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Inside and Outside Romanticism

Michael Scrivener

Wayne State University, m.scrivener@wayne.edu

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M I C H A E L S C R I V E N E R

Inside and Outside Romanticism

The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy by Ian Balfour. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002. Pp. x + 346. \$65.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

The Historical Austen by William H. Galperin. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003. Pp. viii + 286. \$39.95 cloth.

Metaromanticism: Aesthetics, Literature, Theory by Paul Hamilton. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. Pp. viii + 316. \$25.00 paper.

The Satiric Eye: Forms of Satire in the Romantic Period edited by Steven E. Jones. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. Pp. 231. \$55.00 cloth.

The Politics of Aesthetics: Nationalism, Gender, Romanticism by Marc Redfield. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. Pp. xi + 252. \$55.00 cloth.

William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s by Saree Makdisi. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002. Pp. xviii + 394. \$22.00 paper.

Little can be taken for granted in Romantic studies. The canon has been expanding since the 1990s, and what is familiar—the Big Six poets—has been variously reconfigured. “Romantic-era literature” usually designates the writing in the fifty years from 1780 to 1830, but there is also the long eighteenth century that subsumes Romanticism within non-Romantic literary-historical narratives, and some periodizations lay claim to a Romantic century, 1750 to 1850, colonizing both the age of Johnson and the early Victorian period. Identifying something called Romanticism, always a risky enterprise (Arthur Lovejoy [1924] and Irving Massey [1964] demonstrated the incoherence of the concept),¹ is no less risky but has not stopped the construction of multiple Romanticisms, from Anne Mellor’s female Romanticism (1992) to Jerome McGann’s poetry of sensibility (1996).² “Romanticism” is the interpretive sense we make of Romantic-era literature by means of diachronic and synchronic narratives. That there are multiple narratives does not render the concept useless, but Romanticism must be understood in the plural. In the wake of the feminist and historicist dismantling of the older Romanticism, especially Bloom’s “visionary company” and the Wordsworth-centered poetry of consciousness and nature, one has to ask whether one of the goals of the new interpreters has been achieved: are we still reading Romanticism by means of

its own constructions, or have we so far removed ourselves from the assumptions of Romantic texts that we are finally outside of Romanticism? Do we want to be outside of Romanticism? Is it possible to get outside of Romanticism? Are we finally free of Romantic ideology?

Not to leave anyone in suspense, I will answer my own questions: yes, no, impossible to say, no, no. We are still within Romanticism, despite the strenuous efforts to propel us out of its gravitational force, for any number of reasons. As even Romanticism's harshest critics, such as Clifford Siskin, illustrate, our world is still shaped by Romantic assumptions about, among other things, psychological development.³ Genealogies of contemporary literary culture can hardly skip over Romanticism, whether it is the lines of influence drawn by Bloom or by McGann, whether the line is continued by a neo-Romantic like Ted Hughes or a language poet like Charles Bernstein. When we use Derridean mixing of philosophy and literature to interpret Romantic texts, we are repeating Blake in his *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and the Jena Romantikers in their aphorisms. As Freud readily conceded, the Romantics wrote extensively about the unconscious years before his own *Interpretation of Dreams*. Feminist theorists can and do quarrel with the texts of Wollstonecraft and Mary Robinson, but feminist theory, as a modern intellectual enterprise, begins with these Romantics. In the Romantic era one finds numerous anticipations of Marx and his sociopolitical critique, as well as early versions of socialism, communism, anarchism, and social democracy. The British Empire makes huge advances, culturally and politically, but concurrently receives fundamental criticism. Similarly, the slave trade peaks at the same time that also includes a well-developed abolitionist movement. Ecocriticism has evolved largely out of Anglo-American Romanticism. Moreover, there is also the Gadamerian argument that Romanticism is one of the things that has shaped our pre-understanding, that has inscribed us with meanings we cannot disentangle from our lifeworld. Is there a critical discourse uncontaminated by Romantic-era writing and thinking?

