent universe armed with this collection along with Morrison’s unrivalled 2009 biography is really to embark upon an education unlike any other. If this was to be the only collection of De Quincey’s works we ever had, we would be in possession of a fortune as beloved and sought-after as a vial of opium carried in the waistcoat pocket of the Opium-Eater himself.

Roisin McCloskey
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Geoffrey Bond and Christine Kenyon Jones, *Dangerous to Show: Byron and His Portraits*. London: Unicorn, 2020. Pp. 158. £25. ISBN 9781912690718.

This ambitious and richly-illustrated volume introduces the reader to the diverse scope of Lord Byron's self-fashioning and posthumous reinterpretation through portraiture. By focusing on a broad range of depictions of George Gordon, 6th Baron Byron (1788-1824) produced during and after his lifetime, the authors shed light upon how this Romantic poet was, and wanted to be, perceived. Presented in chronological order and incorporating reproductions of printed, painted and sculpted artworks, this accessible and wide-ranging study will appeal to specialists of literature and art history as well as the informed general reader.

Described as 'what we would now call a celebrity' (9), Byron was the ideal candidate for a portrait. His aristocratic background and foreign travels, as well as his poetry, provided ample inspiration for artists from the eighteenth century onwards, although his earliest likenesses are less well known. They include a diminutive watercolour of 1795 by the Edinburgh artist William Kay which presents Byron as a long-haired child clutching a bow and arrow. Invoking the classical iconography of Cupid, this modest painting also marks the moment when the sitter became heir presumptive to the barony of Byron. Other intriguing early portraits, executed by neighbours of the young Byron in 1806-7, include an ink silhouette of his face and a 2cm-wide watercolour of his right eye. The eye portrait, painted by Elizabeth Pigot, was a token of affection, intended to be worn in a locket, and thus more intimate an image than many of the later commissioned likenesses. She also depicted Byron in a series of watercolour illustrations, which are handsomely reproduced here and show the young aristocrat with curls falling over his forehead, as also seen in later paintings.

Particular attention is given to the most iconic depictions of Byron: two oil paintings of 1813-14 by Royal Academician Thomas Phillips. These half-length portraits, which show the sitter in three-quarter profile, are described as instrumental in establishing 'brand Byron' (57). They were displayed at London's Royal Academy in 1814 as 'Portrait of a Nobleman' and 'Portrait of a Nobleman in the Dress of an Albanian,' although many visitors would have known whom they depicted. Byron's identity as a poet was already established by that time and he had completed a Grand Tour of the Iberian peninsula and the Ottoman territories in the Levant, which had informed the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, published in 1812. While the so-called 'Cloak' portrait, which shows Byron swathed in a dark cloak, makes no specific reference to either his travels or his writing, the so-called 'Portrait of a Nobleman in the Dress of an Albanian' is more clearly linked to both of these. Byron had purchased the 'Albanian' costume on his Grand Tour, complete with a turban and an embroidered jacket and waistcoat, and his choice to be depicted in these reflected a fashion for such orientalisering depictions of European travellers at the time. What is distinctive about Phillips's portraits, as highlighted by Bond and Kenyon Jones, is the way in which they were used as prototypes for subsequent printed images, some of which were used to promote Byron's writings. Harnessing visual imagery for such marketing purposes highlights the close links between literature and portraiture at this time.

A particular strength of *Dangerous to Show* is this exploration of the printed imitations of Byron's formal portraits, for example engravings after the full-length oil painting of 1807-9 by Scottish artist George Sanders. Often used as frontispieces, such graphic artworks adapted and altered their source image according to the requirements of a specific project. As well as demonstrating the impact of the printed image upon the dissemination of Byron's likeness, this volume seeks to interpret other less well-known depictions of the poet in a range of film imagery, memorabilia, satirical cartoons, and even a waxwork of Byron dressed in the aforementioned 'Albanian' costume. As such, it goes beyond many existing studies in its

presentation of a wide range of portrait formats, created both for the promotion of Byron's work and the reassessment of his legacy.

