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Aims and Scope: Formerly *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text* (1997–2005), *Romantic Textualities: Literature and Print Culture, 1780–1840* is a twice-yearly journal that is committed to foregrounding innovative Romantic-studies research into bibliography, book history, intertextuality, and textual studies. To this end, we publish material in a number of formats: among them, peer-reviewed articles, reports on individual/group research projects, bibliographical checklists, and biographical profiles of overlooked Romantic writers. As of Issue 15 (Winter 2005), *Romantic Textualities* also carries reviews of books that reflect the growing academic interest in the fields of book history, print culture, intertextuality, and cultural materialism, as they relate to Romantic studies.

David Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity, Politics* (London: Routledge, 2005), xii + 192pp. ISBN 0-415-33556-6; £70 (hb).

DAVID HIGGINS'S READABLE AND WELL-RESEARCHED STUDY contributes to the project of resituating key concepts of Romantic poetics within the print culture of the period. He brings together the period's unprecedented interest in 'genius', which has been a staple of Romantic studies, and the 'uniquely important role' played by the period's literary magazines, which have only recently begun to receive serious attention in their own right, rather than as 'context'. The book begins by sketching how the discourse of genius emerged in the eighteenth century with texts such as Young's *Conjectures*, developed in German thought, was re-imported by Coleridge and others, and became central to Romantic aesthetics. But Higgins is principally interested in the next stage of the story, in which the idea of genius was popularised for the middle-class by the literary magazines. This development produced a series of apparent contradictions, causing the tensions with which this book is concerned. As the 'Romantic' idea of the author as a gifted, self-expressive creator gave way to the 'Victorian' idea of the author as a professional, socially useful sage, discussions of genius became increasingly strident and polarised. Accounts of the genius as a transcendent, spiritualised moral exemplar opposed accounts of the genius as entrapped in local details, worldly concerns, and morally suspect habits.

The first tension the book explores is between the theory of genius as a transcendent, inspired, even quasi-divine quality (a view advanced by John Abraham Heraud in *Fraser's*), and the practice of deploying the discourse of genius in the 'debased' and professionalised periodicals and the emerging celebrity culture that they sustained. The 'myth of the Genius Author' obscured the effect of the marketplace on literature, but it also 'played an important role in the way in which that marketplace operated' (p. 8). Despite his well known disdain for periodical criticism, Higgins argues, 'Wordsworth needs *Blackwood's Magazine* to mediate his work to early nineteenth-century readers, whether he likes it or not' (p. 101).

One way in which *Blackwood's* shaped Wordsworth's reception was through a new genre of magazine writing: the literary portrait. These biographical sketches often appeared in groups, such as William Maginn's 'Gallery of Illustrious Literary Characters' which appeared in *Fraser's Magazine* between 1830 and 1836. As a genre, the biographical sketch produced a second tension: on one hand it represented genius as a spiritual property that transcended the quotidian; on the other it sought evidence of genius in quotidian details of the author's appearance, manners, and habits. John Wilson's 'Letters from the Lakes', for example, depict Wordsworth as a contemplative sage, but also represent him embedded in a traditional rural Christian community of tea-drinking, church-going, and hill-walking. As discussions of genius increasingly became


suffused with biographical detail, appreciations of great authors risked sliding into the kind of gossip that boosted magazine sales.

A third tension emerged when the magazines generalised from the habits of men of genius to the place of genius in society. On one hand, genius was understood to be inherently transgressive. Geniuses such as Burns were subject to physical or moral infirmity. They found it impossible to conform to mundane societal norms and they paid scant heed to social niceties, but only because their minds were on higher things. By comparing the representations of male and female genius in *Fraser's*, Higgins shows how the discourse of genius was gendered. There were certainly female geniuses, Letitia Landon among them, but their genius did not excuse antisocial behaviour, as it often did for their male counterparts. Working against the transgressive view of genius, an essentially conservative account linked it to Christian spirituality, domestic felicity and social virtue. This understanding included a critique of the discourse of genius for providing an excuse for indolence and immorality. Edward Lytton Bulwer argued that Walter Scott's virtuous private habits were 'one splendid refutation of the popular fallacy, that genius has of necessity vices—that its light must be meteoric—and its courses wayward and uncontrolled' (p. 82). That 'popular fallacy' was dangerous because if geniuses were not held to the same standards of conduct as other men, and did not receive recognition during their lifetimes, then the most mediocre and immoral writer could excuse himself by claiming to be an unappreciated genius. But this argument also created a problem for Bulwer. Did Scott's private life and conservative politics prove that genius was not transgressive, or that Scott was not a genius?

Chapter Five traces a related tension in William Hazlitt's thought between two views of the relationship between poetic genius and worldly power. In his famous review of Kemble's production of *Coriolanus*, Hazlitt suggested that poetry always and everywhere had a natural affinity with power, and operated on an 'anti-levelling' principle. But he argued elsewhere that poetry was inherently democratic, and had fallen in with 'Legitimacy' only as a result of specific historical circumstances. 'Hazlitt had his limitations', Higgins concludes, 'but no British writer has expressed more powerfully than him the belief that it is the duty of literature to resist compromise with power, or has faced with more courage and clear-sightedness its failures to do so' (p. 126).

