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(previously 'Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text')



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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 an online 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.

Edwards's analysis certainly touches on such pivotal oppositions, but it is to a position of the 'undermining of narrative meaning' (p. 178) that one is finally led. On a more particular front, there are signs that the writer's knowledge of Scott is not so advanced as in the case of other authors discussed. It is surely an exaggeration to say that 'many of Scott's novels [are] narrated by Peter Pattieson' (p. 159); and it is almost certainly wrong to talk of Ravenswood's father as 'the old Master of Ravenswood' (p. 172), since 'Master of Ravenswood' is a courtesy title applying only to Edgar his son ('Master of' referring to the heir apparent of a Scottish barony). In view of these and other oversights, one is inclined to be sceptical about the proven status of some more sweeping statements, e.g. the assertion (made twice) that the *Bride of Lammermoor* is 'Scott's most Burkian novel' (pp. 15, 161)

As a whole, this is a brave, accomplished, and challenging book. Its concerns have clearly been fomenting in the author's mind for some time, one symptom of this being the high degree of interrelationship evident in the discussions of themes, authors, and works. The texts are well selected and operate in relation to each other in fruitful and sometimes surprising ways. At the same time, it is very much a book which accentuates *modern interpretation* as a primary level of activity, to the extent that aspects such as contemporary readerships and publishing conditions tend to be dealt with in a relatively cursory way. In this respect, notwithstanding its strong historical agenda, this book might ultimately tell us more about ourselves (or a section of ourselves) than its purported subject. 

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Gavin Hopps and Jane Stabler (eds), *Romanticism and Religion from William Cowper to Wallace Stevens* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 262pp. ISBN 0-7546-5570-9; £50 / \$99.95 (hb).

THIS BOOK IS AN IMPORTANT ADDITION to Ashgate's Nineteenth Century series, containing critical and theoretical discussion of Romanticism and its relationship with Religion. The editors, Gavin Hopps and Jane Stabler, state at the outset their aim to redress secular criticism of the subject, which has been predominant for several years. Quoting Jerome McGann's *The Romantic Ideology* as an example, the introductory essay addresses the problems caused by this secular viewpoint, in that it 'presupposes a view of the world opposed to the religious' (p. 1). Examining the work of key Romantic period figures, in what the editors term 'a "theological turn" in postmodern thought', the book therefore invites us to rethink general assumptions in light of broader concepts of belief (p. 8).


One of the most thought-provoking comments of the volume is seen in Vincent Newey's fascinating essay on Cowper, where he writes:

We tend to think of the Romantic age as an upsurge of freedom, as in certain respects it manifestly is, including the diffusion of conventional religious energies into broader causes and purposes; but with Cowper, we are prompted to comprehend it as being no less about quietly and persistently setting controls. (p. 54)

Certainly, when it comes to religion, the evidence of this book shows that issues of control appear relevant to a number of Romantic period writers. This is seen, for example, in Robert Southey and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's anxiety about 'the spreading Catholic infection' (p. 77). Catholicism was a major subject of debate and concern within the Romantic period: there were the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots of 1780; the influx of priests after the French Revolution; the creation of many Catholic seminaries in England and Ireland; and agitation surrounding the Catholic Relief Act of 1829. It was an area that was discussed by a number of leading writers of the time, including (to name a few) Radcliffe, Maturin, Wordsworth, Scott, and Hazlitt. Yet, as Timothy Webb rightly points out, it is an area that is often marginalised in contemporary writings. His article on 'Catholic Contagion: Southey, Coleridge and English Anxieties' admirably addresses this deficit by examining the writers' concerns on European and Irish Catholicism, in the context of wider political and religious debate. The chapter 'Sacred Art and Profane Poets' also engages with this important theme. Here, Jane Stabler highlights the responses of the 'Shelley circle' to religious Renaissance art and shows how it is possible to use these reactions to modify ideas 'about the Promethean heroism of the Romantic creator' (p. 207).

Almost half the book (six chapters out of fourteen) discusses Byron's responses to and beliefs about religion, which provides an interesting debate on this popular writer. One of the most compelling is Christine Kenyon Jones essay, which presents the argument that Byron was 'bi- or multilingual in religious matters'. She argues that this gave him an 'acute sensitivity to nuances of doctrinal argument, an intense and lifelong interest in religious and theological matters and their effect upon psychology and motivation' (p. 109). Far from popular perceptions of Byron's dour Calvinist upbringing, Kenyon Jones correctly highlights that Scottish religion at that time was a multifaceted, pluralistic, and socially complex influence that often engaged with English theological thinking. She also presents new research, which shows that the church the Byrons attended in Aberdeen was 'the only Church in Scotland where there was an organ' and where the service was chanted as in English cathedrals (p. 110). While essays such as these add to our knowledge and understanding of Byron's religious views and influences, the overall balance of the book is compromised by such a heavy-handed examination of one particular writer. This bias is undertaken to the detriment of many key literary figures of

Romanticism, who perhaps should have been included but were not, such as Walter Scott to name but one.