Bond and Kenyon Jones's generously-illustrated volume provides a timely account of Byron's wide-ranging portraits and their close relation to his travels and writing. *Dangerous to Show* illuminates not only the poet's life story, as told through contemporaneous artworks, but also explores the afterlives of these images through their later replication and reinterpretation. More widely, it constitutes a valuable case study in how visual culture can be harnessed for the purposes of self-fashioning and promotion, a process which, in Byron's case, is shown to have 'rendered him immortal' (15).

Aleksandra Koutny-Jones,
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Rieko Suzuki, *The Shelleys and the Brownings: Textual Re-Imaginings and the Question of Influence*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2022. Pp. ix + 204. £104. ISBN 9781800856479.

Rieko Suzuki's book echoes the recent tendency to emphasise literary 'communities' (4) rather than isolated individual creativity. She presses home a sense of continuity rather than absolute break between the Romantic and Victorian periods, and continues the path paved by critics like Richard Cronin and Mark Sandy. Suzuki's assessment focuses on the Shelley-Browning 'constellation' (17, 20, 182), a word that Robert Browning used in his famous conceptualization of the writer-reader relationship to 'connect the scattered lights into one constellation' (*Paracelsus*). This is a notion constantly evoked in this book, and one that achieves an admirable balance between Romantic historicism and the myriad operations of the text. What was originally intended to be an exploration of Shelley's individual works (as disclosed in the coda) becomes a nuanced and meticulous comparative study of the influence between two literary couples, and the thrust of this book seems to favour the Brownings in a surprising way, with the societal significance of the dramatic monologue looming large. Suzuki's own research process exemplifies how the text could be presented in a full Browningsque manner, waiting to be unfolded by those competent and avid readers in unexpected ways.

Chapters one and two focus on Mary Shelley's influence on two of Robert Browning's early poems, *Paracelsus* and *Sordello*, starting from Mary Shelley's 'nuanced treatment of Prometheanism' (50), as well as her staunchly Romantic ideas of societal change based on love and imagination. Chapter 3 discusses the aesthetic significance of the Shelleys in the formation of Robert Browning's taste, as revealed in one artistic poem by Browning, 'Old Pictures in Florence', and in his 'Essay on Shelley'.

Chapters four and five demonstrate the 'revisionary scheme' (93) that Browning employs in *The Ring and the Book* and *Fifine at the Fair* to re-write Shelley's *The Cenci* and 'The Triumph of Life'. Chapter 6 shows how Shelley's radical politics and liberal ideas fit into Elizabeth Barrett's works, despite the latter's attempts to keep the former's radicalism 'at bay' (133). Suzuki sheds light on some important thematic threads throughout these chapters: the Romantic quests and Victorian reflections on Prometheanism in the discussion of 'two kinds of Prometheanism in question' (30) in Chapter 1 and Elizabeth Barrett's comparison of Aeschylus's Prometheus with the figure of Christ in her translation in Chapter six. The writer-reader relationship gradually evolves from the failed Shelleyan model in Chapter two to the more middle-class and democratic device of the dramatic monologue endorsed by Browning in Chapters four and five. Suzuki's focus on the role of the poet, particularly in Chapters three

and six, highlights the light metaphor to illustrate the difference between the ‘white light’ conveyed by ‘subjective’ poets such as Shelley and Elizabeth Barrett and the light ‘broken into prismatic hues’ by ‘objective’ poets such as Browning (154).

