

# Book Reviews/ Critiques de livres

Romantic Reconfigurations in the Poetry of Smith,  
Wordsworth, and Gilbert

*Charlotte Smith and the Sonnet: Form, Place and Tradition in  
the Late Eighteenth Century* by Bethan Roberts

Liverpool University Press, 2019. 192pp. £19.99. ISBN 978-1-789-62017-7.

*“The Excursion” and Wordsworth’s Iconography* by Brandon C. Yen

Liverpool University Press, 2018. 336pp. £29.95. ISBN 978-1-800-85663-9.

*William Gilbert and Esoteric Romanticism: A Contextual Study and  
Annotated Edition of “The Hurricane”* by Paul Cheshire

Liverpool University Press, 2018. 272pp. £24.95. ISBN 978-1-800-85666-0.

Review by Lawrence Evalyn, Northeastern University,  
Boston, Massachusetts, United States

The three books under review are part of a Liverpool University Press (LUP) series, *Romantic Reconfigurations: Studies in Literature and Culture 1780–1850*, which seeks to revise “the literary and cultural geographies and histories of Romanticism.” The immediate expectation for such a series might be the kind of work gathered under the umbrella of “Bigger 6” antiracist and decolonial scholarship. However, these monographs pursue a more metaphorical expanding of geographies, rethinking how particular poets have become “protagonists” in the history of Romantic poetry, though Paul Cheshire’s volume also addresses Romantic representations of Antigua. The LUP series began in 2018, and sixteen titles have recently been made Open Access through the publisher’s website. Bethan Roberts and Cheshire use their books to argue for the seriousness of writers who have not yet received this depth of analysis, namely, Charlotte Smith and William Gilbert. Brandon C. Yen reads a less-studied work by William Wordsworth through a new iconographic lens. All three demonstrate the depth of context that a monograph with a single subject can provide.

Roberts’s *Charlotte Smith and the Sonnet* is, to my knowledge, the first book-length study of Smith’s sonnets. That seems surprising, given that Smith’s importance as an early Romantic poet has been increasingly acknowledged at least since Stuart Curran’s 1993 edition of her poems. Smith’s larger oeuvre has received attention in volumes like *Charlotte Smith in British Romanticism* (2008), edited by Jacqueline Labbe, and *Placing Charlotte Smith* (2021), edited by Elizabeth A. Dolan and

Jacqueline Labbe. Nonetheless, Smith's poetry seems to be addressed more commonly as one example among many in thematic monographs, rather than serving as a sole subject. Roberts provides something new and even overdue with her meticulous accounting of the nine editions of Smith's name-making *Elegiac Sonnets* and Smith's evolution as a poet over the corresponding sixteen years. Structurally, the book begins with an introduction and a short section on "The Eighteenth-Century Sonnet" before charting four successive phases of Smith's poetry in *Elegiac Sonnets*: "Tradition," "Innovation," "Wider Prospect," and "Botany to Beachy Head." Each section addresses the characteristic poetic images found in a particular phase of Smith's career. In "Tradition," for example, Roberts argues that Smith's earliest sonnets use images of the nightingale and the River Arun to mark her participation in existing poetic discourses. Roberts's approach, which unites close readings of poetic form with a book-historical attention to Smith's revisions across editions, develops a picture of a writer who is explicitly part of a poetic tradition, responding to and shaping it. Roberts therefore substantially revises the common narrative of Smith as the almost-singlehanded reviver of the sonnet, without diminishing her importance as a poetic innovator. Roberts moves away from autobiographical interpretations, attending to the events of Smith's poems as not just biographical fact but literary choice. The monograph is valuable as a thorough and authoritative account of Smith's influential poetry, with (as promised in the title) broader implications for understanding place and form in Romanticism, particularly in her proposal that the sonnet is an importantly Romantic poetic form.

