



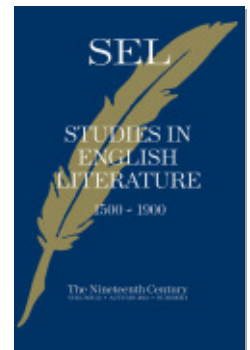
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Recent Studies in the Nineteenth Century

JON MEE

This essay does not offer anything that could purport to be an overview of recent studies in the nineteenth century. Readers who wish to deduce trends may count for themselves whatever theme or issue they wish to quantify from the list of “works received” that follows. Of course, there will anyway always be a degree of randomness to the books sent to the review editors of any journal, but I am going to indulge my own professional prejudice toward what is called—unsatisfactorily, and perhaps increasingly unsatisfactorily—“the Romantic period,” or worse, “Romanticism.” As readers might expect from someone who has just taken up a chair in eighteenth-century studies, my nineteenth century may have quite a few decades of the eighteenth in it, and not so many of the later decades of the Victorian. Even so, I begin by discussing a book devoted, if not entirely, to the Victorian period, and so default on my own default in order to bring out what seem, to me at least, some key issues for current research in the nineteenth century. These include, especially, the recent influence of book history on literary criticism, the social life of literature and literature’s relation to social life, and the continuing, if various, interest in things, sometimes via “thing theory” and sometimes via ecocriticism.

Later sections of the review will deal with two other issues: the very visible presence of Charles Dickens, although often via

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the invisible visible, as we will “see,” and the continued and welcome internationalization of nineteenth-century literary studies beyond narrowly construed national boundaries. Unable quite to resist counting trends, however, I can report that there were sixteen books concerned with Dickens, as it happens, compared with six for Jane Austen (three of which are editions, including a very useful teaching edition of the manuscripts from Broadview), but this inequality between two of the big hitters of nineteenth-century fiction, as with last year, must have much to do with the bicentennial of Dickens. Quite a lot of the new work on Dickens is to do with biography and commemoration. What may seem rather more surprising is the five single-author studies of William Wordsworth, if we include Mary Jacobus’s monograph on romantic things, who is also a significant presence elsewhere, including, to give just two of several instances, Reeve Parker’s *Romantic Tragedies: The Dark Employments of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley* and Keston Sutherland’s *Stupefaction: A Radical Anatomy of Phantoms*. Taken together with the revised version of Stephen Gill’s Oxford selection of the poems and prose, and two volumes on Dorothy Wordsworth, this year’s stock of monographs suggest that the Wordsworth family business retains a powerful presence on the landscape of Romanticism.

HOW TO DO THINGS WITH BOOKS (INCLUDING TALK ABOUT THEM?)

For me the most engaging of the many compelling books I read for this review was Leah Price’s *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain*. A fascinating study, primarily organized around the tension between “text” and “book,” Price’s volume aims to bring book history and literary criticism into a conversation with each other. The opening chapter stakes out the issues in terms of the contentious relations between three operations concerning books: “reading (doing something with the words), handling (doing something with the object), and circulating (doing something to, or with, other persons by means of the book—whether cementing or severing relationships, whether by giving and receiving books or by withholding and rejecting them)” (pp. 5–6). Running throughout her reflections on these issues, as one might expect of such an eminent historian of the book, is the concern that intellectual history and, especially, literary criticism have always privileged the mind of the text (one might say its spirituality) against the matter of the book. Despite the recent rise of book history, I would

say this remains true over the general span of books received for review this year, across whatever methodological variety they otherwise show, although the history of reading, if not always via research into actual reading practices beyond the text, is a rather more visible presence among them.

Perhaps surprisingly, as Price herself acknowledges, even much of *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* itself ends up being concerned with what she calls “a few pieces of printed prose” (p. 18), that is, nineteenth-century bildungsromans. The reason for Price choosing this approach is that the novel of personal growth has frequently been involved with “the heroic myth ... that makes textuality the source of interiority, authenticity, and selfhood” (p. 16), a feature, she notes (p. 17), that the middle-class novel shares with working-class autobiographies from the period. By addressing the bildungsroman, Price attempts to slay the beast of the “text” in one of its principal lairs. Part of the production of this myth of the authentic selfhood in the bildungsroman, as she shows through a series of brilliant readings, involves the explicit denial of the materiality of books themselves, often by associating them with commodity culture or social conformity, or, more mundanely, making them something to hide behind. Losing one’s self in the book, in this regard, is frequently opposed to attending to or hiding behind its cover and, especially, to collecting books or bibliomania. Price is also mildly fixated with “wiping” throughout the work.

Protagonists of the great Victorian bildungsroman “are characterized less by their love of texts than by their hatred of books—less by immersion in verbal content than by indifference, or even repugnance, to its material container” (p. 17). If the heroes and heroines of these novels seem indifferent to the materiality of the processes they are engaged in, so too, at least until very recently, have literary critics been, to the point that “material culture remains absent from our training” (p. 32). Key chapters of part 1 of Price’s book are concerned with representations of print in novels, particularly within some classic nineteenth-century fiction, notably in chapters on Anthony Trollope, *David Copperfield* (where immersing himself in voyages and travels insulates David from the hostile world around him), but also frequent mention of other Dickens novels, most notably *Our Mutual Friend*, and also, especially, George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*. Price also transfers recent eighteenth-century scholarship on “it-narratives” into those nineteenth-century fictions that take “the book as agent,” primarily migrated from novels to evangelical tracts such as the

History of a Religious Tract Supposed to be Related by Itself (1806). Part 2 of her book, "Bookish Transactions," develops the idea of bookish agency further, investigating junk mail and religious tracts, domestic servants and forced reading, and, finally, Henry Mayhew and the recycling of printed matter. Here the idea of the "self-propelling book" opens up the Latourian vista of thinking about books as nonhuman agents within the construction of social groups. Each of these chapters is brilliant in its own way, and the book is worth reading for its introduction alone, which is not to say that I recommend scrimping and just reading it, although, of course, even self-propelling books can't make their readers finish them, or even read their chapters in the right order.

Price's book usefully opens up a variety of questions for scholars of the Romantic period, into which it wanders fruitfully a few times, for instance, in its discussion of evangelical tracts. Evangelicals, it seems, among other things, are not great respecters of periods invented by literary scholars, even though Price for the most part takes periods to be more meaningful than one might expect, given that putting aside one's books seems such a very Wordsworthian trope. My only real vexation with *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* is to do with the neglect of one of the things Victorians definitely did with books—whether they had read them or not—and that is talk about them. It would be an interesting study to come up with a comparison of which was the bigger set—books read or books discussed (for the Victorian period and for our own)—but it seems to me that talking about books remains an issue that literary studies barely ever engages with, even though it probably takes up more of our academic time than writing. Teaching is predicated on talking about books—the near universal gripe about class sizes is usually based on a desire to bring classroom interactions as close as possible to conversation—and we spend a lot of time talking to colleagues about books (when we're not griping about class sizes anyway).

