

ROMANTIC TEXTUALITIES  
LITERATURE AND PRINT CULTURE, 1780–1840



*Issue 21*  
*(Winter 2013)*

Centre for Editorial and Intertextual Research  
Cardiff University

*Romantic Textualities* is available on the web at [www.romtext.org.uk](http://www.romtext.org.uk),  
and on Twitter @romtext

ISSN 1748-0116

*Romantic Textualities: Literature and Print Culture, 1780–1840*, 21 (Winter 2013).  
<[www.romtext.org.uk/issues/rt21.pdf](http://www.romtext.org.uk/issues/rt21.pdf)>.

© 2013–14 Centre for Editorial and Intertextual Research

Published by the Centre for Editorial and Intertextual Research, Cardiff University.  
Typeset in Adobe Garamond Pro 11 / 12.5, using Adobe InDesign cc; images and illustrations prepared using  
Adobe Illustrator cc and Adobe PhotoShop cc; final output rendered with Adobe Acrobat xi Professional.

**Editor:** Anthony Mandal, *Cardiff University, UK*

**Associate Editor:** Nicola Lloyd, *Cardiff University, UK*

**Reviews Editor:** Katie Garner, *University of Cork, Ireland*

**Editorial Assistants:** Esther McConnell, Rhiannon Hayes, Joshua Naylor, *Cardiff University, UK*

#### Advisory Board

Peter Garside (Chair), *University of Edinburgh, UK*

Jane Aaron, *University of Glamorgan, UK*

Stephen Behrendt, *University of Nebraska, USA*

Emma Clery, *University of Southampton, UK*

Benjamin Colbert, *University of Wolverhampton, UK*

Gillian Dow, *University of Southampton / Chawton House Library, UK*

Edward Copeland, *Pomona College, USA*

Gavin Edwards, *University of South Wales, UK*

Gillian Dow, *University of Southampton / Chawton House Library, UK*

Penny Fielding, *University of Edinburgh, UK*

Caroline Franklin, *University of Swansea, UK*

Isobel Grundy, *University of Alberta, Canada*

Ian Haywood, *University of Roehampton, UK*

David Hewitt, *University of Aberdeen, UK*

Gillian Hughes, *Independent Scholar*

Claire Lamont, *University of Newcastle, UK*

Devoney Looser, *Arizona State University, US*

Robert Miles, *University of Victoria, Canada*

Rainer Schöwerling, *University of Paderborn, Germany*

Christopher Skelton-Foord, *University of Durham, UK*


Kathryn Sutherland, *University of Oxford, UK*

Graham Tulloch, *Flinders University, Australia*

Maximilian van Woudenberg, *Sheridan Institute of Technology, Canada*

Nicola Watson, *Open University, UK*

**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. *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.

Kelly's and Behrendt's remarks about scholarly prospects for this area of study urge interdisciplinary practice, and the debalkanisation of scholarship that has previously resisted interdisciplinarity: there is evidence in this collection to suggest that these ideas are already present in current research. 

Justin Tonra  
NUI Galway


**Bernhard Kuhn, *Autobiography and Natural Science in the Age of Romanticism* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 171pp. ISBN 978-0-7546-6166-5; £55 / \$99.95 (hb).**

IT IS STRIKING THAT THE TURN OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY saw the earliest use—and swift adoption—of both *autobiography* and *biology* and their cognates in European languages.<sup>1</sup> Two very different disciplines of 'life-writing' that took βίος as their common object were named, if not born, together. Over a period in which ontogeny, or individual history, was often thought to recapitulate phylogeny, or natural history, Bernhard Kuhn's book suggests there was considerable interaction between these disciplines, across French, German, British and American literature. Kuhn argues that autobiography was for Romantic writers 'a fundamentally interdisciplinary enterprise existing on a continuum with psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, and other human sciences' (p. 142). He goes so far as to claim, indeed, that writing produced under this enterprise 'refutes the still entrenched thesis of "the two cultures"' (p. 1).

This is a bold and laudable claim. Unfortunately, it is not one that this book can substantiate. Its argument rests on a thin account of the history and philosophy of natural science, and a fragile model of interaction between scientific theory or practice and autobiographical texts. Given Kuhn's famous namesake, there is surprisingly little discussion of paradigms in the former at all, apart from some gesturing at the 'inductive approach to nature' and that familiar straw man, 'rigorously-detached', 'Baconian' scientific objectivity, set against either the weak constructivism of natural science as a 'discursive practice that foregrounds the experiential and perspectival dimensions of the naturalist's observations' (p. 2), or an 'organic and holistic view of the world' (p. 3)—terms like 'organic' and 'holistic' being the kind of glittering generalities that critical discussions of Romanticism really should have learnt to avoid, but which nevertheless float aromatically through this book without ever quite succumbing to the indignity of definition. The book needed rather to put terms like 'organic' under the critical microscope, to discover how and why they became central to the arts and sciences of life over the period. A more rigorous dose of Foucault than the smattering evident here, or his mentor Georges Canguilhem, whose extensive writings on *la connaissance de la vie* are finally beginning to appear in English, would have helped.