Suzuki’s research methodology in this book shows flexibility, and her ability to traverse biographical boundaries and the ‘gendered demarcations of poetic subjects’ (161) are two noteworthy cases to mention. In Chapter four, a biographical reading of ‘[r]escuing the poetess’ (110) in Browning’s way of revolutionizing the world might fall into cliché; however, Suzuki insists that ‘[t]o read the rescue theme beyond the biographical and treat it as a trope enables us to appreciate its ramifications in *The Ring*’ (110), and she endows three enriching layers of meaning to the rescue theme: i) as a figuration of Browning’s own rescue of Barrett; ii) as Beatrice Cenci re-envisioned as Pompilia; iii) as Italy itself. Suzuki’s gendered reflections on the role of poet show critical subtlety: she quotes directly from Mary Shelley’s eloquent speech on aesthetics and judgement to justify Robert Browning’s ‘gross misreading of Mary Shelley’ (76). She finds creativity in the ‘gendered fissure’ (180) and what Isobel Armstrong calls the ‘form of mediation’ (179) in Elizabeth Barrett’s address to her own son, ‘Pen’, at the end of her radical political poem *Casa Guidi Windows*. Suzuki also balances the opposing views of Marjorie Stone and Stephanie L. Johnson where she discerns the female voice could be a powerful ‘masking device’ (161) in ‘A Vision of Poets’ that helps Elizabeth Barrett to rewrite and join the patrilineal poetic tradition by creating a ‘rift between herself and the male poetic tradition’ (161).

Why the focus on ‘effect’? Suzuki’s lingering preoccupation with this theory of ‘effect’ shares common ground with dramatic monologue, viz. the effect ‘to produce upon the reader’ (2). The final message of this book is to inspire liberal thinking ‘among the people’ (180). This is at the core, of Suzuki’s wider concerns, for everything discussed in this book, from lyricism to drama to the development of the dramatic monologue, to political and historical consciousness, reveals a greater meaning: that behind the literary ‘communities’ and societal influence of the Shelley-Browning ‘constellation’ is a realistic vision of a better, more resilient society.

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Spotlight: Romanticism Abroad

Cian Duffy, *British Romanticism and Denmark*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022. Pp. 246. £85. ISBN 9781474498227.

Cian Duffy's *British Romanticism and Denmark* offers an expansive yet detailed exploration of cultural and literary exchanges between Denmark and Britain between the 1770s and 1820s. Discussing a wide range of sources, Duffy illuminates connections between fiction, poetry, travel writing, archeology, language, cultural events, and political crises, as the two countries' nation-building efforts sometimes clashed violently and sometimes exhibited a remarkable close bond. As Duffy repeatedly and convincingly shows, this bond was frequently invoked in references to a shared, Scandinavian past manifested in language as well as cultural customs and literary exchanges. At the same time, Britain's two bombardments of Copenhagen (first in 1801 and then again in 1807) resulted in deep political rifts which writers on both sides discussed and, to varying extent, sought to mend. Duffy untangles these under-researched connections in the book's five chapters, which are preceded by an excellent introduction and concluded with a thought-provoking Coda that complicates national and international cultural and linguistic alliances by pointing to the 'rival claims of national and international traditions' (185) in Europe at this time.

Chapter one, "One of the finest capitals in Europe': Some British Romantic Views of Copenhagen", focuses primarily on British travel writers' view of Copenhagen, whether real or imagined, along with British accounts of the two bombardments of the capital. Framed as a discussion of the "oriental other", Duffy shows how Denmark came to be represented as a cautionary tale of the effects of absolute monarchy. These attitudes changed over time, however, and towards the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century perceptions of a "common, Northern identity" came to dominate the discourse – that is, until England attacked Copenhagen, and it was Britain's turn to be portrayed as an Oriental "other" as a result of the latter having 'broken the bonds of cultural brotherhood and violated a 'Romantic' valorization of 'the North'', a sentiment that Duffy documents extensively in contemporary texts (60).

The second chapter, "The dwelling-place of a mighty people': Travelers beyond Copenhagen' takes a wider view of the intercultural exchanges between the two countries. The chapter discusses how state-sponsored inventories of prehistoric monuments, which have been linked to the rise of Romantic nationalism in the 1850s, were preceded by efforts to see these objects as evidence of a common, ancient northern culture that included Britain. The chapter also includes a fascinating discussion of British investment in a romanticized history of Helsingør, the setting of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, alongside what appears to have been some thoroughly disappointing visits to the actual town. Last, the chapter considers the travel writing by the "cultural ambassador" Andreas Andersen Feldborg (65), to whom Duffy returns repeatedly throughout the book.