Perhaps my response to Price's book on this score is best illustrated by one of the claims it makes that I most strongly agree with: "Books don't simply mediate a meeting of minds between reader and author. They also broker (or buffer) relationships among the bodies of successive and simultaneous readers—or even between one person who holds the book and others before whose gaze, or over whose dead body, she turns its pages" (p. 12). In this formulation, the dominant aspect of interpersonal relations for literary studies remains the one between author and reader, a strange limit to impose on a study concerned with "the social

life of books” (p. 34) as much as, if not more than, with their interpretation. Numerous groups formed in the nineteenth century precisely to enable talk about books. Many of the book clubs and reading societies formed in the period were as much concerned with discussion as access to reading material as an end in itself. In this sense, even many “library societies” went beyond their self-descriptions, narrowly understood.

Susanne Schmid’s excellent *British Literary Salons of the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* provides excellent accounts of the groups that formed around Mary Berry, Lady Holland, and the Countess of Blessington, reading the social texts of the salons along with the works produced from within them. Some of these, such as *Conversations of Lord Byron with the Countess of Blessington*, were aimed at representing an idea of literary talk, but also, potentially at least, offered a model for societies that met to discuss it or clubbed together to buy it. Acknowledging the methodological difficulties of writing about the elusive traces of conversation, Schmid nevertheless aims and largely succeeds in restoring “the British salon [to a place] among the nation’s formative cultural sites” (p. 2). If conversation, about books or otherwise, is indeed an elusive “thing,” if a thing at all, then there are plenty of material records that show its traces. For Schmid’s salons, these are primarily personal records in diaries and letters, but also published literary texts such as Blessington’s account of Byron. Other institutions set up for talking about books reveal to us the conditions for talking about books, via minutes and even rule books, sometimes with lists of what books they shared or bought as a group, not to mention their buildings—premises such as the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne (a building that still encourages its users to form conversational circles—to talk about books or whatever else—not insulated in a separate room from the tables at which other members are reading). Does book history need to think a little more about the social practices of reading that go beyond the personal encounter with the page (whether by an individual or in groups reading aloud)? Should literary criticism think more about the way textual forms mimic or deny the conversational worlds they were designed to enter or displace? Should both think more about hermeneutics as extending beyond reading to discussions about books participants have (or perhaps have not) read? Schmid’s book suggests all these questions should be answered in the affirmative, and implies that certain kinds of texts and cultural formations have fallen from notice because of assumptions—often gendered—about what ought to count as the proper object of literary study.

Talking about books is certainly a curious omission from Price's book. It is interesting to speculate about why a book so invested in "the social life of books" has little to say about interpersonal discussion and the institutions that formed around books to facilitate it. The elusiveness of talk noted by Schmid may mean it disappears into the chasm between the new book historical work on reading and the older question of interpretation. It may not be thingy enough for book history. Where the latter has tended toward the history of reading, it has focused mainly on individual responses, making use of diaries and other contemporary records, as with Stephen Colclough's *Consuming Texts: Readers and Reading Communities, 1695–1870* (2007). Even work like Colclough's still tends to treat interpretation as part of a personal encounter with the text and to place its emphasis on the role of such encounters in the construction of the reading subject, a point noted by Price herself (p. 130). Literary critics more generally tend toward a Kantian disregard for scrabbling around in the opinions of others (apart, of course, from the complex apparatus of scholarly critical reference to printed sources), notwithstanding the general commitment of the discipline to conversation as a mode of instruction.

Another possible explanation for the specific omission from Price's book may be historical, that is, the fact that the Victorian period is often regarded as withdrawn from the conversable worlds of the Enlightenment. There are plenty of narratives of withdrawal centered on the Romantic period as the pivot of a turn from a world of enlightenment discourse to one based on private acts of consumption synchronized into uniformity, as Jürgen Habermas had it, a formulation that might be extended to privatized acts of reading. A material rendition of this contrast is presented in Richard Sennett's wonderful book *Flesh and Stone* (1996) where he contrasts a wooden eighteenth-century chair of "sitting sociably," intended to allow the user to turn to either side for the purposes of talk, and the nineteenth-century armchair that enfolds the reader in a cocoon of comfort. Although he doesn't discuss reading as such, the immobilization and "surrender" Sennett identifies with this "comfort" correlates to the many cases of the "absorbed, silent, abstracted reader" (p. 81, quoting from *Jane Eyre* on Helen Burns) discussed by Price. Sennett's "comfort" absorbs the sitter, as the text absorbs Helen Burns in *Jane Eyre* and many other of Price's instances. The chair helps the dissolution of readers into Price's "Absorbent Books" (p. 72). Although Sennett's contrast is a helpful guide to some of the differences between the eighteenth

and nineteenth centuries, Schmid's book suggests we should not be too quick to assume that the salon world of the Bluestocking came to a close around 1800. That may be a story that emanates from various commentaries within the period, not to mention various histories of reading, but that is not to say it should be believed, as Schmid's account, especially of Blessington, shows. Blessington's circle, after all, incubated the career of Dickens, among plenty of others.

CROWDS, COTERIES, AND "COCKNEY" LONDON

Price's account of literary communication is primarily imagined in her book "at a distance" between author and reader. Where it appears in face-to-face relations, it often takes the role of a mask to hide behind, but there is plenty of evidence that books were not just an item that passed between people to facilitate or bar social relations, they also brought people together to talk about them whether in institutions, informal groups, or couples. Many texts from the earliest decades of the nineteenth century seem to have been designed to feed into a world where reading passed over into discussion as part of a process of interpretation or the making of meaning. Take, for instance, Leigh Hunt's imagining of the world in which *The Examiner* would circulate. Anticipating some of Price's ideas of the book being turned into wrapping paper, Hunt discussed the diurnality of his medium in "On Periodical Essays" in the second ever number of *The Examiner* on 8 January 1808. Whereas the book obtrudes itself into the library, Hunt identifies many "pleasant modes" for using the periodical essay: "It may assist your meditation by lighting your pipe, it may give steadiness to your candle, it may curl the tresses of your daughter or your sister, or lastly, if you are not rich enough to possess an urn or a cloth-holder, it may save you a world of opodeldoc by wrapping the handle of your tea-kettle." The idea of the literary being scouted here is comfortable with a world of cozy suburban chitchat and the other things that share the same space. The place of the book—as opposed to the periodical—in Hunt's schema is obtrusive not because of its association with materiality, which is equally if not more true of the diurnal and disposable periodical, it is because the book's solidity seems to be imagined in part as a kind of scholastic throwback, associating it with the stolidity of the library against the everyday life of the parlor. Nor is reading the activity of the recluse in Hunt's world, so much as part of the cheerily interpersonal realm of the fireside, contemporary with

but socially distinct from aristocratic places like Holland House described by Schmid in her book.

In *The Examiner*, as elsewhere in Hunt's writing, the idea of reader-writer relations as an extension of suburban conversation is frequently at odds with other understandings of the operations of print that form a major theme in Mary Fairclough's *The Romantic Crowd: Sympathy, Controversy, and Print Culture*. Fairclough's study makes the case that "accounts of sympathy produced during the Romantic period constitute a particular development of earlier philosophical assertions of the social operation of sympathy, thereby producing an understanding of crowd behavior which is peculiar to the historical moment succeeding the French Revolution" (p. 4). An important strand of her argument extends this issue into an anxiety about the social life of books and print, and the fear that the press might transmit its contents by the same kind of rapid contagion that was understood to rouse crowds to violence. Another way of putting this point would be to say that an anxious elite responded to mass communication, especially when associated with politics, as a derogation of sociability and a descent into a quasi-physiological form of contagion. Progressive intellectuals usually took up a complicated middle ground from which the democratic press could only be imagined in a positive form when it was understood to act in abstracted ways. Reading, especially, is understood as a mode of reflection, although for William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, as Fairclough sees it, the press continued to be understood as most fruitful when perpetuated by the collision of mind with mind. Typically, Godwin preferred to limit those collisions to the carefully controlled social situations such as the Philomathian society he frequented with Thomas Holcroft and others in the 1790s.