"*The Excursion*" and *Wordsworth's Iconography* is even more deeply concerned with close reading. Beginning from the premise that "the more weighty ideas in *The Prelude* and *The Excursion* depend, to a considerable but all too easily unconsidered degree, upon the quiet functioning of local details" (3), Yen examines repeated imagery in the 1814 poem *The Excursion*, which Yen reads as Wordsworth's attempt to envision a virtuous life in a post-Revolution and post-lapsarian world. As Yen notes, scholars have published three other book-length studies of *The Excursion*: Judson Stanley Lyon in 1950, Alison Hickey in 1997, and Sally Bushell in 2002. Yen's core intervention is to apply the interpretive lens of iconography. Operating with the "guiding assumption ... that images in *The Excursion* are rarely purely 'literal', even if they directly refer to real flowers and trees" (4), Yen compares the poem's instances of recurring visual motifs and links these to contemporaneous "stock" imagery, especially imagery in political prints. After a chapter establishing this methodology, the next three sections discuss images

of envisioning, rooting, and dwelling, followed by a briefer section on flowing and reflecting that also serves as the conclusion. Chapter 3, for example, uses the concept of “rooting” to connect the poem’s trees, the iconography of the English oak and the Tree of Liberty, and the ethical stakes of cosmopolitanism versus local attachments. Throughout, Yen matches the number and complexity of Wordsworth’s local details with his own. I found the iconographical lens most productive in chapter 4, where Yen explicates a political tension within the iconography of rural cottages. The introduction suggests that an iconographical reading will undermine conventional assessments of Wordsworth as growing conservative and literal in his later poetry (31). At times, however, the book seems more invested in arguing merely that certain images *are* iconographical, rather than identifying the impact of said iconography. Nonetheless, Yen takes a risk in downplaying the literal in Wordsworth and in locating a “new direction” not in new materials but in new modes of reading.

In *William Gilbert and Esoteric Romanticism*, Cheshire “reconfigures” Romanticism by placing a largely unknown figure, Gilbert, at its heart. Of the three writers under review here, Gilbert is likely the least familiar to a scholar of the eighteenth century: Gilbert was born in Antigua to a Methodist plantation owner in the 1760s, was partly educated in England, served in the British Navy during the American Revolution, practised law in Antigua and England, was confined in a Bristol asylum, made a career as an astrologer, and disappeared in 1798. Gilbert’s dramatic poem *The Hurricane* (1796) is set in Antigua and depicts a hurricane that metaphorically represents a prophetic revolution in Europe. The poem was previously reprinted only in a 1990 Woodstock Books facsimile. Cheshire’s impressively comprehensive monograph is the culmination of fifteen years of research on Gilbert and his works. The monograph begins with a biography of Gilbert and an analysis of his relationships with Coleridge, Southey, and Wordsworth in Bristol’s 1790s countercultures. Cheshire then presents a thoroughly footnoted edition of *The Hurricane*, followed by descriptions of its allegories and literary meaning in light of Gilbert’s complex personal cosmology. This section could be used to bring Gilbert into the classroom. The concluding chapters address Romanticism more broadly, arguing for the importance of occultism, astrology, and magic in the development of Romantic ideas, especially in Coleridge’s attempts to develop “a unified metaphysical system which can harmonize all the different branches of knowledge and reconcile science and religion” (228). Cheshire’s readings transform Gilbert’s poem from something inscrutable to something deeply interesting. At times, the case for the importance of Gilbert

seems to rely on the transitive logic that he was important to Coleridge, Southey, and Wordsworth, and *they* are important. (All three poets promoted the publication of *The Hurricane* and quoted or adapted it.) However, near the end of the volume, the chapter “Son of a Sainly Slave Owner” makes a better case for the importance of *The Hurricane* in itself: as Gilbert navigates his abolitionist views, his ongoing personal profits from people enslaved by his family in Antigua, and his esoteric convictions, *The Hurricane* offers a unique and complex counterpoint to other forms of writing about slavery. Ultimately, Cheshire makes a compelling case that “esoterism” is important but overlooked in all the Romantics, expanding how they may be read. The book further expands the geographies of Romanticism through its attention to the sea and Antigua as crucial sites for revolutionary thinking.

These monographs represent the depth of analysis that is possible through close reading a single author or even a single work. All three take a largely historicist approach, recapturing a historical context not immediately known or available to twenty-first-century readers. For Roberts, this means explicating the allusions and poetic conventions which link Smith’s poetry to that of her predecessors and peers. For Yen, this means locating specific political cartoons and other illustrations with commonplace iconography to be placed in conversation with Wordsworth’s images. And for Cheshire, this means not only untangling Gilbert’s biography but also exploring his idiosyncratic supernatural cosmology. In all three cases, disparate documents and traces have been brought together around the central idea of one work by one person to demonstrate reading that is not just close but deep.