In "A mine yet to be explored': Romanticism and Anglo-Danish Literary Exchanges' Duffy nuances the idea that literary exchange between the two countries was a one-way affair, arguing instead that 'the discussion and circulation in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain of contemporary Danish literature [...] constituted a more significant axis of cultural exchange [...] than has yet been recognized in either Anglophone or Danish scholarship' (93). Feldborg makes an extensive appearance in the chapter, as he worked relentlessly to introduce fellow countrymen such as Knud Lyne Rahbek, Rasmus Rask, Oehlenschläger, and Peter Thun Foersom to a British audience. In his representation of the other side of this exchange, Duffy highlights Thomas De Quincey, and focuses in particularly

on literary networks, translations, and editorial efforts that made the introduction of contemporary Danish literature possible.

To some extent, much of what is discussed in the following chapter, “The brothers of Englishmen’: British Reflections on the Danish National Character’ builds very organically on what has already been stated in the preceding chapters, and, indeed, the book’s greatest weakness is perhaps its somewhat repetitive consultations of primary sources. Similarly, “No trifling kingdom’: Anglo-Danish Politics beyond the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars’ repeats some of the ideas put forward in chapters 1 and 2; however, the captivating account of the ‘unfortunate’ British Queen Caroline Matilda makes the chapter an enlightening read, especially as Duffy places her experience of disappointed hope and isolation alongside Mary Wollstonecraft’s personal reflections in *Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*. An evolution of Romantic tastes is discernable in the way Caroline Matilda’s fate became increasingly sentimentalized, and tourists sought out Helsingør for its connection to this “Romantic heroine” rather than *Hamlet*. The chapter concludes with an overview of British writing about Danish overseas territories and comparisons between British and Danish attitudes to slavery, something that, this reviewer thinks, could have been given more space in this otherwise comprehensive volume on the cultural, political, and literary alliances and rivalries between Britain and Denmark.

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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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**Brecht de Groote, *Thomas De Quincey: Romanticism in Translation*.
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023. Pp. 302. £90. ISBN
9781474483896.**

The hypothesis of Brecht de Groote’s *Thomas De Quincey: Romanticism in Translation* recognises the central dilemma of translation as ‘the irresolvable chasm that yawns between creation and imitation’ (10). From this, De Quincey conceived a formula conducive to negotiating his authorial identity and transferred this formula to other fields of knowledge.

The book is organised into four main chapters with an introduction and a coda. The first chapter returns to the familiar story of De Quincey’s early career, as admirer of Wordsworth, doppelgänger of Coleridge and adversary of Carlyle. The question that De Quincey seeks to

resolve centres on what mode of writing could produce a scheme of mutual compensations between primacy and secondariness, between the major and the minor. Of course, translation would be that mode, insofar as ‘its structures may ground a voice, a style and a philosophy’ (47).

The second chapter takes up the question of ‘impassionate prose’, a mode of poetic prose that De Quincey claimed as his own invention and which, like translation itself, includes two competing terms. Additionally, the chapter addresses the pertinent question of what it means to write in English in the European context of Romanticism. To do so, De Groote studies De Quincey’s corpus dealing with cultural competition between nations, centrally between England, France and Germany. Translation is characterised by De Quincey, then, as an instrument of health for England. Following the Roman model, the best of other nations must be translated to revitalise one’s own language and culture. De Groote studies in detail the metaphors of exchange used by De Quincey, from the more economic ones in *The Gazette* to the biological ones of grafting and inoculation in early essays. In this chapter we also find a suggestive comparison with Hölderlin’s ideas about assimilating foreign languages to revitalise one’s own.