The final chapters of Fairclough's intelligent and engaging study focus on the period after 1815, including the ambivalences of William Hazlitt's attitude toward the place of the individual in relation to the crowd, ambivalence he shared with most others in the Cockney circle, including Leigh Hunt. The same ambivalence is an important part of Gregory Dart's *Metropolitan Art and Literature, 1810–1840: Cockney Adventures*. Hunt, as Dart notes (p. 38), was particularly careful to distinguish his ethics of personal improvement from the mass-platform politics of his namesake Henry "Orator" Hunt. Dart's primary concern is with Hunt and such associates as Benjamin Robert Haydon, Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, and John Keats, but his study uncovers a much larger social formation behind the term "Cockney" that illumi-

nates the logic of *Blackwood's* attacks upon them and their own ambivalence about the term. Although Dart dates the "Cockney moment" from Leigh Hunt's imprisonment in January 1813 for libeling the prince regent, his use of the term is defined primarily by the "uneasy class" of white collar workers who became a distinctive phenomenon of London life in the 1820s and '30s (p. 23). Where the term "Cockney" was used in the eighteenth century, according to Dart, it "could be about speech, and *was always* about attitude, but it was never the preserve of a specific rank or class" (p. 8). By the second decade of the nineteenth century, it was more and more about the lower-middle classes, a shift Dart defines as "a social narrowing, and a geographical expansion" (p. 8). By 1820, the emergence of this distinctive if amorphous class was the focus of a range of critiques, but also a more complicated set of relationships with the group literary history thinks of as the Cockney school.

This larger social question distinguishes Dart's work from Jeffrey N. Cox's *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt, and Their Circle* (2004), which is more narrowly literary in its remit. Much recent work on Romanticism, of course, has extended into more popular forms than the higher lyric and even the novel, for instance, into forms that circulated easily in the social world described by Dart, including the periodical essay and prose works such as Pierce Egan's *Life in London*, the subject of an excellent chapter in *Metropolitan Art and Literature*. In the process, the question of what constitutes "the popular" for the period and the period's role in our own understandings of ideas of "popular culture" has become increasingly important. Quite what "the popular" and "the people" could mean in the period is the focus of Philip Connell and Nigel Leask's wonderful collection *Romanticism and Popular Culture in Britain and Ireland*. The issues are set out by the editors in a long but extremely useful introduction that takes off from and uses the title of Hazlitt's "What Is the People?". Hazlitt's essay used to be largely ignored for his aesthetics and literary criticism, but it appears in the books of Dart and Fairclough as well as here (where Dart also has an essay). Connell and Leask's collection is divided into four sections, each relevant to different conceptions of "the popular" as they shape the Romantic period: "Ballad Poetry and Popular Songs," "Politics and the People," "The Urban Experience," and "Canon Formation and the Common Reader." Among the highlights is a brilliant essay by Gillian Russell on Keats and the theater that sustains the tendency among recent books to present him as the

child of urban popular culture, but with a refreshing sense of the centrality of the theater to this experience.

Connell and Leask are very conscious of the way that claims to the culture of the people could work through complex forms of exclusion as much as inclusion, perhaps most obviously when such claims were staked in national terms, but also when it came to relations with the commercial and/or what was construed as the lowest classes. Dart's monograph's account of the Cockney school also develops a more complicated sense of the way groups work through inclusion and exclusion than many other studies of the Cockney poets as a coterie, specifically in relation to their anxieties about their relation to those classes they took to be beneath them. These exclusions may be implicit in the form of "the Romantic familiar essay" that is so strongly identified with Hunt and his circle, a form Dart dates from "A Day by the Fire" in the short-lived *The Reflector* (1811–12). This species of "imaginative nest-feathering," as Dart appropriately terms it (p. 2), gestured toward ideas of the everyday, conversational and approachable, that corresponded at least somewhat with the domestic arrangements of the uneasy classes, but also provided an insulation from the larger radical assemblies that Fairclough puts at the center of her study. "Private cultivation in everyone" was the keynote of Hunt's democracy as Dart sees it (p. 32). Easily dismissed as mere chitchat from the perspectives of *Blackwood's*, these essays practiced what Dart usefully denominates an "aesthetics of familiarity" (p. 10), although the term is perhaps more meaningful in relation to Hunt than Hazlitt's contrarian brand of table talk. If Hunt can seem pleased with himself and infuriatingly smug, his comfortableness identifies or makes discernible an emergent social "space" of culture with "cosy little interiors and exteriors of the new London suburbs" (p. 30).

Dart's cultural analysis does not simply dwell on the textual versions of these subjects, nor even on books in Price's sense, but on the environment built and made discernible quite literally by this logic, although in some senses beyond the ken of the idea of culture available in *Blackwood's Magazine*. I have already alluded to Dart's discussions of domestic interiors as figured in Hunt's essays. Hunt and his fellows were also readily associated with suburban tea gardens by their enemies, part of the joke being that this was the only form in which the uneasy classes encountered or knew how to encounter nature, a joke that Dart sees as lying behind the critical snootiness in the reviews about *Endymion*—a poem "of ardent aspirations and immortal longings [which]

begins at an outdoor festival” (p. 49)—and Keats’s second-hand access to nature. I hope Dart’s interest in the spaces of metropolitan culture in this period will inaugurate a new cultural geography of the Romantic period. Schmid’s salons at Holland House and Lady Blessington’s are part of this shifting panorama. These are generally posher than the spaces of the uneasy classes that are Dart’s main terrain, although they would have opened out onto the Regent’s Street discussed in his chapter on John Nash and Sir John Sloane. Blessington’s short stories in *The Magic Lantern or, Sketches of Scenes in the Metropolis* (1822) give a sense of London as the vibrant and shifting metropolis her title suggests, a place that requires new media and new literary forms to catch its tidal flows of people. Given his acknowledgment of the importance of the periodical press for the early decades of the nineteenth century, Dart might also have looked into the bookshop sociability of such publishers as John Taylor and J. A. Hessey in Fleet Street from 1805 and into the offices of the *London Magazine* where many of the writers Dart discusses fraternized in the 1820s. Those present at *London Magazine* dinners included Lamb, who is a clerkly presence among Dart’s uneasy classes, as he is in Denise Gigante’s *Taste* (2005), Felicity James’s *Charles Lamb, Coleridge, and Wordsworth* (2008), and Russell’s essay in the Connell and Leask collection. Hopefully, these books and articles will soon speed the appearance of a reasonably priced selection of Lamb to make him more accessible in the classroom.