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*Urban Rehearsals and Novel Plots in the Early American City*  
by Betsy Klimasmith

Oxford University Press, 2021. 228 pp. \$90. ISBN 978-0192846211.

Review by Rochelle Raineri Zuck, Iowa State University,  
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The city occupies a central yet contested place in American literature and culture. As Kevin McNamara has noted, one early vision of America offers an enduring urban metaphor—John Winthrop’s “city on a hill”—while others regard “the urban as alien to a national character defined by the experience of settler colonialism and embodied in the self-reliant yeoman farmer” (McNamara, *The City in American Literature and Culture* [2021], 1). Well-known images of urban life such as that of Benjamin Franklin newly arrived in Philadelphia with a bread roll under each arm circulated alongside J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur’s characterization of Americans as “a people of cultivators,” a vision of rural virtue echoed by Thomas Jefferson and others (*Letters from an American Farmer*, 1782). But depictions of and engagements with the city in early American literature remain understudied. Some scholarly treatments of literary representations of US cities begin in the rapidly industrializing urban centres of the nineteenth century, following characters as they navigate urban spaces such as the oyster cellars of George Lippard’s *Quaker City* (1845), the boarding-houses and townhomes of Fanny Fern’s *Ruth Hall* (1854), and the claustrophobic offices of Herman Melville’s “Bartleby, the Scrivener” (1853). Meanwhile, the developing cities featured in fictional works such as William Hill Brown’s *The Power of Sympathy* (1789) and Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple* (1789) have yet to attract a significant amount of scholarly attention.

*Urban Rehearsals* addresses this gap. “Focusing on the period between the revolutionary and early industrial eras,” Betsy Klimasmith writes in the introduction, “this study explores the significant ways in which the cosmopolitan practices largely derived from British culture that shaped early US cities were represented and revised in early American novels” (1). Klimasmith moves the study of literary representations of the American city backward in time and situates these representations within a transatlantic culture of urbanity and cosmopolitanism that connected cities like Boston, New York, and Philadelphia to British urban centres and to one another. She focuses on a transitional moment, considering “how print and urban cultures interacted in the decades when individual cities were no longer bound by colonial ties to London and not yet connected to one another through national networks” (3). Her focus on literary representations of American urbanity and cosmopolitanism in this earlier period yields new insights into well-known plays and works of

prose fiction and makes a case for the study of lesser-known works such as Sally Sayward Barrell Keating Wood's *Dorval, or the Speculator* (1800) and Martha Read's *Monima, or the Beggar Girl* (1802). The book's attention to works such as *Dorval* and *Monima* contributes to the growing body of scholarship on literature from the early nineteenth century that seeks to correct a longstanding critical tendency to skip from eighteenth-century texts to the fiction of the 1820s, bypassing the literature of the first two decades of the nineteenth century almost entirely. In this way, *Urban Rehearsals* compliments and extends work by Cathy N. Davidson, Karen Weyler, Duncan Faherty, and Thomas Koenig (to name a few).

The first part of *Urban Rehearsals*, "The Protocity: Imagining the US City in the Eighteenth Century," "explores how authors imagined a future city, a past city, and a present-tense city against the undeveloped backdrops of eighteenth-century Boston, New York, and Philadelphia" (14). This part features a prologue and three chapters, which examine urban settings and cosmopolitan practices in Royall Tyler's play *The Contrast* (1787), Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1791), and Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797) and *The Boarding School* (1798). The second chapter offers a representative example of the thought-provoking connections Klimasmith offers throughout. This chapter argues for *Charlotte Temple* as a Philadelphia novel, based on its publication and circulation in that city by Mathew Carey in 1794. Klimasmith draws on Carey's advertisements to persuasively argue that he positioned the book as a "Philadelphia novel" marketed to "ladies of Philadelphia" (76). She further situates *Charlotte Temple* in the context of the yellow fever outbreak of 1793, an event that would have been fresh in the minds of many of the novel's original Philadelphia readers. Considering the novel in this context, rather than reading it against its Revolutionary War-era setting, makes visible the importance of the city (here New York as Rowson imagined it to be) as a place of refuge and safety for Charlotte. As Klimasmith suggests, *Charlotte Temple* "offered readers imaginative access to cathartic feelings of grief mingled with hopeful glimpses of community and sympathy based in a nascent urban space" (69). This chapter is carefully researched, persuasively argued, and yields fresh insights on what, in this case, is an oft-discussed example of eighteenth-century fiction. The second half of the book, composed of an "Entr'acte," three chapters, and a "Finale," is entitled "The Liminal City: Literary Philadelphia, 1799–1812." It focuses exclusively on Philadelphia, which Klimasmith characterizes as "the primary setting for early US novels at the turn into the nineteenth century," and "examine[s] the liminal city that emerges in US print culture" (15–16). Klimasmith writes, "The novels I examine in Part II [*Ormond*, *Dorval*, and *Monima*] allow us to enter early urban spaces differently and to access, through the practice of reading, a compelling account of an American urban consciousness in transition" (139).