The third chapter cuts to the specific question of De Quincey’s translations of texts of and on Kant. In this context, De Groote reviews the remarkable changes in De Quincey’s position on the Königsberg philosopher over a short period of time and, specifically, in relation to the *rifacimento* – as De Quincey called it in another language – the ‘Last Days of Immanuel Kant’ (1827). The re-reading of this essay translated from German sources (E. A. Wasianski above all) in the light of the problems of translation and authorship is a major contribution of the book that clears up unresolved bibliographical controversies.

The fourth chapter is one of convergence. It studies the ingenious case of *Walladmor* (1824), the “pseudo-translation” of a non-existent text by Walter Scott made in Germany by Willibald Alexis (pseudonym of Georg Wilhelm Heinrich Häring), which De Quincey then reviewed and translated for an English audience. This case, with its respective paratexts and reviews, generates a potentially infinite web of apocrypha and free versions that conceptually demolishes any pretence of separation between original and copy. For De Groote, the hoax and its offshoots form an episode in which one can read a commitment to the staging of the philosophical stance on translation in practice.

The book’s coda seeks to project De Quincey’s theory about the status of translation onto a more general plane. De Groote outlines two contrasting and well-known positions on the “task of the translator” (those of Benjamin and Paul de Man) and the paradox implied in them. And he turns to a third, that of Wolfgang Iser, akin to that of De Quincey, to suggest a possible way out of the dilemma. In De Groote’s re-reading, Benjamin ties the translator’s task to the project of liberating in the target language the language of the original that the translator longs for, a project which, if realised, would produce a “pure language” (182), the utopia of universal meaning in which substance and form are unified.

One remarkable aspect of De Groote’s book is the strategic use he makes of recent contributions to De Quincey studies to foreground De Quincey as translator and translation theorist. Certainly, one could discuss the causality implied in his design (that which goes from the dilemma of translation to the other reconfigurations) and ask whether translation is not only one of the multiple phenomena that suits De Quincey’s poetics of writing. But be that as it may, there is no doubt that De Groote’s book succeeds in bringing the fundamental issue of translation powerfully to the fore of the agenda of De Quinceyan scholarship and Romantic studies.

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Richard Cronin, *Byron's Don Juan: The Liberal Epic of the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Pp. 258. £85. ISBN 9781009366236.

Richard Cronin's monograph *Byron's Don Juan: The Liberal Epic of the Nineteenth Century* is the first study on *Don Juan* in over 30 years. It was started during the COVID-19 lockdown and was the subject of nearly 50 years of rumination on Byron's *magnum opus*. This enlightening work, on arguably Byron's most challenging text, affords the reader the opportunity to thoroughly engage with *Don Juan* in ways that previous generations were not afforded. Cronin 'asks what kind of poem *Don Juan* is' (2) in the first chapter, whereby he sets the book's plan in motion. He argues that it is a modern epic that is clearly in the lineage of *Paradise Lost* and Wordsworth's plans for epic poetry as exemplified by *The Excursion*. By setting out his argument for *Don Juan* to be seen and treated as an epic poem, Cronin elevates the poem and scholarship into a new realm where readers are challenged to take *Don Juan* as a text that warrants the same serious scholarship as its epic precursors. From here, it feels 'natural' that the second chapter presents *Don Juan* 'as an anti-heroic poem' (166) even though most scholars- from Byron's day until the twenty-first century- have argued that Juan is a modern-day hero. Cronin's unconventional reading continues when, in chapter three, he convincingly argues that 'Byron's poem has a better claim to embody the age's spirit than *The Prelude* or *The Excursion* or, for that matter, Southey's *Joan of Arc* or *The Curse of Kehama*' (6). This statement, although well-supported, is sure to make Wordsworth, Southey and Byron scholars alike feel slightly uncomfortable in the sense that Byron is categorized with his Laker 'enemies'.