Although Keats doesn’t figure overly much in Dart’s study, it does note that the poet was much closer to the uneasy class than either Hazlitt or Hunt in his social origins. Dart’s version of Keats is primarily a “disciple” of Hunt’s (p. 50), a role he thinks the hostile reviews correctly identified, however unfair their judgments on its consequences may have been. Keats’s relatively minor role in Dart’s Cockney theater makes sense perhaps because his literary work, with its fascination with allegory, pastoral, and romance, is the least obviously engaged with the urban world from which it sprang. What the latest of many Keats biographies, Nicholas Roe’s *John Keats: A New Life*, does do is embed Keats and his poetry very firmly in the city in which he was born. Whatever form his writing may have taken, Roe’s Keats is very much the product of London and its “suburban threshold” (p. 13), child of the shop-keeping and clerkly classes, and the disciple of Hunt, whom Roe sees as much more important to Keats’s thinking than Hazlitt. Dart and Roe both also show that the *Blackwood’s* attacks were not merely abusive, but that they had what Dart calls “a deep purchase on their subject” (p. 14).

Keats's death came too early for us to know whether he would have developed into a writer of the urban scene of Dart's book. Would Keats have started to sketch the world of shopkeepers and seamstresses that first brought Dickens to public notice? Given the degree of Keats's infatuation with the high poetic tradition, it seems unlikely to me, although Roe imagines him becoming a great Victorian novelist. As it is, whatever judgments he makes on the novelist, Dart's treatment of Dickens's succession to the role of sketcher of the uneasy classes is one of the achievements of his book, not least because it transcends the usual period boundaries of nineteenth-century studies. Given my previous comments on literary discussion, it is interesting that two of Dickens's earliest fictions, *Master Humphrey's Clock* and *The Pickwick Papers*, are predicated on conversational groups of literary gentlemen. Dickens's navigation away from these framing scenarios and their comic presentation as already antiquated may suggest his steering toward the more unified and autonomous role of what Robert L. Patten calls the "industrial-age author" in his book discussed later in this review. Certainly, for Dart, Dickens is always on the verge of betraying a world of suburban everyday life for the higher vantage point of the Victorian novel. In this regard, even the sketches of his early work are contrasted with the essays Renton Nicholson collected as *Cockney Adventures* (1838). Dart identifies the differences in tone and perspective as due to the fact that Nicholson's sketches were written for and not simply about the uneasy class. Dickens, on the other hand, is providing a book of reassurance about Cockney rootlessness for those whose social status—unlike Dickens himself at this point—is more securely bourgeois. Dart sees these attitudes hardening in the major novels with characters such as Wemmick, a clerk of course, whose association with the joys of tea gardens and pleasure grounds places him firmly beyond the pale of the Dickensian hero proper. This logic seems to me to be very much at work in *Great Expectations*, but not to play itself out with the determinism Dart implies. Dart acknowledges that there is affection for Wemmick, if not respect, but might have given more weight to the fact that Pip himself is a clerk, at least for part of the novel, one associated, like Lamb, with the Eastern trade. Pip's social status never really settles down, even supposing, as Esther Summerson might muse, we know where he gets to at the end of the novel. Of course, he may be in this regard the kind of reading subject treated in Price's book who transcends class issues completely, except that, apart from stained newspapers in a coaching house, Pip doesn't seem to read particularly much.

In the course of his fine book, Dart mentions many places in London. From coaching inns to posh shops on Regent's Street, from debtor's goals to the Southampton where Hazlitt used to entertain William Hone and George Cruikshank, these are the new sites of a Romanticism that used to be associated with green fields and the mountaintops. Anyone interested in exploring them further could do worse than picking up Ralph Rylance's guidebook *The Epicure's Almanack: Eating and Drinking in Regency London (The Original 1815 Guidebook)*, now edited for the British Library by Janet Ing Freeman. The world of commerce and consumption described a few years later in Egan's *Life in London* is laid out here as "a descriptive Tour constituting an ample Directory to the Taverns, Coffee-houses, Inns, Eating-houses, &c &c." It is followed by "a review of the Artists who administer to the wants and enjoyments of the table" (p. 1). These artists do not include Haydon or David Wilkie, but do include Mr. Deakin, whose Philosophical Kitchen Range could be inspected on Ludgate Hill. Romanticism now seems to incorporate a very different metaphysics from the one traditionally associated with Coleridge. Indeed the new *Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, edited by Frederick Burwick, contains little on the London described by Dart, despite the fact that Coleridge was sometimes at the heart of it, never mind any reference to kitchen ranges, not even "the conjuror" or traveling kitchen that required no other fuel than a sheet of paper cut into shreds and tied up as a faggot. These faggots could have been included among Price's many examples of the fate of paper in the period, although it may have found the pages of *The Watchman*, famously used by Coleridge's maid (as Price mentions, p. 232) to light his fire, rather too metaphysical for its conjuration to work.

FINGS AIN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE
(AT LEAST, ACCORDING TO WORDSWORTH)

This may be a good place to pause and notice the proliferation of Romanticisms currently available and the different kinds of aesthetics and texts they propose. Dart's discovery of an "aesthetics of familiarity" in relation to Keats, for instance, makes discernible a formation that long had to be denied even by his admirers. Such familiarity was to distance dangerously the poet from the European history of ideas in which Burwick's handbook mainly places Coleridge. An awareness of these distinct aesthetics brings with it a different sense of what ought to be the object of

analysis for literary critics: poetry and the philosophical treatise, largely, for Coleridge; the essay and the sketch for many of the Cockneys of Dart's book. The historical turn in Romantic studies, especially associated with the Cambridge series to which most of the books discussed in my previous section belong, is increasingly bringing us in touch with the diversity of what was read at the time, although it is far from always pitching its tents beyond the key texts of canonical Romanticism. Richard Adelman's *Idleness, Contemplation, and the Aesthetic, 1750–1830* and Rowan Boyson's *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment Idea of Pleasure*, for instance, are both primarily, but not exclusively, concerned with forms of lyric. Even so, both discover the emergence of aesthetic principles that question the traditional boundaries of Romanticism and extend the terms of debate: Boyson primarily by questioning any simple opposition to Enlightenment values and, particularly, its debates about the social ethics of pleasure; Adelman by charting a distinctively British idealism evolved against the labor theory of Adam Smith. Outside the Cambridge series, one might add to this reconfiguration of the canonical texts Monika Class's *Coleridge and Kantian Ideas in England, 1796–1817: Coleridge's Responses to German Philosophy*. Class's study shows that Immanuel Kant's ideas were in circulation in the 1790s at lectures frequented by Godwin, John Thelwall, and others. In this context, Coleridge's development of a Kantian aesthetics after 1802 is not simply importing a foreign model, but effacing a prior reception that was open to a much more radical version of German philosophy than Coleridge's. For all these monographs, the aesthetics of Romanticism, even in its loftiest bowers, we might say, is described as the product of cultural debate rather than the instantiation of a univocal spirit of the age or the manifestation of some prior metaphysical ground.

Thomas Pfau and Robert Mitchell make the difficulty of defining the term part of what makes Romanticism distinctive as a period in their collection of essays *Romanticism and Modernity* (a gathering together of two special issues of the *European Romantic Review*). Instead of a simple contrast with the Enlightenment, the period is understood to extend the project of modernity and also to subject its key categories to "incisive critical and methodological reflection and revaluation" (p. 1). A similar attempt to unpick the old contrast between Enlightenment and Romanticism appears in the second edition of Aidan Day's *Romanticism* in the New Critical Idiom series. Day includes a new section on recent ecocriticism, but potentially reinforces some old assumptions

by finding no space for work on the romantic metropolis associated with scholars such as Dart. There is also some extension of the list of key authors discussed and a chapter on American Romanticism. Even so, the fact that Charlotte Smith appears on several pages and Austen on only two suggests that some deep-seated assumptions may be perpetuated even behind attempts to extend the canon. Thelwall has also yet to really appear in books of this kind (he's mentioned twice by Day, but never as an author), despite the recent work of scholars such as Michael Scrivener and Judith Thompson, who have now collaborated with Yasmin Solomonescu to bring out an excellent edition of his novel *The Daughter of Adoption*. Thelwall and the London Corresponding Society's secretary Thomas Hardy (also mentioned by Day, but not as an author) were two key figures in the development of a distinctive republic of letters around the radical movement in the 1790s, and both have some claim to being understood as important autobiographers. Day does not take us this far, but then there's only so much one can do in introductions of this kind, and this is a brave attempt.