Blending archival/historical research and sophisticated literary analysis, *Urban Rehearsals* makes significant contributions to the study of early American literature and culture. In terms of additional avenues of inquiry, *Urban Rehearsals* focuses on plays and novels which, given what was published during the era in question, leads to an emphasis on northern coastal cities such as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. Recent work by Jordan Alexander Stein (*When Novels Were Books*, 2020) and Koenig (*Founded in Fiction*, 2021) demonstrates the fluidity of the “novel” as a generic category, particularly in the eighteenth century, and points to the ways in which the term “novel” has been retrospectively applied to fiction that itself critiqued and/or resisted this categorization. Koenig in particular focuses on “competing varieties of fictionality” that circulated in early America (1). Future studies might extend Klimasmith’s valuable work by looking beyond the novel at other fictional representations of urban spaces to expand the geographic scope and further our understanding of the city in early American literature and culture.

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*Queering the Enlightenment: Kinship and Gender in Eighteenth-Century French Literature* by Tracy L. Rutler

Voltaire Foundation/Liverpool University Press, 2021. 304pp. £65.

ISBN 978-1800859807.

Review by Chris Roulston, Western University,  
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While the exploration of kinship relations in eighteenth-century French literature is not a new topic, *Queering the Enlightenment* expands the discussion by casting a queer lens on a range of canonical authors and by showing how certain of their works challenge traditional kinship structures. Drawing from both known and lesser-known texts by Montesquieu, Voltaire, Prévost, Crébillon fils, Marivaux, and Graffigny, Tracy L. Rutler argues that French Enlightenment authors narrate the destabilizing of entrenched patriarchal structures through their depiction of non-normative kinship relations. For these authors, the Enlightenment involved “reorienting one’s relation to power” by transforming the terms of how intimate relations could be imagined (5). Using a range of contemporary theorists, including the work of Foucault and Rancière, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and queer and feminist theory, Rutler develops or expands notions such as Prévost’s regime of the brother and Graffigny’s regime of the sister, as well as introducing

José Esteban Muñoz's concept of cruising to show how these authors attempt to imagine new forms of intimacy. I understand Rutler's work less as a reclaiming of Enlightenment values than showing how those values involved the questioning of certain key categories such as the traditional family through the reimagining of modes of community and of social and kinship relations. At the heart of this work is an examination of how these authors aimed to rewrite the terms of the social contract to create less normative and predictable social scripts.

Unable to maintain its firm political hold following the death of Louis XIV, France's absolute monarchy was weakening and being challenged by Enlightenment thinkers from multiple angles; Rutler convincingly shows how the patriarchal family became one of the Enlightenment's most effectively contested sites of authority. In many of the works analyzed, female figures possess a new voice that exposes the violence of the patriarchal system even as they continue to serve as its victims. In Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* (1721), the epistolary form creates a "cacophony of voices" (43) that exemplifies Jacques Rancière's concept of *dissensus*, which prevents those in authority, such as Usbek, from determining the shape of the narrative, embodied by Roxane's damning final letter. Rutler also persuasively shows how works such as Voltaire's *Oedipe* (1718) and Marivaux's *La Vie de Marianne* (1731–41) reflect the instability of the politics of the period, often by augmenting female characters' voices. An author such as Crébillon fils, in turn, challenges familial models by creating a language of libertinism that offers "non-normative erotic systems in ways that allow a space to imagine utopian communities of desiring bodies" (138). With Crébillon, libertinism has not yet been instrumentalized, and it can inhabit a queer sociality, privileging queer models of cruising and wandering over that of the reproductive family. Other challenges to the regime of the father, however, can reinforce patriarchal models, in particular the evolution of the regime of the brother. While the development of the notion of *fraternité* as opposed to *paternité* will become key to the concept of revolutionary brotherhood, Rutler argues that in Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* (1731) and *Histoire d'une Grecque moderne* (1740), *fraternité* could in fact be more devastating for women and minorities than conventional patriarchy because it is less secure and more narcissistic. Questioning the father, therefore, does not always produce a more liberatory politics.