In chapter four, Cronin shifts focus to examine the role of language and its importance within the poem and cultural elements between Britain and Europe. By marking the poem as a 'public poem', Byron is able to vacillate between the public and private spheres by introducing purely fictional characters based upon real individuals and real individuals based on fictionalized events. Chapter five elaborates on British and European influences and supplements them with 'thickly seeded references to Byron's own domestic circumstances' (6) that would come to dominate and influence the next two generations of European novelists more than poets. Chapter six looks at the 'swift transitions' of the poem, namely examining the 'digressions within digressions' (137). In addition to examining the digressions, Cronin also briefly looks at the role and significance of Byron's use of dashes and em dashes and the role they play in shaping the poem micro and macrocosmically. He calls into question, and makes the reader wonder regarding, the significance of punctuation within poetry. While chapter seven explores the demands of *ottava rima* and how the uniquely Italian poetic form helps shape the poem's physical and internal structures, Cronin uses *Beppo* as a way to support his ideas, as *Beppo* was composed (1817) during the early cantos of *Don Juan*. Finally, in chapter eight, the book is brought 'to a conclusion by asking what Byron means by insisting that his is a liberal age even though he was writing at a time when liberalism seemed to be, if not defeated, then at least everywhere in retreat' (7). Looking at the quickly evolving politics of Britain and the Continent, during *Don Juan*'s composition, Cronin facilitates the ever-changing life and times of Byron, Juan and the age and demonstrating that it is a kind of 'perfect storm' that affords Byron the ability to create his masterpiece.

Cronin ends his study by what I believe to be the most important idea: that *Don Juan* is not only an epic that is on par with his Miltonic and Wordsworthian precursors, but is one that influences the Victorian novelists and is the last bastion of liberalism in British literature. For too long, Byron and *Don Juan* have largely been ignored by Romanticists who have felt that the poet and the poem were insignificant when compared to their contemporaries. He convincingly argues that Byron's thought process and skill in composing *Don Juan* is a force

to be reckoned with and is one that warrants the necessity of serious thought and study. Taking this into consideration, Cronin provides readers with a book that not only thoroughly examines Byron's epic poem but contextualizes the framework by which *Don Juan* was created and the lenses through which the next generation of Byron scholars will examine the poem. This is, without a doubt, a text that belongs on the bookshelves of all Romanticists – not just Byronists.

Peter Francev
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Matthew Leporati, *Romantic Epics and the Mission of Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Pp. 250. £85. ISBN 9781009285155.

Romantic Epics and the Mission of Empire argues that a persistent strain of epic in Romanticism delineates a contemporary anxiety that empire was being refashioned into a 'benevolent project of spreading British culture and religion across the globe' (1). Central to that story is the rise of the missionary movement; in the 1790s evangelism became a key British export as missionaries spread across the globe. Yet, as Leporati shows, any notion that the missionary movement was 'the unambiguous partner of empire' (2) is a misleading one, and there were always tensions between the overlapping projects of missionaries and colonists. Missionaries were often highly critical of imperial practices; further, their work could sometimes stand to destabilize the hierarchical principles on which imperialism was built, for instance by highlighting 'points of correspondence between Christianity and supposedly savage Indigenous beliefs' (113). Epic's work in the period was to expose the antipathies between the missionaries and the imperialists, and, in so doing, reveal the shaky underpinnings of the notion of 'benevolent empire'.

Key to the book's argument is the idea that the epic was 'suspended between internal and external orientations' (36). Resisting the narrative that Romantic epics (exemplified by *The Prelude*) were expressions of a widespread tilt toward interiority, Leporati argues that they are better characterized by a desire to 'evangelize': to effect change in the external world by impressing or imposing one's internal experience upon it. This plays out variously. An ingenious reading of Ann Yearsley's *Brutus* sees her at once adopt the status of a 'convert' to epic classicism – redolent of her infamous conversion, under Hannah More, from labouring 'savage' to 'civilized' poet – even as the poem itself insists that converts owe nothing to their converters. Meanwhile, Southey, in *Madoc*, explores with ambivalence 'the troubling links between missions of liberation and missions of conquest' (134). He was determined that religion should not become merely 'a dogmatic tool of empire' (137), but ultimately upheld the belief that, if properly Christianized, a benevolent empire was attainable.