A. O. Lovejoy once commented that ‘the offspring with which Romanticism is credited are as strangely assorted as its attributes and its ancestors’, and this book is a prime example of this. It attempts to do many things in its overall structure: it re-examines the relationship between Romanticism and religion; addresses what Hopps and Stabler call the ‘recent attempts to recruit the poet [Byron] for the cause of “radical unbelief” ’ (p. 9); and extends temporal boundaries beyond first-generation Romantics to include Gerald Manley Hopkins and Wallace Stevens. Added to a mix of topics and genres (there are essays on poetry, prose, drama, art, and language), these competing aims make the book hard going at times and are a hindrance to its overall coherence. The book would also have benefited from a clearer explanation of how it defines the term ‘Religion’. This is particularly relevant when the editors admit that ‘[n]ot all the chapters in the collection espouse a religious viewpoint’, but what they contribute is [after appropriating Alan Rawes quotation], a responsive openness to possibilities’ (p. 13). It could be argued that while these chapters are hugely valuable in their own right, they result in the book taking steps towards the blurred boundaries between secular and non-secular readings. Regardless of this, *Romanticism and Religion from William Cowper to Wallace Stevens* is a worthy contribution to the field of Romantic studies, and will instigate and inspire continued debate on the subject for some time to come. 

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Nicholas Reid, *Coleridge, Form and Symbol: Or the Ascertaining Vision* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate 2006), ix + 189pp. ISBN 0-7546-5327-7; £45 / \$89.95.

THE AIM OF ASHGATE’S NINETEENTH CENTURY SERIES ‘is to reflect, develop and extend the great burgeoning interest in the nineteenth century [...] as a locus for our understanding not only of the past but of the contours of our modernity’ (p. x). In *Coleridge, Form and Symbol: Or the Ascertaining Vision*, Nicholas Reid engages with the dual articulation of Ashgate’s locus through an intriguing examination of Coleridge’s metaphysics and his theories of the imagination, symbol, and form. What is especially refreshing about Reid’s study is how it situates the relevance of Coleridgean concepts and thought within contemporary critical theory. Rather than solely reading Coleridge *through* the lens of critical theory, Reid frames an interchangeable *dialogue* between Coleridgean concepts and theory, which reciprocally inform and enlighten one another.

In Part I, for example, Reid draws on twentieth-century aesthetics to show that ‘a Coleridgean phenomenology, far from being mere folk psychology, is

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS



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Wendy Hunter is in the process of completing her PhD thesis at the University of Sheffield, which has a working title of 'Literary Identity in the Work of James Hogg'. She has recently published an article on Hogg's periodical *The Spy* for the *Literary Encyclopaedia* and has contributed to a forthcoming e-book on Hogg's contributions in Chambers' *Edinburgh Journal*.

Anne MacCarthy is Senior Lecturer in English Literature in the English Department at the University of Santiago di Compostela, Spain. She has published book-length studies on Edward Walsh, James Clarence Mangan, and the development of Irish literature during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as heading a research project on the influence of nineteenth-century Irish literature on the work of James Joyce.

David Stewart (BA Stirling, MPhil Glasgow) is a second-year PhD student at the University of Glasgow. His thesis focuses on the periodical culture of the 1810s and '20s, particularly literary magazines such as *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, the *London Magazine*, the *New Monthly Magazine*, and Leigh Hunt's *Examiner*, *Reflector*, and *Indicator* papers, as well as the intersections between print culture, commercialism, and the aesthetic.

Abraham Thomas is Curator of Designs at the Victoria & Albert Museum. In 2006, he co-curated the V&A's 'Alternating Currents' season on Islamic architecture, and 'On The Threshold', an exhibition in the Architecture Exhibition Gallery looking at contemporary housing. During 2007, he will be curating a display entitled 'Full Tilt', looking at the fashion photography and graphic design at *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue* magazines in the 1940s/1950s, which opens in August in the V&A's 20th-Century Gallery.

Lisa M. Wilson is Assistant Professor in the Department of English and Communication at the State University of New York College at Potsdam. Her research focuses on issues of authorship, gender, and print culture in the British Romantic period and she has published on Matthew ‘Monk’ Lewis, Charlotte Dacre, and Mary Robinson. She is currently working on a book manuscript, *Marketing Authorship in an ‘Age of Personality’, 1780–1850*. This article forms part of her new study on Romantic-period satirical novels, which began as part of a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar directed by Stephen Behrendt at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

Maximilaan van Woudenberg (BA McMaster, PhD Alberta) is Professor of Communications at the Sheridan Institute of Technology in Oakville, Canada, where he teaches Literature and Digital Storytelling. He has published several articles on Coleridge’s activities at the University of Göttingen and is currently preparing a monograph entitled *Coleridge and the Continental University*.