In contrast, Michael Ferber's *Cambridge Introduction to British Romantic Poetry* is unapologetic in his commitment to what he calls the "Big Six," although Robert Burns, Thomas Moore, and Walter Scott do make flitting appearances in his book. It also has space, for instance, for satire, although largely confined to *Don Juan*. Nevertheless the ode and other forms of lyric loom largest as the forms of Romanticism in this introduction. His argument is that these forms and these poets remain the ones who most "speak to our condition" (p. 7). Much of this might depend on who "we" are. Dart and Fairclough, for instance, seem to speak to conditions transformed but in many ways still with some of us in "our" conditions of urban aspiration and consumption in contexts of social and ecological anxiety. Even so, the very significant presence Wordsworth retains as the subject of single-author monographs this year may bear out Ferber's claim (and the anxieties of publishers about the narrowness of the market for single-author studies). Many of these studies do understand Wordsworth in terms that may seem universal and timeless, but most also claim a contemporary urgency, not least through the investment in the ecological perspectives apparent in several of them.

Mary Jacobus's beautifully written *Romantic Things: A Tree, a Rock, a Cloud* is powerfully attuned to the resistance of things to human co-optation, although also eerily retrospective, tied, for

all its discussions of Jacques Derrida and various avant-garde manifestations of contemporary art, to a meditative practice of criticism strongly associated both with Wordsworth's poetry and a European tradition of phenomenological philosophy. The elegiac cast of Jacobus's own writing, the dwelling on memory and loss, seems not coincidental to a book concerned with the fate of the human and the ethics of its relation to things. Jacobus's series of essays are concerned with the "apostrophic power" of the lyric form (p. 1), which in the Heideggerian tradition effectively stands in for poetry as an entire field of human making. For Jacobus, the principal characteristic of poetry is "the activity of naming or invocation into direct relation with the life of things" (p. 2). These acts of naming are understood to be the response to "the gravitational pull of insensate things" (p. 1). These things include those that once were alive. The dead. Jacobus does not assume that the lyric can really access the life of these insensate things, but shapes her discussion around the resistance of things "to being seen, sensed, or understood" (p. 3). The ethical claim of lyric poetry is in its recognition of otherness without the assumption of access to what its senses disclose or what Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his posthumous and unfinished *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964) understood as the intertwining of the sentient and the seen.

One place where I departed from Jacobus's nuanced close-readings of the poetry that follow was in her account of "Nutting." In her reading, the key transgression in the poem is the entry into nature in itself. Potentially at least a variant of ecological management, Jacobus identifies nutting with coppicing and other forms of forestry, which she approximates to a form of violence in its intrusion on the natural. That is open to debate, as Jacobus shows, but it seems to me not to be what happens in a poem which dramatizes the point at which nutting—potentially, at least, defensible as a form of reciprocity between the human and the natural—passes over, unexpectedly, into a form of paradoxical wildness, a deliberate destruction of the sheltering bower, "a scene of pillage" as Theresa M. Kelley calls it in her book on botany discussed later (p. 157). The persona in Wordsworth's poem is not just nutting; he goes nuts, as it were, quite possibly because he discovers that the other will not accede to his wish for reciprocation.

Adam Potkay's *Wordsworth's Ethics* takes as its foundational moment "the sympathetic and imaginative pleasure" (p. 2) that John Stuart Mill found in Wordsworth's poetry. With his emphasis on Wordsworth's sense of "interconnectedness," it should perhaps

come as no surprise that “Nutting” isn’t a poem that Potkay discusses, given its dramatization of a point of willful destruction. Jacobus’s sense of the resistance of things is in part derived from contemporary thing theory. She acknowledges, for instance, the 2001 special issue of *Critical Inquiry*, edited by Bill Brown, as does Potkay. Brown’s influence is acknowledged in Price’s study, as it happens, but she also notes Matthew Brown’s criticism that “the one category of object that scholars of material culture shy away from is the book” (p. 266n). I’ll return to this point below, but Potkay distances himself from Bill Brown for quite different reasons. Erroneously, I think, believing that “contemporary ‘thing theory’ tends to sideline or ignore the conceptual fullness and recalcitrance of *thing*,” Potkay wants to liberate *things* from what he calls “the shadow of commodification” (p. 75).

The things that concern most of the books mentioned in the first two sections of this review are all manufactured things, urban things, things made, including, at least sometimes, books themselves. Roe’s biography of Keats, for instance, has a wonderful moment where the poet’s school prize, C. H. Kauffman’s *Dictionary of Merchandize and Nomenclature in All Languages*, is suggested as the prosaic origin of the “disgorged cargoes for realms of gold” (p. 39) that embellish the pages of Keats’s romances. The world of commercial things has been a striking aspect of Austen criticism this year, although it is not one where they are blurred by theories of recalcitrance or the complex intertwining of the seer and the seen. Paula Byrne’s *The Real Jane Austen: A Life in Small Things* is one of several books published in the last twelve months that wish to place Austen among the things of this world. Likewise, the version of rational choice found in Michael Suk-Young Chwe’s *Jane Austen, Game Theorist* might underestimate how much time the novels spend on the difficulty and perhaps impossibility of ever getting it right. “Cluelessness,” to use Chwe’s term, is a state to my mind that no character entirely avoids in the novels. Janine Barchas’s *Matters of Fact in Jane Austen: History, Location, and Celebrity* from its title may look like a repetition of Byrne’s method, but it shows how slyly Austen played with the reader expectations created by the celebrity names she often riffs off in the novels. Referentiality to a world of things, names principal among them, is here far from easily translated into meaning.

Each of these books encourages us to think of Austen not as a novelist of narrow compass, but one at ease with the things of the world. She becomes of the world, as Dickens might have said, worldly. But this world of commodities is definitely not the world of

things Jacobus or Potkay explore in their studies of Wordsworth. Potkay is explicit on the ethical and ecological gains “when things are thought through in their unmade and nonrepresentational interconnectedness” (p. 71). Thing theory has frequently tried to resist the reduction of things to commodities, if not usually favoring the “unmade” over the “made.” The urban should have a place in any ecological thinking worth the name. The idea of Wordsworth as an ecological thinker in his relation with unmade things, human and nonhuman, objects and non-objects, found in Jacobus and Potkay is challenged directly by Scott Hess’s *William Wordsworth and the Ecology of Authorship: The Roots of Environmentalism in Nineteenth-Century Culture*. For myself, I have always struggled with what seems to me to be Wordsworth’s ethical failure to think in terms other than disappointment about the relationship between the made (and, perhaps, the social) as against the “natural” (and what we might call communion). Hess’s book is extremely useful in inviting us to think of Wordsworth not as the protoecologist found, for instance, in Jonathan Bate’s work, further developed in Potkay’s study toward a more general ethics, but as someone whose defense of the Lakes derives from the privileged assumptions of his class and a specifically nineteenth-century aesthetic theory.