The historicist critiques of Romanticism, which largely deployed one strand of Romanticism against another, provided an exhilarating distance between a lucid us and a deluded them, an unbreachable gap between now and then, thus producing moments of insight into the pastness of the past yet also another version of the Enlightenment subject whose reason becomes objectified domination, just as in that Enlightenment narrative of "superstition," the story of *Frankenstein*. Jerome McGann's *Romantic Ideology* (1983) checked this dialectic of Enlightenment with romanticizing countermovements, for which inconsistency Marc Redfield among many others has criticized him (30–31). David Simpson, by including a psychoanalytic with his historicizing dialectic, prevented from the start an objectivist kind of commentary in his New Historicist books on Wordsworth.⁴ During the 1980s and 1990s, how-

ever, there was a strong movement to purify Romanticism of its ideology, with Wordsworth as the favorite target and “Tintern Abbey” as the locus classicus where the interpretive labor took place. Poetic idealizations concealed material processes of political evasion, gender domination, and forms of displacement, psychic and cultural, all of which required demystification. However necessary and valuable this cultural work, it entailed more than occasionally a moralism inevitable but no less distracting. In instances when the texts of Wordsworth or Percy Shelley became personified as bad men who needed punishing, the moralism had been carried to an extreme that was, however, accepted at the time. To make an omelet, apparently, one has to break a few eggs. Not that the moralistic excesses have had much consequence: Wordsworth and Percy Shelley are still read and written about, if not with the same cultural awe as in the pre-1980 period, if not as centrally located in the canon as they once were. An anecdote: during a recent North American Society for the Study of Romanticism conference presentation of a play by a noncanonical Romantic, a feminist scholar leaned over to me at the intermission and whispered wearily, “Wordsworth it isn’t.” She wasn’t talking about Dorothy either.

So where are we now? Is it the same old Hegelian story of antithetical journey out only to return where we started—but with a difference? Yes and no. There is general acceptance that—like it or not (and most of us seem content)—we are within Romanticism, crosshatched with ideology about which we can declaim in precise detail, enlarged by a canon expansion that is still in process, reconfigured in multiple ways by synchronic and diachronic interpretive narratives. The desire to get outside Romanticism has not been forsaken, because it appears in the move toward totality evident in more than a few ambitiously theoretical efforts. How does it all fit together, and where are we in this network of meanings? To understand the parts, one must know the whole, but the whole is unknowable except in its parts. The paradox of the hermeneutic circle drives us to the utopia of interpretation, which still “beacons . . . darkly, fearfully, afar”—but we know that, if we ever get there, we will be within Romanticism, not outside it.

The six books under consideration reveal some newer trends as well as continuations of older tendencies in Romantic studies. The two single-author studies, both on canonical figures, are of the critical moment for different reasons. Galperin locates Austen in a now no longer anomalous Romantic context and grounds his close readings in fully assimilated theoretical engagements, especially but not limited to de Certeau. Makdisi’s Blake is framed by Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), Iain McCalman’s *Radical Underworld* (1988), and Jon Mee’s *Dangerous Enthusiasm* (1992). The Romantic author as genius is a still legible and appropriate topos, but in both studies genius is decentered by innumerable forces. The other four books consist of two generic

studies and two explicitly theoretical reflections. Before 1980, Romantic satire was a subject for maybe an article, but now, as is evident in Jones's essay collection, it is a field, reflecting one area of canon expansion, as a neglected archive receives its due attention. How the genre of satire had come to be neglected is a story unto itself, revealing the ideological investments of earlier constructions of Romanticism. Balfour writes on prophecy, a long-recognized literary mode prominent in M. H. Abrams's *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971), which highlights Romanticism's secularization of religious themes, but Balfour's use of Walter Benjamin, whose writings are provocatively brought to bear on issues throughout the study, carries the interpretation back to our own moment. The two theoretical studies mix readings of literary texts, German and English, with reflections on Theory and Romanticism. The uppercase "T" Theory brings us back to a moment in Romantic studies when Theory was dominant, when de Man was alive, before l'affaire de Man and the war writings—before the triumph of historicism and feminism. Redfield is a strong partisan of de Man, but even Hamilton, who is not, makes extensive use of his writing, suggesting that the critical moment will permit a mature examination. Perhaps now Michael Ryan and Julie Rivkin would not exclude de Man entirely from their hefty anthology of literary theory, as they indeed did five years ago.⁵

Makdisi's book on Blake is a forthright defense of the poet on political, even moral grounds (Blake is generous, kind, and humane [xii]). Makdisi provides a narrative of modernization, revolution, and empire into which he inserts Blake, and within which Blake becomes an effective illustrating example. The story told by Makdisi portrays Blake as a writer who opposed not just the dominant political and religious authorities, as the liberal radicals also did, but also the intellectual roots of modernization (Bacon, Newton, Locke) as well as the *future* political and religious authorities who are evident in figures like Paine, Wollstonecraft, and Thelwall. Blake was not an isolated rebel but part of an antinomian tradition, a radical underground, those who wrote within the assumptions of "enthusiasm," dating back at least to the seventeenth-century religious revolutionaries. Makdisi sharply distinguishes a mainstream left—the London Corresponding Society, Paine, Thelwall—that he calls hegemonic or liberal radicalism from the antinomian left of Thomas Spence, Robert Wedderburn, Citizen Lee, and of course Blake himself. The liberal radicals suffered political defeat, as did the antinomians, but eventually the modernization process for which the liberals were actually fighting, including empire, did indeed triumph, whereas Blake and his comrades opposed empire and capitalism root and branch. The defense of Blake, then, goes with a critique of Wollstonecraft et alia for their promotion of modernity and its "fundamental conceptual categories" such as "the stable unitary subject, the sovereign individual," which are essential for "liberalism, republicanism, and commodity