Rutler concludes with works that challenge patriarchal Oedipal structures and that redefine normative familial relations through the figures of the mother, the daughter, and the sister. Drawing on the early French feminism of Héléne Cixous and Julia Kristeva, Rutler argues for the

construction of a maternal symbolic in selected works by Marivaux, in which fathers are absent and key bonds are established between mothers and daughters. However, while Rutler convincingly shows how Marivaux does something unique with his female protagonists, it is perhaps too ambitious to claim that he successfully establishes an alternative economy of desire and radically challenges eighteenth-century kinship models. Appropriately concluding with Graffigny and Zilia's famous refusal of marriage in *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747), Rutler also brings in Graffigny's lesser-known plays and shows how through the ensemble of her oeuvre and her correspondence, Graffigny was repeatedly rewriting and revising her work in ways that were questioning kinship relations and the role of women. With Graffigny's regime of the sister, marriage and reproduction give way to friendship bonds and alternative forms of relationality.

*Queering the Enlightenment* is ambitious in scope and offers a valuable overview of the political as well as the literary landscape of Enlightenment France. It is as much a feminist intervention as it is a queer one. While Rutler's use of theory is useful within the chapters themselves, the introduction's syntheses of various theoretical positions are at times too reductive to be entirely helpful. The book's strength lies in the attentive and compelling close readings of a wide range of French Enlightenment texts. Cumulatively, these readings provide a convincing claim for how works that explore intimate relations reflect the broader political picture of an increasingly anxious monarchy, and for how these works begin to offer alternative, less normative social and political models that do effectively queer the Enlightenment.

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*Collective Understanding, Radicalism, and Literary History, 1645–1742* by Melissa Mowry

Oxford University Press, 2021. viii+250pp. \$80. ISBN 978-0192844385.

Review by Leah Orr, University of Louisiana,  
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Melissa Mowry's new book tackles one of the great axioms of eighteenth-century cultural studies: that the eighteenth century saw an inevitable rise of individualism from the debate over selfhood and personhood in the mid-seventeenth-century civil wars. Such a narrative, Mowry argues, disguises the more democratic or populist impulses in the mid-seventeenth century and their long influence through the Restoration. Instead, she argues that later literary writers were chiefly responsible for the promotion of individualism, exceptionalism, and sovereignty as the primary modes of understanding the self and a person's role in the state. This ambitious and interesting argument takes a genuinely fresh approach to a long-standard view of the period.

The first two chapters establish the historical grounding for Mowry's understanding of collectivity in the mid-seventeenth century, primarily through the writings and philosophy of the Levellers, a radical political faction who were against exceptionalism and sovereignty in favour of populism and broader, though not universal, suffrage. Mowry digs deeply into the extensive surviving archives about the Levellers to show that their arguments constituted a genuine threat to the established order that was only suppressed through arrests and executions. She shows that their practices of collaborative authorship and the inclusion of women in their writings and publication practices were enacting the populist message they promoted (41–49). The Levellers are an illustrative example because they are so well documented and, for a short period, were highly visible. I am less convinced of their lasting importance; the documentary record disappears after about 1650, with the exception of several manuscript petitions that Mowry has uncovered in the National Archives and discusses here (79–85). While fascinating on their own as archival documents of women's political engagement in the interregnum, the fact that they were not printed and were little known suggests that the Levellers were no longer so influential.

The last three chapters of *Collective Understanding* cover a range of literary texts to show how they were engaged in the question of non-elite collectivity. Mowry discusses the plays of Aphra Behn, particularly *The Roundheads* (1681) and *The Widdow Ranter* (1689), both of which are set in the recent past and treat the theme of sovereignty. As Mowry argues, "each play creates a world that pits a mercurial non-elite collectivity against the stable virtue of a romantic couple" (98). This is a