Questions of the place of the human in relation to the natural are essential to Kelley’s *Clandestine Marriage: Botany and Romantic Culture* and John Goodridge’s *John Clare and Community*. Kelley’s book uses the term Cryptogamia (pp. 19–20), Carolus Linnaeus’s term for the class of plants in which the reproductive parts are hidden from view, to unpack the disruptive role of botany within the culture of the Romantic period. Eerily, the word—new to me—pops up in a couple of other places in this year’s crop of books, including Robert Mitchell’s essay in the *Romanticism and Modernity* collection and Janelle A. Schwartz’s *Worm Work: Recasting Romanticism*. Schwartz’s book takes a lead from Kelley’s work on botany—as she acknowledges (p. xxx)—to use vermiculture to open up the problem of relating seemingly lowly parts to the pretensions of conceptual wholes. In Kelley’s terms, trouble plays itself out primarily in the tension between the conviction that species were universal and fixed and “an accumulating record of newly discovered species that demanded both the practical work of differentiation and, over time, more categories and more reassignments of plants to different genera and even species” (p. 21). This conflict Kelley relates to the strain between thing and system that has been so central to “thing theory,” especially Brown’s hope

in his *Material Unconscious* (1996) that “material presence might precede or survive cultural objectification as something more” (p. 2). Schwartz develops the vermicultural version of these issues toward more recent work in ecocriticism, such as Timothy Morton’s idea of the “strange stranger”: beings that seem at once connected and not connected with human being (p. 4). In Kelley’s study, contra Brown, it is “precisely the embeddedness of plants as matter and thing in romantic concepts, particularly as those concepts roll round and back to take in new particulars, that stages one of modernity’s most sustained arguments over whether things or their conceptual frameworks constitute a reliable index of what we know” (p. 2). In Kelley’s hands exploring the troublesomeness of botany produces extremely rich rewards that range from the taxonomy of empire to new light on the now familiar argument between Anna Letitia Barbauld and Wollstonecraft on the poem “To a Lady, with some flowers” (pp. 99–103). There is also a wonderful chapter on Clare that addresses the power of lyric to call forth and call out by acts of naming, although with a much more complex sense of the role of community in these processes than the treatment of the same issue in Jacobus’s book, primarily via the deployment of those common plant names that Linnaeus’s system was intended to displace. In this regard, Kelley’s account of Clare touches upon issues raised by Goodridge, for whom “community” is also a key term. As with Kelley, who gives great scope to the specificity of Clare’s botanical poetics, there is no simple sense of a matching of the language of community to the thing it names in Goodridge’s book. His main concern is with the dialogue between the community of the village, “with its rituals, culture, and ecology,” and the complex “imagined community” of poets and bards, especially those with whom Clare believed he shared a common origin in humble birth (p. 192).

Apart perhaps from aspects of Hess’s “ecology of authorship” and Kelley’s interest in book illustration, little of this work on the natural “thing” shows much interest in the materiality of the books, despite the presence of a chapter entitled “The Look of the Book” in Jacobus’s *Romantic Things*. Most of the Wordsworth criticism, especially, practices a form of communion with texts where there is a constant pressure for even the words to fall away in place of a sharing of consciousness between reader and writer. In this regard, Jacobus’s book, for instance, is distinctively post-Heideggarian and inhabits the High European tradition of lyric criticism, both in terms of its objects of study and the lyricism it aspires to in its own style. In Price’s terms, the material object of

the book—the “thing” in which Wordsworth’s poems appear—soon dissolves in favor of the idea of a communion with the natural world, implicitly given precedence as a more authentic order of thing, even if it is shown, at least in Jacobus’s nuanced readings, to be a form of communion that can never be achieved. Ironically the version of Merleau-Ponty that vouchsafes much of Jacobus’s account of the resistance of the natural to being appropriated to or even discernible as human categories, appears in another book from this year’s crop, Julian Wolfreys’s *Dickens’s London: Perception, Subjectivity, and Phenomenal Urban Multiplicity*, but there its phenomenology could only describe—indeed seems only the product of—the urban milieu.

PHENOMENAL DICKENS, PHENOMENAL LONDON

Inevitably in his bicentenary year, there has been a plethora of Dickens. Patricia Ingham has edited a new edition of *Bleak House*, for Broadview. *Dickens’s Uncollected Magazine and Newspaper Sketches: As Originally Composed and Published, 1833–1836* are very usefully gathered and introduced by Robert C. Hanna, which should help place Dickens even more precisely in relation to the “Cockney” world described by Dart. Books such as Robert Terrell Bledsoe’s *Dickens, Journalism, Music: “Household Words” and “All the Year Round”* suggest that the increased accessibility of Dickens’s journalism is already paying off in terms of critical attention. Along a parallel path, adaptations of Dickens should also be helped into the classroom by the useful anthology published by Broadview in *The Story of Little Dombey and Other Performance Fictions*. There is also the charming and informative catalog put together for the recent Bodleian Exhibition—*The Curious World of Dickens*—by Clive Hurst and Violet Moller. Joseph P. Jordan’s *Dickens Novels as Verse* rather belies its title by proposing a study of the patterns of repetition across three of the novels, from rising and falling in *A Tale of Two Cities* to the dust and bits of bodies in *Our Mutual Friend*. Ruth Richardson’s *Dickens and the Workhouse: Oliver Twist and the London Poor* builds on her discovery that Dickens lived close by a major London workhouse. Sambudha Sen’s *London, Radical Culture, and the Making of the Dickensian Aesthetic* places Dickens in the context of popular print and visual culture, particularly in relation to his divergences from the path through the same things taken by William Makepeace Thackeray.

Predictably enough for an anniversary, there are several biographies around, including Simon Callow’s *Charles Dickens*,

Michael Slater's *The Great Charles Dickens Scandal*, and Claire Tomalin's *Charles Dickens: A Life*. In the context of these various retellings of a familiar story or stories about Dickens, the less predictable appearance of Dickens in the final chapter of Dart's book is particularly refreshing. The urban ground of Dart's criticism is also occupied by Wolfreys's *Dickens's London*, but their conclusions about Dickens could hardly be more different. Where for Dart the Dickens of novels such as *Great Expectations* betrays the uneasy class that his early sketches had described and sometimes celebrated, in Wolfreys's analysis Dickens is "the historical materialist, in the Benjaminian sense" (p. 178). In general terms, Wolfreys's method is phenomenological, tracing in Dickens the emergence of a distinctive urban world of ever-varying perception. For Wolfreys, the sense of this welter of phenomena in Dickens is not simply impressionism, because it conveys a strong sense of the manner of appearing to the perceiving subject. My own favorite index of this feature of the novels to present in the classroom has long been the frequency of the appearance of "to eye" as a verb in the novels. Wolfreys's is very convincing on the way perception in Dickens is embodied, although at times it seems as if Dickens is Merleau-Ponty. Ironic then, of course, that Jacobus should use similar passages from Merleau-Ponty to show how Wordsworth continually investigates those discrepancies between the visible and the invisible that Wolfreys, using Felix Guattari's terms, calls "discernibilization" (p. 36). Of course, Wordsworth's poetry was an early symptom of the reading of the city in terms of such disjunctions:

the same perpetual flow
 Of trivial objects, melted and reduced
 To one identity, by differences
 That have no law, no meaning, and no end.
 (1805 *Prelude*, book 7, lines 701–4)

Where Wordsworth differs from Dickens is that there is a continual return to a notion of some space of knowing where things are themselves, usually identified with nature, even if, as Jacobus shows, realizing this identity in language continually runs up against the resistance of things. Wolfreys sees Dickens as ending this dream of knowing: "After Dickens it is no longer possible to 'represent' the material world 'as if it were only a single manner of existing and therefore a single adequate modality of access to the existing'" (p. 87). The quoted phrases are from Wolfgang Iser,

but it is difficult to know how seriously to take the historical claim Wolfreys uses them to make. Is Dickens really being used as the marker of a more pervasive historical change? Or even its creator?

