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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.

## REVIEWS



Michael Eberle-Sinatra, *Leigh Hunt and the London Literary Scene: A Reception History of his Major Works* (London: Routledge, 2005), ix + 169pp. ISBN 0-415-31676-6; £70 (hb).

MICHAEL EBERLE-SINATRA'S HIGHLY ACCESSIBLE STUDY is a worthy contribution to the recent rise of interest in the work of Leigh Hunt. Focusing on 1805–1828, the study aims to regain a sense of Hunt as a prolific and influential writer through an exploration of his originality as a poet and critic. Eberle-Sinatra reads these innovations in the context of Hunt's public life and reputation, and it is helpful to have his work placed in this way alongside the reviews it generated. The book is not intended as a literary–critical biography, however, but as a reassessment of Hunt's work that acknowledges the need to give it a status independent of that of Percy Shelley, John Keats, William Hazlitt, and Charles Lamb, with which it is often compared. The temptation to contextualize using these writers, and to see Hunt as less good, is not always resisted, however. We are told that Hunt's style, for instance, 'often anticipates Hazlitt (though it does not quite rise to the level of Hazlitt's brilliant prose)' (p. 17).

The first chapter (1805–1811) establishes Hunt as 'the first major Romantic theater critic' (p. 10) and as a reviewer of poetry. Eberle-Sinatra demonstrates that Hunt's innovations as a theatre critic lie in his emphasis on describing the style of the acting in particular performances, his comment on direction, and his development of the concept of 'mental theater' (p. 10). Long reviews of individual performances were, Eberle-Sinatra suggests, unusual, and the strength and originality of Hunt's contribution to theatre criticism lie in the close attention he pays to detail, and in his insistence on critical independence. Much of this chapter is a useful summary of Hunt's thought on the suitability of certain plays for the stage, on the role of the actor's imagination in informing a performance, and on the need for imagination on the part of the audience. Here, Eberle-Sinatra stresses that Hunt is different from the other Romantics and 'from Coleridge in particular' (p. 24) in that he is interested in specific performances rather than the general portraits of theatrical figures preferred by his contemporaries. The conclusion of the chapter sets out to consider the 'socio-political implications' (p. 27) of Hunt's theatrical criticism, but, disappointingly, offers instead merely a brief summary of Hunt's political involvement.

The next chapter (1811–1816) is devoted to Hunt's criticism of the work of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, centring on a reading of *The Feast of the Poets*. Eberle-Sinatra observes that Hunt was initially hostile to Coleridge's poetry; Hunt came to appreciate it in 1818 in the preface to *Foliage*, where he suggests that it is superior to that of Wordsworth, whose poetry he had long admired. Eberle-Sinatra notes that like others of his time, Hunt was critical of Southey after Southey accepted the laureateship in 1813. Eberle-Sinatra shows that Hunt, nevertheless, gave Southey's poetry favourable reviews after this date, seeing him, in *The Feast of the Poets*, as the leader of the Lake poets. This chapter seems more focused on the reception history of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey than on the reception of Hunt's work. While Hunt's views on Coleridge and Southey are typical of the time, Eberle-Sinatra stresses that Hunt's early appreciation of Wordsworth 'is the most relevant for a summary of Hunt's innovative approach toward some of his contemporary writers' (p. 49), though, as Eberle-Sinatra points out, from 1818 onward Hunt is ambivalent towards Wordsworth.

Chapter 3 (1816–1821) centres on Hunt's poem *The Story of Rimini* (1816), which Eberle-Sinatra calls the 'founding document of the Cockney School' (p. 69). Avoiding the usual strategy of linking this poem to Keats ('in its style and content' [p. 66]) and Wordsworth (in its use of 'simple colloquial language' [p. 69]), Eberle-Sinatra makes an interesting case for Hunt's following Dante in an attempt to bring 'the language of the poet even closer to the language spoken by the readers' (p. 68). There are detailed accounts in this chapter of the negative impact on Hunt's reputation of the dedication of the poem to Byron—Hunt was unjustly accused of presuming to use a familiar tone. The quality of the poem, Eberle-Sinatra argues, was almost universally recognised, as was Hunt's use of a 'new vocabulary and linguistic inventions' (p. 69), though the poem was criticised extensively for its neologisms. It is a shame that Eberle-Sinatra touches only very briefly here on Hunt's attitude to women. He suggests in passing that the poem, which elaborates on Dante's story of Paolo and Francesca from Dante's *Inferno*, characterizes Francesca's 'status as a commodity' (p. 63). Gender issues are presumably omitted from deeper consideration in the study as a whole because Hunt was not an innovator in this area. If there is a weakness in this book, it is that the focus on originality does not generate the complete picture of Hunt which one might expect from a survey book of this kind.