culture" (2). The liberals were Orientalist in their celebration of "the modern self's superiority to the Oriental other" (4), whereas Blake made common cause with Orientals, as well as "the poor and unlearned," Asians, Africans, "fellow labourers," and "children" (4). Blake and his tradition provide an enduringly radical opposition to our bourgeois world, whereas the tradition of Thelwall and Paine has manifested itself as our world. Through Blake, Makdisi vindicates a particular radical tradition not just in an act of historical sympathy but in an act of political identification. This is the most political reading of Blake since Erdman's *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (1977).

Makdisi's study is most successful when it locates in Blake's own texts—*America* especially, as well as the *Urizen* books—the critique of modernization that is central to his political analysis. He provides excellent commentary on Blake's texts and methods, his philosophical assumptions, his key metaphors. Makdisi persuasively argues that in the illuminated books *Urizen* is "a supervisory regulating power" (124) and "the dark satanic mill" is "a figure not just of the organization of production in early industrial society" but also—echoing Foucault's concept of biopower—"a figure of the social, political, and religious constitution of the individual psychobiological subject" (131). Blake's texts represent industrial work discipline as it is experienced in the body and emotions. Makdisi's discussion of Blake's principles of organization—"organization"—is especially effective, as Blake reinforces his critique of unilinear narrative with his variously organized versions of the "same" text that cannot be read as conventional narratives (ch. 3). Chapter 4 describes Blake's production of texts and images in the context of artisanal and industrial modes of production, drawing upon the previous work of Essick and Viscomi to emphasize the centrality of Blake's political critique of industrial production of commodities that depends on an equality of exchange. Blake's writing attacks precisely such an equality of exchange from multiple angles. Chapter 5 contrasts Blake, prophet against empire, with liberal radicals like Wollstonecraft whose Orientalism sustained the project of imperial conquest. The final chapter, "Impossible History and the Politics of Hope," identifies "impossible" as not imaginable within a Whiggish history of progressive development. After a fascinating discussion of Blakean "production," Makdisi makes an extensive critique of Locke, Paine, Thelwall, and the Levellers from the position of an antinomianism that has many different historical manifestations, from the Diggers to the insurgent "Atlantic" proletariat described in Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Redeker's *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (2000).

I cannot remember a study that has so intensively and usefully developed the importance of modernization for Blake, and modernization has become—as it was in Makdisi's earlier book, *Romantic Imperialism* (1998)—an important area of study. Blake's belonging to an antinomian tradition is something

that by now we can take for granted, as it has been illustrated by A. L. Morton, E. P. Thompson, Michael Ferber, and Jon Mee. I have to question, however, the way Makdisi elides Blake with antinomian political activists like Spence unless it makes no difference whatsoever whether one is a political revolutionary or an engraver-poet. Another elision is Makdisi's neglect of the most difficult Blake texts—*Four Zoas*, *Milton*, *Jerusalem*. It is not that the themes of modernization and antinomian desire could not be found in these texts, but that neglecting them makes it easier to evade the problem of rhetoric and audience in Blake. I also find tendentious the way he characterizes the differences between the antinomian left and the liberal left. In *Seditious Allegories* (2001), I illustrate both differences and similarities between Thelwall and antinomian radicals like Spence and Wedderburn, and I did not find that the liberal radicals consistently promoted empire, Orientalism, and the sovereign self. If we accept Makdisi's version of political history, then Marx himself, who had very harsh things to say about utopian socialism, lumpen proletarian rebellion, and anarchistic anti-authoritarianism, would have to be a "liberal radical," tied to modernization and bourgeois democracy. So what, you might ask? Perhaps it is a good thing—opposition being true friendship—that one can leave Makdisi's study not only with new insights into Blake's poetry but with disagreements with the critic's political interpretations.

Galperin's *Historical Austen* is also interested in oppositional reading, but the overall project is at a very different level of political discourse. Galperin portrays a more oppositional Austen than that depicted by many of her historicizers, who have largely emphasized the constraints of class and gender to produce an anti-Jacobin and conservative novelist. He rehistoricizes her by using de Certeau's conceptual frame of everyday life and the heterogeneous. Oppositional practices within the everyday do not aspire to a "position of exteriority," nor do they inadvertently recuperate established power with strategies of "improvement"; they are means of "getting on," not "getting out" (30). The antinomian Blake does, however, have at least one similarity with the oppositional Austen. Both embrace the "possible" over the "probable"—but of course Makdisi's "impossible" is stronger than anything one could find in Galperin's Austen.