In terms of cultural interactions, Kuhn argues that writers such as Rousseau and Goethe had a ‘deep interest in the natural sciences precisely during the period of their most autobiographical activity’ (p. 142); while this is undoubtedly true, ‘precisely’ only draws attention to how weak a link contemporaneity (‘during the period’) can be. So it often proves for the book’s key analyses. In the introductory chapter, the main parallel Kuhn draws between autobiographical writing and natural history in the Romantic period is that both were popular (pp. 5–6), but this does not make them inevitably ‘coextensive’ (p. 8). When he moves on to the three authors discussed at length—Rousseau, Goethe and Thoreau—Kuhn does find specific and convincing connections. Very much the best part of the book is that on Rousseau’s *Confessions* and *Reveries* read in relation to his botanical writings. Here Kuhn shows how Rousseau’s ‘fantastical image of the autobiographer as auto-botanising plant’ drew, from his sense of a ‘temporalized natural world’, not a ‘single narrative model of development but [...] endless lines of correspondence and difference that can be traced from one episode to another’ (pp. 31–38). As Kuhn emphasises, this does Rousseau the great service of overturning a widely held view, propagated by Jean Starobinski, that his later botanising was a self-indulgent retreat from the social world; instead we gain a richer sense of Rousseau’s explorations of the tangled bank of human personality. Chapters on Goethe’s ‘morphological approach’, in which autobiographical selves and the forms of nature are both seen as ‘dynamically-evolving entities’ (pp. 112–13), also work well enough, and there are some interesting sections on that author’s writings on the aesthetics and science of colour and music, and *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. The final part of the triad on Thoreau and *Walden* (which unaccountably switches tense into an irritating historical present) sometimes loses sight of its author’s naturalistic interests chasing down his debt to Goethe, and though it quotes Thoreau’s interesting statement that ‘the purest science is still biographical’ several times, never manages to fully gloss it satisfyingly, although it has some good material and conclusions on Thoreau’s ‘proto-ecological’ (p. 124) moments.

Perorating, Kuhn praises Thoreau’s ‘sustained vision of the unity of the self’ (p. 140), deploying a formula—unity of self—that recurs throughout the book, alongside abstractions such as ‘higher unity’, ‘structural unity’, ‘the true nature of the self’ and so on. Once again, the lure of pleasant words in place of carefully examined or advisedly used terms is not very helpful. It is also revealing of Kuhn’s approach to the study of autobiography. The book is ultimately strikingly old-fashioned in its grandiose emphasis on ‘unity’ and its sense that Rousseau and other great men forged ‘the modern self’ in a select canon of literary autobiographies. It is almost entirely uninterested or incurious about popular traditions and genres of autobiographical and natural–historical writing, or indeed the autobiographical writings of scientists and naturalists themselves. It is probably enough to note here that passing reference is made to Gilbert White’s *Natural History of Shelbourne* [*sic*]. *Selborne*, the most widely read and influential work of natural history for English Romanticism, at least,

is exactly the kind of text that could have helped Kuhn to answer his question ‘where precisely does one draw the line between natural observation and personal narrative?’ (p. 2), as could any number of other collections of scientific letters, journals and travel writing from the period. This is a not a long book: it needed more time to be spent among more varied primary material to give a full picture of the interactions it begins to suggest. 

#### NOTES

1. Kuhn credits the latter neologism to Lamarck in 1802, although it was used earlier in English by that quintessential figure of Romantic natural science, Thomas Beddoes, in 1799. Another suggestive overlap is that biology has an earlier history in the lexicon as a rare synonym for biography (OED).

James Whitehead  
King's College London

Paul Youngquist (ed.), *Race, Romanticism, and the Atlantic* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), xi + 267pp. ISBN 978-0-7546-6927-2; £65 / \$109.95 (hb).

‘BRITISH ROMANTICISM’, writes Paul Youngquist in *Race, Romanticism, and the Atlantic*, ‘is white’ (p. 91). Youngquist’s volume interrogates this ideology of whiteness, critiquing its systematic erasure of the violence in and across the Black Atlantic in the early nineteenth century. The collection brings together nine essays, organised into sections on ‘Differences’, ‘Resistances’ and ‘Crossings’. As the plural forms of these words suggest, the underlying idea is one of ‘multiplicity’, a term that appears multiple times in Youngquist’s introduction: ‘The hope that drives this collection of essays is that [a] renewed conjunction of imagination and multiplicity can disrupt the grim legacy of racism by recovering the multiplicity it disavows’ (p. 18).

Indeed the success of the project derives from this sense of multiplicity, not only demonstrated in the range of the subjects discussed, but also in the diversity of approaches to literary and cultural studies: Marlon B. Ross offers a meta-theoretical look at two early, unacknowledged practitioners of critical race theory, Olaudah Equiano and Mungo Park; C. S. Biscombe blends first-person travel narrative with historical analysis in his study of ‘Black Loyalists’ in Romantic-era Canada; and readings of literary texts are coupled with analyses of visual culture throughout the collection, from Elise Bruhl and Michael Gamer’s examination of Emma Hamilton’s ‘Nubian’ servant Fatima to Daniel O’Quinn’s reading of the boxing battles between the white Briton Thomas Cribb and the black American Thomas Molineaux. Taken together, these essays remind us that, as Ross puts it, ‘the tenets of race (and thus of racism) were [...] disjointedly sloppy’ (p. 27) and that, to begin to understand these tenets, we need a certain critical polyphony that, while not ‘sloppy’ in itself, calls forth