Given the hostility shown throughout the book to reductive historicism, Wolfreys's claims about what happens "after Dickens" may seem rather surprising. The primary named object of his critique of historicism is Jeremy Tambling's *Going Astray* (2009), which Wolfreys sees as "desiring to fix the Dickens text in place a little too hurriedly" (p. 13). Richardson's book or some of the biographies might be more appropriate targets for such an attack. To be fair, Wolfreys does partially accept that Tambling is "neither reductive nor facile," even if he then goes on to charge *Going Astray* with being a book that "conflates the phenomenal with the empirical" (p. 18). Whatever one makes of Tambling's book, it seems perverse not to see it as committed to dissonance, no less than Wolfreys, not least via its interesting deployment of photographs. Perhaps the issue is critical overcrowding in the same space. Wolfreys's book is certainly concerned to develop its own form of playfulness, which may be the real tenor of his comments about what happened "after Dickens."

If its phenomenology is taken from Merleau-Ponty, then Wolfreys's book is probably more fundamentally shaped after Walter Benjamin's *Arcades* project (an important text also for Tambling, hence the crowding). Wolfreys's chapters are organized by an A-Z of themes associated with places within Dickens's London. B is for "Banking and Breakfast. Gray's Inn Square, Temple Bar, Strand Lane." C is for "Chambers. Holborn, Staple Inn, Furnival's Inn." In some chapters, "Les Passages" (the Parisian arcades) of Benjamin become chapters made up entirely of passages from Dickens, left to speak for themselves in their rendering of urban phenomenology. Except, of course, part of the point of Wolfreys's book is that nothing, ever, speaks for itself, especially in Dickens, where like the goods in Mr. Venus's shop in *Our Mutual Friend*, "nothing is resolvable into anything distinct" (book 1, chap. 7). Wolfreys's book itself is the invisible visible in so far as he gives us no gloss on what he presents in these chapters.

Tambling and Wolfreys are both interested in the idea of phantoms and phantasmagoria as a nineteenth-century category, although only the former links it explicitly to Karl Marx on commodity fetishism. Sutherland's fascinating *Stupefaction: A Radical Anatomy of Phantoms* offers a spirited and convincing rebuttal of Derrida's critique of Marx's idea in *Spectres of Marx*. Sutherland insists on a Marx who does not disperse phantoms in the name

of the “real,” but understands them as complex manifestations of “living social contradiction” (p. 12). Sutherland has other fish to fry, quite a few of them Wordsworthian mackerel, but he has nothing to say about Dickens, sadly, given the phantasmagoric life of places such as Mr. Venus’s shop. On one level phantoms would seem to have little place in Patten’s meticulous *Charles Dickens and “Boz”: The Birth of the Industrial-Age Author*. Patten is scrupulously book historical in his attention to print runs, publishers’ contracts, and their relation to the material forms of the printed product. These details, if nothing else, would make Patten’s book invaluable, but there is a lot more going on here besides, not least the sense of “Charles Dickens” as a phantom of the marketplace, whose emergence from “Boz” and other authorial personas is traced through the 1830s and ’40s. Generally speaking, Patten’s book is proof of what book history has to offer criticism—as Price would have it— not least in how it shows complex negotiations and repackagings contributed to the creation of an identity as the foundation and legitimation of the texts issued under the name “Charles Dickens.” Not the least of the surprises of Patten’s book is the fact that such a distinguished Dickens scholar should come close to, if not endorsing, then recognizing Dart’s sense that some things were lost as well as gained by the emergence of the major novelist.

VISIBLE WORLDS

It is now exactly a decade ago that Erin O’Connor launched a celebrated attack on what she saw as the paradoxical colonization of the field of Victorian Studies by postcolonial criticism. Her preface to a special issue of the journal *Victorian Studies* in 2003 charged the followers of the work of Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak in particular with vastly exaggerating the historical and cultural importance of imperialism to Victorian literature. She thought that this new attention to imperialism had politicized and damaged the proper analysis of Victorian literature, mistakenly making unwarranted generalizations from individual bodies of work. At the time, O’Connor’s accusations were refuted by a host of scholars and critics, including Patrick Brantlinger and Deirdre David. Judging by this year’s crop of books, the scholarly attention to imperialism has continued to enrich and develop criticism of Victorian literatures and cultures, making its place in the world increasingly visible, as its perceptions of the world become increasingly the subject of scholarly debate.

Critics of the “postcolonial turn” in Victorian and nineteenth-century studies have often relied on a quantitative argument in order to propose the irrelevance of empire to Victorian literature. There simply was not enough, so their argument goes, of empire in Victorian literature to warrant the degree of critical attention being lavished on it. Bernard Porter, for example, confidently declared that not only was empire largely absent from the major Victorian novel, but also popular forms such as the theater were almost entirely silent about it. Marty Gould energetically debunks Porter’s claims in *Nineteenth-Century Theatre and the Imperial Encounter*. Gould finds no less than 300 popular plays on imperial subjects. Although Gould’s analyses of individual texts can be brief because of the sheer mass of his archive, he brings relatively neglected works such as W. T. Moncrieff’s *The Cataracts of the Ganges* to our attention and lays to rest any quantitative claim about the irrelevance of empire to Victorian theater. Much the same could be said of Kimberly Snyder Manganelli’s *Transtalantic Spectacles of Race: The Tragic Mulatta and the Tragic Muse*, although it takes the route of pursuing a particular figure through its different incarnations in transatlantic plays and novels. Manganelli’s book makes visible a whole hinterland that makes newly legible more familiar figures such as Bertha Mason.

Imperialism might be considered one of the primary modes through which nineteenth-century society and culture were internationalized. Proper attention to this fact is enabling critics to untether productively the term “Victorian” from its anchorage in “Little England.” Witness the expanded horizons of Deborah Shapple Spillman’s *British Colonial Realism in Africa: Inalienable Objects, Contested Domains*, Lawrence Phillips’s *The South Pacific Narratives of Robert Louis Stevenson and Jack London: Race, Class, Imperialism*, David Glover’s *Literature, Immigration, and Diaspora in Fin-de-Siècle England: A Cultural History of the 1905 Aliens Act*, Amy E. Martin’s *Alter-Nations: Nationalisms, Terror, and the State in Nineteenth-Century Britain and Ireland*, and Ellen Brinks’s *Anglophone Indian Women Writers, 1870–1920*. Spillman’s sophisticated study brings disparate writers such as Joseph Conrad and Anna Howarth into dialogue with nineteenth-century essays, paintings, sculptures, and testimonies about Africa, where the attempts to represent objects triggered a crisis in aspirations to realism. By paying attention to the relationship between literary styles and the contested commodification of things African under imperialism, Spillman takes thing theory into the domain of empire. In contrast to her wide-lens approach, Phillips zooms in

on two authors, Stevenson and London. He contends that both the Scottish and the American writer were drawn to the South Pacific because they sensed that it was here that the changing of the guard between Britain and the United States as global imperial superpowers was taking place. This historical shift in the process of modernity and modernization was also registered, Phillips shows, in the distinctive literary styles of these writers. This stylistic aspect in turn reveals the *fin-de-siècle* to be much more than a decadent twilight between the robust Victorian realist and the experimental Edwardian periods.