The study's argument is shaped diachronically, early versus late Austen, but the contrast is not mechanically developmental. The book's organization is roughly chronological, but the first three chapters are theorized explorations of issues that are treated in the next five, which focus on individual fictions. The book opens with an anecdote about Austen's aunt, who was arrested for shoplifting and was probably guilty. Austen never commented on the episode in any of her letters, and Galperin posits Austen's silence as an ironic comment—non-comment—on the oppositional actions of her childless aunt whose kleptomania—she could easily have paid for the items she stole, and

she certainly did not have to go to trial—was a symbolic means of rectification and a gesture of rebellion. Something had been taken away from her—she was powerless—and she was taking things back. The story is an improbable one that Austen could have written but Fanny Burney could not have because Austen understands the power of the normative to harm women. The third chapter, wittily entitled “Why Jane Austen Is Not Fanny Burney,” explains that Austen is not truly a realist in the way Burney is because the latter’s narratives remain within the logic of the normative and the probable, while Austen’s are within the possible.

Austen’s realism is only apparent: a genuine realist like Maria Edgeworth could not bear *Emma*, and Walter Scott was troubled with Miss Bates. Galperin distinguishes between plot and detail, as plot is the conventional cover story that can distract readers who want to be distracted from the intricate detail that undermines the plot’s logic. His reading of Miss Bates is brilliant. A “powerful” and “progressive” foil to the novel’s other hysteric, Mr. Woodhouse, who is afraid of everything (190–91), Miss Bates is fully engaged with the world, enthusiastically sensitive to other people and their needs. The relationship between her and Knightley is cryptically intimate, provoking Emma’s jealousy and aggressive hostility. This unmarried daughter of a poor clergyman—who else would be in that situation?—is also the catalyst for community in Highbury, as she knows everyone (including servants, with whom she converses extensively) and tries to bring them together. Miss Bates’s much maligned verbal style, the almost free associative blocks of prose we get every time she talks, disclose, according to Galperin, “possibilities and nuances that would remain hidden” otherwise (192) because she is so obsessively involved with the real, with the people in the community, with everyday goings-on. Without repression, she takes her social world into her conversation and makes accessible the “possible” and the prospect for “change.” Knightley and Mr. Woodhouse, along with the narrator (usually), are aligned with the forces of probability, maintaining the established arrangements and extending them unchanged into the future. Within Miss Bates’s weird prose one glimpses difference, surprises, energy, and the unexpected.

In *Emma*, then, the plot is working one way—Emma will be proved wrong and she will come to accept Knightley’s authority—but the details counter this conservative pedagogy, not just the details of Miss Bates but many others, which Galperin unfolds with striking originality. Adapting the detail/plot dialectic from Ross Chambers’s construction of “textual function” and “narrative function,”⁶ Galperin himself contributes to the discussion of irony with his concept of epistolarity. The received view is that by abandoning the epistolary style in which her earliest novels were written, by revising *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* with narrative omniscience and free indirect discourse, Austen was making huge strides in the development—and

improvement—of the novel. Galperin argues that narrative omniscience brings with it a “regulatory” function that works against Austen’s “uncontainable realism.” The single epistolary novel to have survived the transition to the brave new world of free indirect discourse is *Lady Susan*, whose subversiveness is readily apparent. Traces of the epistolary—characters speaking in their own voice without the socially regulative interference of the narrator—are to be found in the “detail,” the reading of which ironizes the norm-enforcing narrator.

I don’t have space to discuss all the riches in Galperin’s study, an exciting feature of which is how he brings into play formalist categories and close reading to strengthen an oppositional reading practice that does not depend on external sources of critical logic. His readings of Austen’s novels are innovative but not idiosyncratic. As with the example of Miss Bates, one thinks after reading the interpretation: Why didn’t I think of that? How did I miss it? It seems now obvious. His reading of Austen is more easily melded with the subversive, feminist Austen than with the anti-Jacobin Austen, although Galperin is careful not to portray Austen as just like Wollstonecraft or Mary Robinson. The kind of opposition Galperin portrays is within the everyday, not one that would provoke manifestos.