new angle on Behn's well-known royalism, showing how she deployed a romantic plot for political ends. In chapter 4, Mowry examines the mythos of the tyrant-killer as a hero, pointing to the ways that collectivity was reinterpreted as a mob that could threaten the state. Defoe, for example, omitted the non-elite collective from his historical writing and emphasized the singularity and exceptionalism of the non-elite characters in his novels. Mowry offers a reading of *Moll Flanders* (1722) that shows how Moll's reliance on her own "'enterprise' has nothing at all to do with self-fulfillment. Instead, it is the practice that promises to liberate Moll and Jemy from the vagaries and degradations of collective affiliation" (148–49). Such an argument qualifies the longstanding interpretation of the novel by Ian Watt (*The Rise of the Novel*, 1957) and others of Moll as a champion of individualism. In Mowry's view, Defoe is seeking to distance his non-elite hero from the mob and reframe her labour as a quality of her individual exceptionalism rather than a collective condition of the working class (155). For Moll to obtain her individual fulfilment, she leaves the collective behind her and becomes a landowner—and, as Mowry points out, a slave owner (170).

The final chapter, labelled a "Counterpoint," offers a somewhat different stance that shows how certain works of fiction found new ways to invest in the power of the collective in the mid-eighteenth century. Mowry reads *Roxana* (1724; generally attributed to Defoe) as a response to Eliza Haywood's *Idalia* (1723), and she also reads the 1740 version of *Roxana* that mingles *Roxana* with a different Haywood novel, *The British Recluse* (1722). She makes the case that a new kind of collectivity emerges in the form of collective authorship in works of pastiche and journalism that was private and domestic rather than political—and therefore less threatening to the state (201). One of the most salient points throughout these readings of works by Behn and Defoe, and to a lesser extent Haywood, is the treatment of these works as historical for their own time. While Behn's plays have often been discussed in terms of the political moments in which they are set, Defoe's novels are routinely treated as more or less contemporary to their publication date, and Mowry argues convincingly that readers who do so miss a key political implication of Defoe's fictional project in his intentional setting of *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* in the seventeenth century. Her reminder of the politics of the recent past should also affect how we read Haywood's works and other early eighteenth-century fictions.

*Collective Understanding* is making a big argument, and there are inevitably some areas where it falls short. The connection between the Levellers and the later literary writers is tenuous at times, and the focus on that faction to the exclusion of others sometimes seems questionable.

The prose can be a little dense in spots, particularly when discussing political philosophy. The copy I reviewed was a first printing that was missing some cross references and included citations to apparently two earlier titles for *Collective Understanding*. Mowry is to be commended for taking on a topic, which few have touched, with such keen scepticism and assured capabilities in multiple disciplines: political philosophy, cultural history, and literary criticism.

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*Perception and Analogy: Poetry, Science, and Religion in the Eighteenth Century* by Rosalind Powell

Manchester University Press, 2021. 296pp. £80. ISBN 978-1526157041.

Review by Annika Mann, ASU's New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, Phoenix, Arizona, United States

*Perception and Analogy* is an erudite survey of the analogies used to comprehend perception in eighteenth-century Britain. In chapters covering outer space, light, colour, and the physiology of the eye and the other senses, Rosalind Powell's study traces how physico-theological writers engage with empirical accounts of perception to prove nature's providential design. These writers use analogy to grapple with celestial and anatomical discoveries that challenge religious truths, including beliefs in universal capacities of perception—of particular interest for scholars of disability. Grappling with what she terms “seeing scientifically,” Powell argues that these writers use analogy to facilitate “readers’ cognitive experiences of scientific perception without the need for direct observation” (3). In excavating these analogies, Powell affirms how analogy bridges scientific and religious discourses, as it “align[s] new knowledge with accepted beliefs” (10). Powell's study is generously grounded in recent scholarly work across the fields of literature and science, particularly evolving beliefs about observation and sensation (Shapin and Schaffer 1988, Jackson 2008, Goodman 2004), the close relationship between science and religion (Markley 1993, Weiss Smith 2016), the history of analogy (Beer 1996, Griffiths 2016), and physical disability during the eighteenth century (Turner 2012, Mounsey 2019). The strength of *Perception and Analogy* comes in its detailed catalogue of how analogies are used to affirm religious beliefs during this period. Scholars working in disability studies will find the chapters on human limitation particularly useful, as Powell's close readings affirm the centrality

of disabled bodies for linking medical and religious discourses during the eighteenth century.

