Noah Heringman, *Deep Time: A Literary History*. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2023. Pp. 384. £30. ISBN 9780691235790.

In *Deep Time: A Literary History*, Noah Heringman offers a compelling account of the emergence of 'deep time' as both a scientific and literary concept, tracing its development from the long eighteenth century to Darwin's formulation of human evolution in *The Descent of Man* (1871). Traversing natural history, antiquarianism, poetic form, voyage narratives, and scientific romance, Heringman argues that deep time is not the exclusive outcome of geology as a modern science, but rather a composite, cross-disciplinary construct shaped as much by narrative techniques, oral traditions, and speculative philosophies as by stratigraphic measurement. The result is a rethinking of what it means to historicise time—and a challenge to views that confine deep time to the empirical frameworks of post-Enlightenment geology.

Heringman argues that deep time was imagined before it was measured, and that literature was not merely a vehicle for transmitting scientific discoveries but a generative force in shaping long-scale temporal thought. The book's key figures—Reinhold and George Forster, Buffon, Herder, Blake, and Darwin—do not simply mirror an expanding temporal horizon; they actively participate in the construction of deep time as a cultural object resistant to disciplinary boundaries. A striking example is Heringman's discussion of the 'abyss of time', a concept commonly attributed to Buffon but, as he shows, one with a layered and debated history. Equally significant are the Blakean 'Ancient men', resonating with Buffon's 'First Men', whose imagined perspectives on origins complicate the relationship between prehuman and human time. This reinterpretive approach allows Heringman to develop what he terms a 'counterhistory' of deep time (1)—one that foregrounds the imaginative labour of poetry, romance, and ethnographic speculation alongside empirical observation.

The book is organised into four chapters, framed by a theoretically rich Introduction and a provocative Afterword. Chapter One traces geological and ethnographic entanglements in the Pacific voyage narratives of the Forsters, where ideas of primitive landforms intersect with conjectures about the origins of human society. Chapter Two turns to Buffon's *Epochs of Nature* (1778), arguing that its experimental geochronology and cometary cosmology offered one of the first systematic attempts to narrate Earth's history on a planetary scale. Heringman's reading of Buffon is particularly valuable, at once recovering the text's philosophical digressions and speculative gestures (often omitted or censored in later editions), and showing how Buffon's comet—responsible for throwing off planetary matter from the Sun—figures catastrophic origin and creative rupture.

This concern with origins and rupture also informs Chapter Three, which will be of particular interest to Romanticists. Heringman offers an original reading of William Blake's geogony, situating him within a strand of poetic and philosophical thought that registers deep time not as a stable scientific category but as a mythopoeic and visionary mode. He aligns the ballad revival and oral traditions with the emergence of a 'deep past of poetry' (120). Drawing on Herder's and Ritson's theories of cultural antiquity, Heringman demonstrates how eighteenth-century poets and philosophers reimagined poetic form itself as a kind of stratigraphy, in which layers of speech, myth, and memory encode lost human epochs. Seen in this light, Blake's *Songs*, prophetic books, and marginalia represent archival interventions into temporal scale, foregrounding the imaginative capacity to inhabit and remake time.

The final chapter considers Darwin and John Lubbock, reframing their evolutionary and anthropological works in light of the long prehistory of deep time as a conceptual field. Particularly striking is the suggestion that Darwin's encounter with indigenous peoples in Tierra del Fuego echoed earlier naturalist accounts that situated human origins within the same temporal and material field as fossil shells and cliffs. In this perspective, the Anthropocene

appears less a novelty than a return of the long-imagined unity of human and geological history—first articulated in literature, later formalised by climate science.

Heringman's method is erudite and persuasive. He combines close readings of canonical and neglected texts with incisive theoretical interventions, drawing on thinkers including Koselleck, Chakrabarty, Zielinski, and Rudwick. Notable is his insistence on figural and rhetorical dimensions of geological writing, which allow geological temporality to migrate into poetry, ethnography, and romance. Heringman thereby challenges Gould's view that deep time arose chiefly from the late-eighteenth-century rise of geology, defined by its separation from history. He recovers a pre-disciplinary space wherein Earth's history was conceived as a shared problem of scale, form, and narrative.

In the context of renewed attention to geological temporality, this book demonstrates with clarity and breadth how literature and science together shaped the idea of deep time. It is a valuable resource not only for scholars of Blake and Romanticism, but also for those interested in the broader intersections of literature, science, and intellectual culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and beyond.

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