Patrick Vincent, *Romanticism, Republicanism, and the Swiss Myth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. 308. £75. ISBN 9781009210294.

In the preface to their *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* (1817), Mary and Percy Shelley describe the environs of Lake Geneva as 'classic ground, peopled with tender and glorious imaginations of the present and the past'. In so doing, they headline their *History*'s almost pervading engagement with the 'Swiss myth', defined, in Patrick Vincent's masterful study, as an ideology and attendant set of cultural practices that configured Switzerland as 'an ideal republican landscape in which nature, liberty, and manners harmoniously corresponded' (1). Vincent's thesis, amply borne out by the Shelleys' *History*, which has Switzerland as its primary geographical and narratological goal, is that during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, 'Switzerland'—understood as physical, historical, and imaginative territory—was, as a place and as a trope, 'practically synonymous' with 'the cultural phenomenon that came to be known as Romanticism' (1). This is a strong claim, but one that Vincent demonstrates convincingly through an impressively broad and well-researched survey of diverse genres of writing, areas of enquiry, historical periods, and modes of activity (notably including burgeoning tourism to the area). In keeping with Vincent's monumental recent *Cambridge History of European Romantic Literature* (2023), this book is also appropriately and pleasingly European in its range of reference, despite the headline focus on Switzerland.

Chapter 1 takes one of the most-familiar Alpine scenes of British Romantic writing, Manfred's encounter with the Chamois hunter on the Jungfrau, in Byron's eponymous 'dramatic poem', as a point of entry into an exploration of the transition from early modern to Romantic configurations of the Swiss myth. This fruitful strategy of taking a canonical or certainly very well-known text as a leitmotif for a broader contextualisation is sustained across the volume—and evidences an impressive range of reading and historical knowledge on Vincent's part, spanning the period from the seventeenth century to the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. Themes and topics addressed include the use of the Swiss myth in Whig thought as a token in republican and oppositional discourse; the changing political inflection of the myth in a selection of eighteenth century British travel writing by prominent figures like William Coxe and Helen Maria Williams (with nice attention to the European dimensions of their books); the turbulent fate of Switzerland during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, with notable attention to Wordsworth and Coleridge; Wordsworth's appropriation of the Swiss myth in his political and autobiographical writing; and the fate of the myth after the defeat of Napoleon, where Switzerland could serve both as a beacon of hope for disappointed radicals and as an occasion for sentimental reflection on the fate of revolutionary aspirations. A coda reads the 'belated iteration' (14) of the Swiss myth in John Ruskin's manifold writing about Switzerland as exemplary of the inadvertent role played by the myth, through the explosion in tourism which it drove, in undermining the very national environment and culture held up as exemplary in the first place (comparable legacies of Romantic-period valorisations can be seen in neighbouring Chamonix too). Ruskin, as so often, diagnoses not only the anxieties of his own age but also anxieties which continue into our times.

William Tell is a constant presence in Vincent's book. Rousseau, not surprisingly, is another. But one might have expected a bit more attention to Rousseau's wildly popular novel *Julie*. Its politically and affectively charged descriptions of Lake Geneva and the Upper Valais (in particular) were profoundly influential on British Romantic-period engagements with the Swiss Myth, visible across the range of genres Vincent covers here, from late eighteenth-century travel guides to the writings of Byron and the Shelleys. And on the question of genre, one also has, very occasionally, the sense that the book understands British Romantic *literature* primarily to mean British Romantic *poetry*—William Wordsworth, for instance, in Vincent's

phrase, ‘remains’ a ‘central protagonist’ (5). One could wish, despite the admirably broad range of materials addressed here, that just a little more had been said about engagements with the Swiss myth in canonical Romantic prose hits like *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, granted that the myth serves much more as backdrop than a theme in those works. But of course, one can’t do everything as an author and one shouldn’t be too greedy as a reader.

In his Acknowledgements, Vincent describes his book as a long time in the making. It has certainly been worth the wait, exemplifying meticulous research and thoughtful, thought-provoking writing. A delightful and informative read, rich in insight and pleasingly full of evocative quotations from primary sources. The book is also nicely illustrated, further clarifying that Romantic-period engagements with the ‘Swiss myth’ were by no means confined to textual media.

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