Opposition is the mode of satire, and the eleven essays on Romantic satire collected by Steven E. Jones are of a uniformly high quality. When the Romantic lyric seemed to be the only truly Romantic genre, Austen and her satirical irony seemed to be out of place, but Austen—whose *Northanger Abbey* is discussed by Karl Kroeber—is obviously at home in a volume about satire. (That there is not an essay on Blake’s satire is surely just a matter of accident.) If Romanticism were a reaction against Neoclassicism, and if satire were the defining Neoclassical genre, Romantic satire had to be anachronistic and oxymoronic, but Romantic satire is now taken for granted as a robust genre manifested in popular prints, poetry, novels, children’s literature, women’s writing, radical pamphlets, and theatrical pantomimes. First, there turned out to be so much satire empirically that it could not be dismissed as anomalous, which Gary Dyer’s bibliography of Romantic satire established beyond dispute.⁷ Second, the privileging of the lyric was a “strong misreading” of the actual literary situation that repressed other possibilities, one of which was a politically contentious culture with a strongly satirical component. The French Revolution controversy had thrown up satires of both left and right, and the Waterloo to Peterloo period of political turmoil also produced its explosion of satire. As long as one ignored the political culture, satire could be viewed as a mere vestige of a dying Neoclassicism.

The eleven essays collected by Jones illustrate that satire is intergeneric and not limited to poetry, that it is ideologically complex, and that it unsettles the clear divisions between high and low, center and periphery. In one of the most intriguing essays, Tim Fulford shows how the Orientalist trope of Lon-

don as the new Babylon circulates freely from elite satirical poetry (Cowper, Wordsworth), to urban commercial spectacles like Dr. Graham's genteel sex show (the Elysian Palace—the Temple of Health and Hymen), to satirical prints mocking politicians like Fox and the Prince Regent, to Byron's Romantic poetry. The harem enters social discourse from numerous angles. The harem as an object of desire marketed for clients who submit to the magnetic-electrico treatments of Dr. Graham and his scantily clad assistant Vestina at the Orientalized sex clinic becomes indistinguishable from the legitimate theater that displays beautiful actresses on sale to the wealthy and powerful, a spectacle which is then satirized as symptomatic of Britain's moral decline, corrupted by the empire and the infectious East. The East, invested with desire and fear, can be deployed by satirists for reactionary or progressive purposes. Byron's poetry invents personas who play the role of sultan and also huckster for Orientalist spectacle. The sensationalistic clinic of Dr. Graham appears in *The Prelude* and in satirical references to Prince George and Mary "Perdita" Robinson as well as to the mistress of the naval hero Admiral Nelson; thus the most innovative literary texts are shaped by sensationalistic culture.

The generic variety of satirical texts discussed in the book is broad. Donelle Ruwe deals with satire in children's illustrated chapbooks, a resource few of us make use of. One of the poets retrieved from obscurity by the project to reexamine the work of neglected women writers, Jane Taylor, was, according to Stuart Curran, the only woman Romantic poet who specialized in satire; her style is like Jane Austen's but from a middle-class Dissenting perspective and milieu. Marilyn Gaull describes the pantomimes as visual spectacles that reached thousands of Londoners every night. The Hone-Cruikshank satires, which were spectacularly popular in the Regency, democratized the public discourse, according to the argument of Kyle Grimes. Even the essays that deal with traditional literary texts take unusual interpretive angles. Karl Kroeber applies sociobiology to Austen's *Northanger Abbey*; Michael Gamer shows that Gifford's motives in attacking the Della Cruscan school were not entirely aesthetic but also commercial, in that the publisher of the Della Cruscans, John Bell, was a hated source of cheap reprints that disrupted a London monopoly. Several essays clarify the ideological conflicts within which individual satires participated. Popular and elite culture are mixed in Marcus Wood's essay on racist satire, as the symbols and tropes in the pro-slavery satire *Voyage of the Sable Venus*, by Bryan Edwards (1793), reappear in one of Wordsworth's 1820 poems. Nicola Trott demonstrates how the parodies of the "simple" Wordsworth were actually part of a cultural system that produced both a "new school" of poetry and a "new school" of criticism that attacked it: Wordsworth's own texts contained parodies of themselves just waiting to be activated. There is, then, no simple contrast between the reactionaries and the progressives in the battle over Wordsworth. Gary Dyer's treatment of Thomas Moore's topical

satires reveals the immediate political issues that are represented ambiguously enough to signify both seditiously and innocently, if the text needs defending in court. Romantic satire, a rich area of study in part because conflict and social desire are so prominent, reveals more effectively than lyrical poems how Romantic-era culture functioned.