Finally, Higgins turns to the career of Benjamin Robert Haydon in order to investigate the difficult relationship between genius and (self-)promotion. Haydon's career, in a memorable phrase, 'was spent trying to bully the world into accepting that he was the great artist who was to lead the "British School"' (p. 127). His problem was that the more he trumpeted his own genius or encouraged others to do so, for example in *Annals of the Fine Arts*, the more he sounded like a quack. Haydon was set apart from other aspirants to 'genius' because even those who derided his self-promotion acknowledged his talents, and because he never allowed himself the consolations of anticipating a post-

humorous reputation. Haydon kept faith that the public would recognise him as a genius in his own lifetime, given time and education. When he lost that faith his debts overwhelmed him and he killed himself. Haydon's treatment in the magazines and in graphic satires raises a question that's at the heart of this book. 'Can you promote genius without debasing it?' (p. 146).

Throughout, Higgins writes in an accessible, engaging, and direct style. He thinks that genius 'is *always* socially constructed', but it is not always clear if he thinks it was *primarily* constructed in the magazines, or whether they simply took part in a discourse that was being produced through a much wider variety of discursive and material factors. He has, however, made the case very effectively that magazines were important in shaping, mediating, and popularising Romantic conceptions of genius, and that magazine writing should hold an important place, in its own right, in scholarly debates about the history, ideology and politics of genius. 

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Mark Sandy, *Poetics of Self and Form in Keats and Shelley: Nietzschean Subjectivity and Genre* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 160pp. ISBN: 0-754-63579-1; £45/\$89.95 (hb).

THIS BOOK USES NIETZSCHE'S WRITINGS to explore the treatment of the self as a fictional construct in the work of Keats and Shelley and, in turn, argues that both poets anticipate Nietzschean theories of subjectivity, in particular his emphasis on 'becoming' rather than 'being'. Sandy's post-structuralist approach combines theoretical sophistication with a clarity of expression that is not always to be found in this sort of criticism. A notable strength of the book is its interweaving of analysis of the poetry of Keats and Shelley, which leads to some illuminating comparisons between the two writers.

The first chapter begins with an elegantly self-reflexive account of the impact of Nietzsche on deconstructionist and New Historicist approaches to Romanticism, and goes on to consider Nietzsche's understanding of subjectivity as a succession of competing fictions. Chapter Two is the most philosophically complex, allying Keats and Shelley's prose writing on poetics and identity with Nietzsche's rejection of Kantian dualism. Sandy argues that both poets 'campaign for an aesthetic of self-revision and release of the self from such metaphysical delusion' (p. 16); the word 'campaign', here, is an example of the book's occasional tendency to make Shelley and (particularly) Keats sound more philosophically didactic than they are actually are. The following chapter looks mainly at *Alastor* and *Endymion*, examining the tension between the ideal and the real in these two poems through Nietzsche's notions of 'Apollonian individuation' and 'Dionysian universality' (p. 40). This leads into an interesting discussion

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS



Janette Currie received her PhD from the University of Stirling, where she is now Research Fellow of the AHRC-funded ‘Songs of James Hogg Project’ for the Stirling/South Carolina Research Edition of *The Collected Works of James Hogg*. Forthcoming in 2006 is James Hogg, *Contributions to Literary Annuals and Gift Books* (S/SC Research Edition). A major interest, and the subject of a previous AHRB-funded research project, is Hogg’s trans-Atlanticism — see ‘“A Man’s a Man for a’ That”: Burns, Hogg, and The Liberator’ and ‘From Altrive to Albany: James Hogg’s Transatlantic Publication’ on *STAR* (*Scotland’s Transatlantic Relations*) project at <<http://www.star.ac.uk/Archive/Publications.htm>>.

Bianca Falbo is Assistant Professor of English and Assistant Director of the College Writing Program at Lafayette College. Her scholarship focuses on the institutionalising of literacy practices since the turn of the nineteenth century in a range of cultural sites including school books, periodicals, editions of ‘literary’ texts, and student writing. Her articles have appeared in *Reader and Composition Studies*.

Derek Furr is Assistant Professor of English in the Bard College Master of Arts in Teaching Program, where he teaches courses in Romantic period and post-colonial literatures, and works with pre-service and in-service public schoolteachers.

David Higgins is Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Chester, and is the author of *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity, Politics* (2005—reviewed in this issue of *Romantic Textualities*); he has also published articles on Wordsworth and celebrity, Hazlitt and prize-fighting, and nineteenth-century constructions of ‘race’.

Tim Killick is Postdoctoral Research Associate on the AHRC-funded *Database of Mid-Victorian Wood-Engraved Illustrations* at Cardiff University’s Centre for Editorial and Intertextual Research. He has published articles on the fiction of Allan Cunningham, James Hogg, and Mary Russell Mitford. Current projects

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Tom Mole is Assistant Professor of English Literature at McGill University. He has edited one volume for the Pickering & Chatto edition of *Blackwood's Magazine, 1817–1825* (forthcoming), and has published a number of articles on Byron and celebrity. He is currently preparing a monograph entitled *Byron's Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy*, to be published by Palgrave.