Madoc concerns itself with religious and cultural hybridity, and notions of cultural hybridity are pursued in a subsequent chapter on Olaudah Equiano. Though not an obvious candidate for a book on epic (or Romanticism), Equiano engages extensively with epic verse in his *Interesting Narrative*, and Leporati connects moments of poetic citation to a claim concerning the author's 'hybrid' identity as 'both missionary and convert' (175), during an episode where Equiano recounts his own efforts to spread the Christian faith. (There is no mention of Equiano's own poetry, though the 'Miscellaneous Verses' mark the moment of Equiano's own conversion, and notably take the form of rhymed hymn stanzas – a decidedly un-Miltonic, non-epic form.)

Other chapters deal variously with poetical works associated with the early missionary movement, the epic cultures of the politically charged 1790s, and, in the final two chapters, the high-canonical epics of Blake, Byron, and Wordsworth. Blake is singled out as a radical

‘epoist’, whose work presents a direct attack on the ‘Christian imperial ideologies’ sustained by other epics in the period (186), yet even Blake, in his picture of a unified ‘Albion’, figures as a species of imperial fantasist. Byron gets the last word of the book, as chief subverter of the Evangelist epic. Don Juan goes forth in the world but perceives humanity around him, rather than trying to impose it there; Byron himself is as sceptical towards conversion efforts as he is towards empire.

‘Epic’ is used elastically in the book, and that elasticity produces unexpected comparisons; *Don Juan*, for instance, ‘might be grouped with the more explicitly subversive epic productions of writers like Blake, Equiano, and Joel Barlow’ (226). Leporati calls a work ‘epic’ when it ‘engages the epic tradition by employing tropes commonly associated with it’ (21), a definition expansive enough to cover, for instance, prose non-fiction. The unspoken assumption on which Leporati’s interiority-exteriority thesis rests is that epic’s ruling ‘trope’ resides in the action of an individual hero: Brutus, Madoc, Don Juan, Blake’s Milton, Wordsworth’s Wordsworth, and so on. This might be why, looking back to the earlier 1700s, Leporati speaks of ‘a dearth of epic poems written in the eighteenth century’ (26), but it is strange to discount, for instance, the entire traditions of the Neoclassical georgic or the mock-epic, especially given the otherwise permissive use of ‘epic’ in the book.

The book’s use of the term, however, does usefully circumscribe a previously undervalued Romantic concern with conversion and imperialism, where ‘epic’ is the site of a theorization of both attachments and animosities between the two. The book thinks past the narrative wherein epic gave way to Romantic lyric, and it also resists easy characterisations of Romantic epic, as subject-centric, or as ‘tend[ing] towards fragmentation’ (260). Instead, the Romantic epic is a hybrid form: backwards-looking but future-oriented, critical of empire but by turns hopeful for a unified world, sceptical of religious doctrine but seeking to re-enchant the universe. At its centre is the fraught question of benevolent empire – of goodness imposed – which vexed many a Romantic epic writer. This is a book of significant value, therefore, to those with interests in poetic form and form’s history, but also to scholars with far wider interests in empire, conversion, religion, and secularity, and the role of the literary imagination in working through those concepts and their relations.

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Tristram Wolff, *Against the Uprooted Word: Giving Language Time in Transatlantic Romanticism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022. Pp. 338. \$70. ISBN 9781503632769.

In *Against the Uprooted Word*, Tristram Wolff invites his readers to an ambitious reconsideration of the history of philology. At the nexus of literature and linguistic theory, he casts a select group of Romantics as influential disruptors of the process of racial categorization that had its origins in Western theories on culture. Whereas stadial narratives of civilization uprooted language from lived experience, so that speech forms were ‘remade into objects separable from the linguistic reciprocity of uptake and utterance,’ the writers Wolff has chosen resisted the ‘tightening net of association between language, nature, and race’ (48, 225). They enacted this resistance by, as his title puts it, giving language time, that is, by endowing language with ‘new temporalities more intimate, shared, and expansive than the progress-driven historical imaginary that would supplant or absorb them’ (7).