The first chapter, my favourite, explores the domestication of physical knowledge about celestial bodies to amateurs in the first half of the eighteenth century—particularly women. Reading poems by natural philosophers like Henry Baker, educational essays by Mary Chudleigh, as well as dialogues by John Harris and others, Powell details the analogies that “make outer space familiar,” including using cannonballs to explain velocities or mops to explain diurnal motion (37). She points out that these analogies inspire readers “to adopt a mode of careful observation when encountering everyday phenomena and to align these empirical observations with newly acquired knowledge about outer space” (39). Powell ties this “active analogizing” to the use of instruments and models, which train viewers to imagine themselves occupying different perspectives (40). While knowledge about outer space is domesticated in these examples (the kitchen is the preferred site of many of these analogies), these also license imaginative leaps, or spiritual flights, to “a new kind of speculative astronomy based on analogy” found in poetry by David Mallett, John Hughes, and Elizabeth Carter (50). As Powell notes, these flights remain capturable by religious writers, as ideas about plenitude and pluralism allow “for a celebration of the infinite variety of God’s universe in spite of the apparent diminution of earth’s significance” (52). While these flights do reach their limit, careful readings illuminate the elastic nature of analogy: to move across varieties of scale and to bring that which is infinite back within human bounds.

The problems and possibilities of those bounds take centre stage in chapters 2 through 4, which detail how physio-theological writers respond to new scientific ideas about light, colour, and the human eye, all of which produce a sense of the subjectivity, fallibility, and variety of human perception. As Powell explains, this sense of limitation is particularly fruitful for physico-theological discourse. Chapter 2 explores how tropes of light as knowledge are revised by these writers to critique empirical explanations, while chapter 3 explores how teaching readers to see colour scientifically—as a product of light and the eye—centres subjective, embodied experiences of seeing. Reading publications by Christopher Smart, Mark Akenside, and Richard Blackmore alongside that of Richard Jago and James Thompson, Powell explores how “colour perception is reassessed as an individual, somatic experience where the private world meets public” (152). Chapter 4 moves inside the eye, as Powell traces the waning of the analogy of the eye as a camera obscura, transformed by John Locke’s formulation of Molyneux’s Question in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), accounts of successful

cataract surgery, and the verses of blind poet Thomas Blacklock. While these publications do not dethrone the longstanding association of light with knowledge, or ableist notions of sight as the highest or “fullest sense,” as Powell notes, “Sight, and the interpretation of the visual world as connected to tangible reality, are ... shown to be dependent upon repeated experience and judgment” (189). In these chapters, careful attention to analogy in the hands of religious writers reveals how central disabled bodies are as a bridge to religious faith, as these writers “often advertise a theological context for [what they perceive as bodily] restrictions” (15). As such, while Powell, like other scholars, finds an “increasingly medicalized account of vision” during this period (5), what she deftly shows is how that medicalized account facilitates the co-presence of religious models for comprehending sensory experience.

In chapter 5, Powell traces how “seeing scientifically” is pluralized in the mid-eighteenth century, as writers move from accounts of limited to intersensory perception. In the poetry of Edward Young and William Blake, Powell recounts an “emerging awareness of how diverse sensory abilities can give access to knowledge” (216), while in Hartley’s theory of vibrations analogies of sounds displace those of sight. As she explains, “the auditory metaphors and analogies between sensory and musical instruments that Hartley generates in his account of association help to show how this imagery is related to a theory of subjective and interrelated perception” (230). It is in this chapter that she returns to instruments, specifically the Aeolian harp. Powell explains that “like the astronomical instruments, the Aeolian harp was a popular parlour toy that blended science and polite culture and evoked wonder” (235). Moving to representations of the Aeolian harp in Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth, Powell notes that the Aeolian harp “escapes the dominant ocularcentric discourse around perception and offers an alternative to the static prospect view” by embedding the perceiving body in the landscape and by modelling the interconnection of mind and bodily senses (235). At the end of *Perception and Analogy*, one discovers a story not of mastery but of participation, not of universality but of plurality and accommodation. For what are these polite toys but modes of access, different ways of teaching variable bodies how to perceive the world around them, even if they are taught to read for signs of the same?

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*Romantic Pasts: History, Fiction and Feeling in Britain, 1790–1850* by Porscha Fermanis

Edinburgh University Press, 2022. 312pp. \$110. ISBN 978-1474481885.