Glover turns to a single moment in the history of British legislation against immigration—the 1905 Aliens Act—to remind us that carefully manufactured hysteria against foreigners has been with us for a long time in the United Kingdom. If the *Daily Mail* newspaper, the far right of British Politics, or the Conservative party today deflect attention from real structural economic and social malaise by blaming the East Europeans at one moment and Arabs or Africans the next, it was the figure of the poor Jew that acted as the bogeyman at the beginning of the twentieth century. Glover shows how this discursive figure was created and contested across a range of registers—literary and nonliterary—and offers a series of illuminating readings of novelists as varied as George Eliot, Margaret Harkness, and Israel Zangwill. Not only was nineteenth-century British culture globalized through imperialism, it was also gendered in particular ways. In their different approaches, Manganelli and Brinks draw our attention to this transaction between gender, race, and empire. Manganelli's attention falls on the transatlantic exchange of writing and spectacle between Britain (and, to an extent, Europe) and North America, through which the two popular and powerful female archetypes of the “tragic mulatta” and the “tragic muse” were created. Manganelli suggests that neither of these archetypes—overtly, if differently, eroticized and racialized—could have existed without the transnational circulations—material and ideological—that were consolidated in the “long” nineteenth-century. Brinks looks at a group of pioneering Indian women who wrote in English between 1870 and 1920, and asks how our understanding of the dynamics of colonial cultural exchange might be altered by them.

Thanks to the work of scholars such as Elizabeth A. Bohls, Saree Makdisi, and Leask, Romantic period criticism has shown itself to be just as robust in its globalization of the subject as Victorian Studies. Among the current list of books received, Bohls provides rich evidence of this achievement in her *Romantic*

Literature and Postcolonial Studies. As well as poetry and novels, Bohls covers travel writing, slave narratives, and political prose to show how integral to the writing of the period was the British experience of empire. Her chapter on Orientalism focuses on what has perhaps become the key issue for postcolonial scholarship in this period. The figure of Sir William Jones inevitably looms large in what Bohls calls “a dramatic shift in attitudes towards Asian cultures” (p. 161). The shift to the attitudes associated with Thomas Babington Macaulay’s *Minute*, crucial, for instance, to Makdisi’s writing on Orientalism, is dealt with succinctly by Bohls without falling into the trap of producing Jones as a heroic figure in contrast, beguiling though for all kinds of reasons he may be.

The question of empire is not the only way that studies in the nineteenth century have looked beyond the paradigm of national literatures. As John O. Jordan remarked in last year’s omnibus review, the nation is increasingly coming to seem inadequate as a container for the research scholars wish to pursue in the nineteenth century. Robin Jarvis’s *Romantic Readers and Transatlantic Travel: Expeditions and Tours in North America, 1760–1840* and Judith Johnston’s *Victorian Women and the Economies of Travel, Translation, and Culture, 1830–1870* are two examples of recent interest in the economies of cultural translation defined not only by empire. The same topic is at the heart of David Simpson’s *Romanticism and the Question of the Stranger*, which places itself in the train of a series of books that made interventions in contemporary crises by addressing the question of the “alien, the stranger, and the foreigner” (p. 3). For Simpson, our moment of crisis is the world “*After 9/11*” (the quizzical italics are his), which he understands in terms of a very long romanticism stretching back, at least, to the terror of the 1790s. The focus of Simpson’s analysis is what he calls “the stranger syndrome,” the need for and challenge of the alien in terms of making the invisible of identities visible, although the terms of his analysis are not taken from Merleau-Ponty so much as Derrida. Unusually in Simpson’s fine body of work over a long career, Wordsworth does not make much of an appearance. Among many other things, he is interested in some of the material issues of cultural translation, represented in terms of the footnotes and marginal glosses in Coleridge’s books, those “strangers on the page” (p. 109), and also the more literal aspects of translation in a series of more or less famous romantic texts. The chapter on “slavery and sociability,” particularly on the demands of authenticity made of “strangers” such as Olaudah Equiano in their autobiographical writing, shows how far such

“aliens” were caught in a complex authorial role where “mastery looks like mimicry, while mimicry appears masterful” (p. 194).

Bringing an omnibus review of this kind to a close makes one painfully aware of books not mentioned. How one has made certain things invisible in making others visible. Looking back over the essay and then back to the list of books received makes one equally aware of connections made and not made between them. Among the many trends I have failed to notice in this review are those between the books published on representations of children, concepts of childhood, and children’s literature (not to mention authorial juvenilia). M. O. Grenby’s achievement in bringing together an encyclopedic knowledge of the material, a nuanced critical ear, and the sophisticated awareness of book and reading history in *The Child Reader, 1700–1840* stands at the head of the books received in this area. Some of the connections I have made between books may well come as a surprise to their authors and readers. Some of them surprised me. Merleau-Ponty, for instance, takes on a prominence unexpected to me, not because he seems everywhere at the moment, but because he is used by two critics on two very different writers—Jacobus on Wordsworth and Wolfreys on Dickens—to two very different ends, even though the two critics more or less agree on what Merleau-Ponty says. This review opens with and gives many of its precious hoarded words to Price’s book. I found in it a number of connections that seemed to encourage work in a similar vein on the earlier decades of the nineteenth century (and the late eighteenth), not least to see how far some of the things done with books were distinctively Victorian. I have mentioned a couple of times the question of the role of the urban in ecocriticism, not least because romantic versions of the latter may be in danger of reproducing the old tendency to sacrifice the city to the mountainside. Perhaps Price’s discussion of books as waste can encourage Romantic critics to think about the ecology of books as man-made things that themselves constitute a version of Morton’s “strange stranger.”

Reviewing itself has become something that is increasingly studied now. In the nineteenth century, perhaps as now, it was very common to discuss books and ideas on the basis of reviews (which were sometimes little more than extended quotations, of course), and sometimes, in the case of book clubs and libraries, to order them for other readers on the basis of those discussions. Reviews, book clubs, and libraries were an essential part of what in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century was still a relatively new market mechanism for matching readers to books.

Something of this sort seems to have happened with Mary Hays and Godwin's *Political Justice*. In her case, she had the temerity to write directly to the author to see if he would lend his book to her. This is one of many cases of reading or at least interpreting before the book itself was read. It is the kind of case, I think, book history doesn't think that much about when it reifies the material object of the book. Equally, it is the kind of case literary criticism dislikes as it questions the authentic engagement of the individual reader with text. My best hope for this review is that it makes its readers think about and discuss some of the books it mentions. And if you then go on and read them, and make your own minds up, so much the better. Not of course, that reading and making one's mind up, with the finality that phrase suggests, can ever be quite the same thing.

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