The prophetic is a literary mode long associated with Romanticism. The new study of Romantic prophecy by Ian Balfour provides what will become the standard work on the topic, but it still leaves areas for further development and inquiry. Enlightenment figures like Bishop Robert Lowth, Richard Hurd, William Warburton, Johann Herder, and Johann Eichorn established biblical poetry as literature and provided ways of reading the Bible as a historically specific Oriental text. They prepared the way for the Romantics to take up poetry as prophecy, the poet as prophet. Balfour brings prophecy back into our own critical moment with Walter Benjamin and his messianic approach to history.

The post-Enlightenment Bible could be read poetically and mythologically, not just religiously. (Spinoza, too radical for scholars in the eighteenth century to claim, is of course the key precursor who historicized the Bible; Mendelssohn had to fight against being linked with him.) Balfour tells the story of the Enlightenment's disenchantment of the Bible in chapters 3, 4, and 5. It might be churlish to utter anything but praise for a task so well performed, but there is a gap in his narrative. Lowth aimed to "read the Hebrew scriptures as the Hebrews did" (77), but the Enlightenment scholars were utterly indifferent, if not contemptuous, about how actual Jews read their own scriptures. Balfour takes note of the Enlightenment anti-Judaism and even anti-Semitism, but David Ruderman has described how Jews publicly contested the Christian interpretations.⁸ For example, Lowth championed an idiosyncratic revision of the Masoretic Hebrew text undertaken by Benjamin Kennicott, who wanted a truer version of scripture undistorted by Judaism; David Levi criticized both Lowth and Kennicott. Similarly, the discussion of Herder and Eichorn requires the insertion of a Jewish presence, not just the anti-Semitism but the development of the Haskalah, the specifically Jewish Enlightenment.

The study's final three chapters focus on the prophetic in Blake's *Milton*, Hölderlin's "Germanien," and Coleridge's *The Statesman's Manual*. These three chapters on Romantic prophetic texts are careful, elegant, nuanced readings with a density of analysis that is impossible to summarize; chapter 7, on "Germanien," includes a brilliant excursus on religion and Idealism. The chapter on *The Statesman's Manual* proves what a strange and offensive if also fascinating writer Coleridge is. Coleridge interprets a part of Isaiah as prophesying current political events to provoke this apt comment by Balfour: "his reading is highly implausible, if not absurd" (262). Balfour also unpacks the conflicted project of the "lay sermons," addresses to the upper, middle, and working classes. Coleridge wants the upper and middle classes to "read the Bible so as

to control and guide the lower classes" (264), and his promised sermon to the working class is never composed because he has nothing to say to them except, perhaps, submit (268). In the 1790s this same writer, the pantisocrat, had referred to property as the origin of all evil. Balfour deconstructs Coleridge's affirmation of the symbol and symbolic politics by pointing to the allegorical style of his political rhetoric. He can speak to the upper and middle classes, not the poor; there is no universal language, no universal audience, no effective prophetic announcement. He tries but fails to situate his political discourse in relation to divine authority as prophecy.

Like Makdisi, Balfour draws upon Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" as a model for interpretation, especially a way to repudiate a particular kind of Whiggish or antiquarian historicism which assumes an empty interpretive temporality; Benjamin's historian resides famously within the *Jetztzeit*, the "now time." Balfour refers to the messianic dimension of interpretation, but in his book that dimension remains largely formal, a categorical affirmation rather than an explicitly politicized one, and that seems to me the correct move. Balfour's is critical scholarship that tarries with the negative, so to speak; it is not the politicized criticism that has discovered a revolutionary agency.

The final two works under consideration are theory books, even though they also have readings of literary texts. Politics, a major theme here as it is with all the books under review, is so important that it almost overwhelms the aesthetic. A theme in both Redfield and Hamilton is the relation between the aesthetic and the political, but their projects—the one deconstructive, the other Habermasian—are not really similar. Redfield deploys with elegance and wit de Manian deconstruction to provide rhetorical readings of nationalism as it appears in several texts, principally Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* (1808) and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991), a particularly inspired pairing (ch. 1). Using Matthew Arnold's "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1865) as a text still forceful in our own time (William Bennett and other cultural conservatives reproduce its arguments), Redfield explores the figurative logic of the body in aesthetics and the construction of national taste (ch. 2). The third chapter is a fiercely argued defense of de Man as providing the most effective critique of ideology—such as the kind of ideology found in Schiller's idea of aesthetic education. The last two chapters are fresh readings of Schlegel's *Lucinde* and Shelley's *Mask of Anarchy* that work out the implications of gender and sexuality (ch. 4) and political oratory (ch. 5) as they bear on Redfield's overall discussion of nationalism, aesthetics, and Romanticism.