Chapter 4 (1821–1828) deals with Hunt's editorship of the *Liberal*, a periodical proposed by Byron, who contributed poetry to it. Eberle-Sinatra seems a little uncertain of his conclusions on the reception of this journal, calling it an 'ultimately unsuccessful' collaboration (p. 95) that 'did not make him [Hunt] a more popular writer or editor' (p. 95), but goes on to describe 'the huge popularity of the *Liberal* in its time' (p. 114). Eberle-Sinatra makes a case for the originality of Hunt's travel-writing on Italy, published in the *Liberal*,

asserting that Hunt differs from his contemporaries in his 'frankness about his feelings' (p. 104), his 'conversational tone' (p. 111), in the way that he neither uses 'his observations of Italy to reveal his superior taste and education in a self-congratulatory fashion' (p. 107) nor 'indulge[s] in criticism of previous contributors to the genre' (p. 114), and in the manner in which he relates his experiences abroad to his experiences 'as an Englishmen, more particularly as a Londoner' (p. 107). Eberle-Sinatra regards these innovations as superior even to Hunt's theatrical criticism and his writing on poetic language. To assert that it is a novelty to present travel literature as informal letters to be 'read as if they were addressed to a friend rather than an impersonal reader' overlooks many examples of the genre from the eighteenth century. Patrick Brydone's *Tour Through Sicily and Malta* (1773) and Helen Maria Williams's *Letters Written in France in the Summer 1790, to A Friend in England* (1790) are two such examples. Eberle-Sinatra's claims for Hunt's originality in theatre criticism are much more convincing. The final section of this chapter looks at the reviews of Hunt's *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* (1828). Henry Colburn, who published the book, also praised it in his periodical *New Monthly Magazine*. Eberle-Sinatra comments that 'this specific review is really only a puffing piece designed to promote the sales of Hunt's work' (p. 119). Eberle-Sinatra does not explore how Hunt may have reconciled this endorsement with his views on critical independence, or whether Hunt may have felt his independence in any way compromised in writing on an acquaintance.

Eberle-Sinatra is devoted to detail in this book, and there is something of the indulgence of the editorial note in much of the writing. The book seems a little uncertain about its readership, too. It is an introductory overview that synthesizes the work of other critics, but it is also interested in the minutiae of publication expenses, the critical implications of multiple versions of the same texts, and the complexities of hostilities between various literary figures. ❏

Essaka Joshua  
*University of Birmingham*

**Dino Francis Felluga, *The Perversity of Poetry: Romantic Ideology and the Popular Male Poet of Genius* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), xi + 208pp. ISBN 0-791-46299-4; \$70 (hb).**

DINO FRANCIS FELLUGA'S WELL ARGUED AND THOROUGHLY RESEARCHED STUDY explores the reception history of Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott, and connects their popular critical reception in the nineteenth century to the ultimate dismissal of poetry as a pertinent political force. Over the course of the book, Felluga contends that a variety of critics and reviewers throughout the Romantic period systematically marginalised poetry and, moreover, the figure

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS



**Gavin Edwards** is Professor of English Studies at the University of Glamorgan, Wales. His research focuses on Romantic literature and society, and historical applications of narrative theory and semantics. He is the editor of *George Crabbe: Selected Poems* (Penguin, 1991) and *Watkin Tench: Letters from Revolutionary France* (Palgrave, 2001), and *Narrative Order, 1789–1819: Life and Story in an Age of Revolution* (Palgrave, 2005). He is currently working on capital letters in the novels of Dickens.

**James R. Fleming** is a Kirkland PhD Fellow in Victorian and Folklore Studies at the University of Florida. He is a Review Editor and Co-Managing Editor for *ImageText* <<http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/>>. He is currently working on a dissertation tentatively entitled ‘Trauma, Testimony and the English Romantic Movement’ and a study focusing on issues of space, place, and temporality in the works of Jane Austen and Lord Byron.

**Jonathan Hill** is a member of the Department of English, Saint Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota. His main area of teaching is the British Romantic period, his main research interest Regency culture broadly understood, including graphic satire and book history. This article is part of an ongoing study of books in boards, both British and American.

**Essaka Joshua** is Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Birmingham. She is the author of *Pygmalion and Galatea: The History of a Narrative in English Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) and *The Romantics and the May-Day Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, forthcoming).

**Jonathan Kelly** is IRCHSS post-doctoral fellow in University College, Dublin, where he is engaged in research on the writings of Charles Robert Maturin (1780–1824).

**Peter Simonsen** is Postdoctoral Carlsberg Research Fellow at the University of Southern Denmark. His research project concerns British poetry of the 1820s and 1830s. He has published articles on frontispiece portraiture, problems of literary historical periodisation, the aesthetics of typography, and ekphrasis.

His monograph entitled *Wordsworth and Word-Preserving Arts* is forthcoming from Palgrave.