Through chapters on Phillis Wheatley, William Blake, William Wordsworth, and Henry David Thoreau, Wolff pursues this understanding of transatlantic Romanticism as

especially invested in a linguistic naturalism that works through temporal multiplicity. The guiding spirit here is J. G. Herder, to whom Wolff devotes most of his first chapter, skillfully presenting the liberatory potential of Herder's linguistic theories freed from the limitations of linear development. Acknowledging that Herder's mode of historicizing is implicated in the eventual designation of the white European as the sole subject of history, Wolff argues that Herder's theoretical shift toward a 'language ecology' creates possibilities for reading—and occupying—alternate and divergent temporalities (37, 11). As Wolff goes on to show, each of his central literary figures worked against the uprooted word through a particular temporal poetics. In many texts, this is expressed as 'gray romanticism,' Wolff's term for 'an embrace of ambiguity or opacity' (25). It also refers to the many images and concepts these Romantics extract in the field of geology, from which Wolff coins the term 'linguistic actualism' (118). With such felicitous phrasing (including 'uprooted word' and 'giving language time'), Wolff builds a vocabulary for his work, pursuing in his own practice what he detects in the achievement of these Romantics: 'ways to represent language as simultaneously solid (a product of history) and soluble (still actively in play)' (7). Such innovative erudition animates his subsequent chapters, beginning with Wheatley, whom Wolff regards as 'an underacknowledged resource for European romanticism' (61). His reading of her linguistic agency will garner significant attention, for in the poem 'Niobe in Distress for Her Children' the uprooted word is 'etherealize[ed]' into speech beyond death (86). Wheatley reworks the source myth to forestall petrification, a choice Wolff explores as an 'effect of diaspora,' a 'geological voice' interrogating Enlightenment notions of freedom as abstraction' (62, 90). Turning to Blake, Wolff centers three texts ('The Clod and the Pebble,' *The Book of Thel*, and *The Book of Urizen*) in which 'deep time is a way of thinking against empire' (142). This presentation of Blake's gray romanticism animates the near imperceptibility of temporal change on the level of geological strata, which in Wolff's account enhances our own ability to 'expand or contract, feel in different tempos, or hear in new ways' (137). His chapter on Wordsworth begins with the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and the Romantic era's broader investment in vernacular language, and here John Horne Tooke enters Wolff's informative discussion of the political implications for individual speech acts. Pursuing the question of whether a common language can be stabilized over time, the chapter moves on to a geologically oriented reading of 'Hart-Leap Well' and then turns from the local to the transatlantic by pairing Wordsworth's sonnet to Toussaint with a responding poem by Antoine Dupré (180). The final chapter, on Thoreau, takes up the transcendentalist's 'regard for variation, mixed durations, and regeneration in the natural world' (14) while acknowledging troubling aspects of his temporal dislocations. Thoreau's fascination with etymology sits in tension with his inability to perceive Native Americans as being fully present; perhaps Thoreau remained 'beholden to increasingly sedimented forms of racial time' (187).

Throughout, Wolff assembles, disassembles, and reassembles multiple themes and disciplines: linguistics, ethnography, geology, postcolonial studies, critical theory, and more. He keeps these aloft, bringing each in when relevant, to pursue the important matter of how 'literary language shape[s] racial time' (15). Never willing to gloss over contradiction, Wolff certainly succeeds in his aim 'to foreground the vicissitudes of linguistic subjectivity as surprising openings for creativity' (31). Indeed, he himself offers many a literary or critical surprise, often through the inclusion of an unexpected interlocutor whose presence enriches the given context without ever fixing the central figure. *Against the Uprooted Word* is a subtle, erudite, and lively study that richly rewards engagement.

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