The defense of de Man is a little shrill—the criticism of him both before and after his death was not *all* in bad faith—but Redfield can hardly exaggerate the marginalization of de Man that followed the war writings controversy. De Man seems to be returning to a position of some importance in Romantic studies,

which is certainly appropriate, and it is important that deconstructive work continue to develop. Redfield's rhetorical readings that unpack the figurative language of key texts upholding nationalism, aesthetic taste, and revolutionary opposition are powerful. The comparatist style of analysis is especially valuable for the innovative contrasts, and also in terms of countering the English-only linguistic imperialism of our new world order. By introducing the Freudian problematic of mourning by way of Fichte into Anderson's discussion of nationalism, Redfield adds new dimensions to the conversation on imagined community. The reading of voice in *The Mask of Anarchy* is fascinating for its dramatization of the primal scene of nationalism—an orator addressing the entire nation—and for the poem's own equivocations concerning the orator, described circumspectly as a voice “as if” coming from the maternal earth. What could be more substantial, natural, than mother earth? Shelley gestures to a foundation he takes away with two words, “as if,” and the reader is also never sure of how the dream vision that inaugurates the poem ever comes to a close (a central point made by Susan Wolfson in an influential reading that Redfield draws upon).⁹ This does not seem to be a voice but words, words that have to be repeated again and again to have political force. Redfield's rhetorical reading yields dividends throughout the study, including the shrewd account of *The Cenci* in relation to the Shelleyan figure of the inspired poet: both the patriarchal villain Count Cenci and the unacknowledged legislator are represented as machine-like, affectless vehicles through whom impersonal Power operates, torturing other bodies in the one case, expressing words that come from Elsewhere in the other.

I cannot leave the book without noting a tendency that is evident, for example, in the comments on the work of Paul Younquist and Elaine Scarry, whose use of the body as a prelinguistic ground Redfield characterizes as a “fantasy,” a word he uses twice just in case we missed it the first time (215 n. 11). It is reprehensible to call serious work by other scholars fantasies.

Is de Manian deconstruction the proverbial last word, the “endgame” of ideology critique? Paul Hamilton does not think so. “An escape from, rather than a negotiation of, ideological difference is linguistically impractical. Such emancipation would so defamiliarize language as indeed to leave it as the unusable, meaningless, strange, noumenal material, always to be approached as if for the first time, that is the aesthetic object imagined in Paul de Man's hyperbolic, Kantian suspension of identity. De Man's ideologically disabused view of language actually looks . . . prelinguistic” (217). Prelinguisticity seems to be in the eye of the beholder. Hamilton, who in fact makes considerable use of de Man throughout his work, has given us a very ambitious rethinking of Romanticism, even though eight of the thirteen chapters appeared in an earlier form as essays in other publications where he rethought Romantic theory for more than a decade. The first three and last four chapters are theoretic-

cally focused on developing his concept of metaromanticism, while the middle six chapters are readings of Romantic literary texts. However fine the readings, I will concentrate on the theoretical dimension.

So what is metaromanticism? With Schlegel and Rousseau as his key authors, with the *Mischgedicht* (“generically conflicted” work [11]) as the favored genre, Hamilton develops a metaromanticism that “trumps critique” by a perspectivism within Romanticism, not outside of it. The metaromantic moment is when a Romantic text performs its own critique, and metaromantic writing, notably in Rousseau and Schlegel, poeticizes philosophy and theorizes poetry (9), while the overall metaromantic project is to stage a mutual interrogation of philosophy and literature (5). Habermas is the tutelary spirit inspiring the emphasis on dialogue and negotiation, interpreting different disciplines to each other, and hybrid discourses. One of Hamilton’s decisive borrowings is the idea of the “stand-in” (*Platzhalter*) that Habermas develops in “Philosophy as Stand-In and Interpreter” (1983; English translation 1990).¹⁰ Forsaking the philosophy of consciousness and philosophical foundationalism of all kinds, Habermas steers a course between those who liquidate philosophy entirely and the “master thinkers” who provoke our anxiety. Philosophy’s new role is as mediating interpreter on behalf of the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*), and such mediation between modernity (science, law and ethics, the arts and art criticism) and the lifeworld is the only way philosophy can retain a legitimate hold on totality. Hamilton explicitly rejects other approaches to ideology, including Adornian non-identity—which surrenders “all cognitive competence to art” (18)—and all forms of external critique that violate the hermeneutical assumption of Heidegger and Gadamer that critique and the object of critique share a “common being” (9). Traditional critique sees Romantic idealization as compensatory displacement, but Hamilton rescues a form of idealization with the model of communication, in which there is always a dimension of idealization, a discursive “reserve” for future semantic adjustments and sympathetic engagements, as communication aspires to an ever deferred “full communication” (13). Metaromantic texts and metaromantic moments within texts are especially amenable to the hypothetical and temporal qualities Hamilton is promoting as an alternative to the dichotomous structure of traditional ideology critique. This Schlegelian revision of Habermas is unique and promising.

To clarify his project, Hamilton shows us Romantic texts that are not metaromantic and contrasts them with texts that are. Schiller, in the second chapter, is his prime example—along with Wordsworth—of the Romantic who resists enlistment into the metaromantic cause. Schiller’s idealization of the past (the “naive” poetry and its world) is projected onto a future that will never arrive because the structure of internalization carefully quarantines the beautiful that might otherwise critically engage an unjust present world.

Wordsworth's symbolic style works similarly, turning all real-life losses into aesthetic gains. The Wordsworthian text provides no exits to other discursive realms. In contrast, Hamilton celebrates the Rousseauian text, especially the reverie that enacts a letting-go and surrender to the environment, as Rousseau's autobiographical impulses give rise to more and more texts that are generically innovative and that lack aesthetically recuperative symbolism. Rousseau exposes "aesthetics to the depredations of other discourses" (66). Other chapters also compare and contrast, for example, the metaromantic writing of Tom Paine and the aesthetically armored *Libor Amoris* by Hazlitt (ch. 10); Barbauld and Dorothy Wordsworth are also brought into a reading that highlights their antisymbolic metaromanticism (chs. 10 and 11).

If metaromanticism is simply a way to separate the metaromantic sheep from the Romantic goats, it will not be nearly as interesting as the theory seems to be. Hamilton's reading of Schiller and Wordsworth is not inadequate as far as it goes, but one hopes that the dialectic would continue beyond the point where the two great writers are simply negative examples. Indeed, Hamilton cites favorably the fine humanistic reading of Wordsworth by David Bromwich, *Disowned by Memory* (1998), and if we are to take seriously the dialogic spirit the book recurrently invokes, then I suggest that somehow we find a way to bring together antithetical readings—if we are really committed to immanent critique, remaining within and not outside Romanticism.

The politics of Romanticism now has a variety of meanings. If Makdisi's dichotomy of antinomian resistance and liberal institutionalization were just a heuristic to probe Blake and other 1790s writers, then its politicizing of the aesthetic would not be as absolute as it is. Makdisi's approach is not the only way to rescue the antinomian left from neglect and condescension, not the only way to pay homage to the spirit of Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History." Makdisi's valuable treatment of modernization, however, points to a fresh area for further work. Not unlike the politics of the antinomian left, the politics of the everyday that Galperin brings to bear on his reading of Austen points to a politics that operates below the representation system of the "political nation," the official politics. The play between detail and plot that reveals the micropolitics of power and resistance is a promising way to read texts in addition to Austen's. Perhaps satire can no longer count as a neglected archive, as it, along with Romantic drama and women's writing, continues to receive the attention it deserves, thereby displacing the older interpretative politics of exclusion. Future studies of the prophetic will bring together Balfour's focus and texts and Makdisi's—and other relevant prophetic writing—because few subgenres are as central to Romanticism as prophecy. The comparatist method, which has proven to be so useful in three of the studies under review, should perhaps be applied also to the textuality of actual religions in researching the prophetic—Methodist autobiographies, Hasidic tales, spiritualism, the

Great Awakening, organized freethinking, millenarian movements, German Pietism, the Haskalah, the Oxford movement, antimodernist Catholicism, as well as the antinomian enthusiasm. Religion is a resource Romanticists have shied away from, but within a cultural studies framework there is no good reason to continue doing so. Finally, whither theory? Or Theory? It is not clear exactly where it will lead and how productive it will be, but the Habermasian turn described by Hamilton signals an exciting new development.

Wayne State University

Notes

1. Arthur Lovejoy, "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms," *PMLA* 39 (1924): 229–53; Irving Massey, "Romanticism: Fact or Phrase?" *Dalhousie Review* 44 (1964): 396–412.
2. Anne Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Jerome McGann *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
3. Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700–1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).
4. David Simpson, *Wordsworth and the Figurings of the Real* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1982); idem, *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination: The Poetry of Displacement* (London: Routledge, Kegan, and Paul, 1987).
5. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1998). Daniel T. O'Hara criticizes Rivkin and Ryan's treatment of de Man in *Empire Burlesque: The Fate of Critical Culture in Global America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 203–4.
6. Ross Chambers, *Room for Maneuver: Reading (the) Oppositional (in) Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
7. Gary Dyer, *British Satire and the Politics of Style, 1789–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
8. David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key: Anglo-Jewry's Construction of Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
9. Susan J. Wolfson, *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 195–206.
10. Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 1–20.