Review by Ina Ferris, University of Ottawa,  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Porscha Fermanis's stimulating book has two principal objectives: to reposition Romantic-era history as central rather than incidental to the emergence of modern historical methods and, more particularly, to recalibrate the relations of history and fiction in the period by dislodging fiction from its current prominence as innovative agent in the reconfiguration of the historical field in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Both objectives hinge on a reconsideration of the place of feeling in historical writing and thinking, and Fermanis's critical move is to argue that the attention to feeling in romantic-era histories, which led to their banishment from the history of modern historiography, embodies a distinctly modern historical insight and was a catalyst in the documentary turn that is definitive of modern historiographic practice. Addressing the still common identification of "Romantic" history as a sentimental revivification of the past, she frames her analysis by positing a distinction between sentimental historicism ("feeling history"), concerned with affective states, and a counter-sentimental psychological historicism ("history of feeling"), concerned with the analysis of mental states (3). Concentrating on the counter-sentimental mode, *Romantic Pasts* brings into sharp focus its historicization of feeling as both an agential force in historical change and as itself a socio-historical phenomenon available to historical inquiry (albeit not transparently). Structured as a set of richly contextualized comparative case studies, the book understands history as primarily a mode of writing and pursues the question of "how feelings are represented or embedded in texts" (10). More specifically, it investigates the ways in which historical writers sought to incorporate the dimension of feeling into historical study by "repurposing" historical conventions and forms already in place.

Fermanis thus sets out to make visible the obscured role of procedures and structures internal to historiographic practice in the experiential and inward turn of historiography generally credited to more high-profile neighbouring genres like the novel. Her intention is not to deny those pressures (admittedly potent) but to rebalance a field unbalanced by an "over-emphasis" on fiction's generative powers (25). Revisiting the question of constitutive generic relations broached in *Rethinking British Romantic History 1770–1845* (2014), which she co-edited with John Regan, the current study reverses the latter's lens to foreground the

impetus of specifically historical rather than literary or quasi-historical forms. This shift effects two significant and salutary interventions. First, it modulates the dominant literary-critical trope of porous generic borders by arguing that if history and fiction operated “alongside” one another in an interactive and fluid zone, they did not do so in “continuously cross-fertilising” relation (3). They are hence best understood as “interrelated activities but not part of a single endeavour” (26). Second, it rehabilitates classical narrative history (general or official history), long relegated to the critical sidelines as outmoded or moribund. Reclaiming the form, it refashions narrative history as responsive to and actively working within a distinctively modern context of thinking and writing. To establish the analytic ground, an opening chapter on Edmund Burke and Mary Wollstonecraft on the French Revolution deftly sets the familiar pair in supple relation both to elaborate the parameters of sentimental/counter-sentimental history and to delineate the question of collective memory as pivotal in their construction of the divergent modalities of historical experience through which each processed historical and social time.

The following two chapters, bringing into direct view the specific milieu of narrative history, constitute the core of the book’s argument. Chapter 2, summoning William Godwin and Thomas Carlyle on Oliver Cromwell, concentrates on the revitalization of the largely discarded form of the character sketch in their efforts to insert into the historical matrix a sense of inner life in the past. The most compelling chapter in the book, it offers the study’s most effective example of the mobilization of classic historical forms and primary documents as “internalising techniques” (60). Carlyle’s remarkable *Oliver Cromwell’s Letters and Speeches* takes centre stage, not only because of its documentary base but also, importantly, because it interjects Carlyle himself into the text to figure the historian’s own hermeneutic struggle with the opacity of sources. Carlyle’s inventive iconoclasm (his *French Revolution* features in a later chapter) emerges as prototypical of the historical methods and techniques valorized by *Romantic Pasts*. Chapter 3 on national history and national feeling yields a less certain focus given the tangled complex of issues (origin, identity, allegiance, race/ethnicity) put into play by the new nationalist inflection of general national history. To gain purchase on these issues, the chapter brings three non-metropolitan histories into relation—Walter Scott’s *History of Scotland* (1829–30), Thomas Moore’s *History of Ireland* (1835–45), and Robert Southey’s *History of Brazil* (1810–19)—to exemplify how “alternative identarian models of collective attachment” forged in peripheries could work doubly to both

reinforce and disrupt metropolitan models (87). What emerges most clearly and resonantly in the chapter is that in either case the pressures of peripheral positioning unsettled the developmental narrative of national history from the start, releasing counter-temporalities of historical time as a manifold and uncertain process in ways that implicitly cast the nation as unfinished project, no matter the resolution finally offered.

The final two chapters transfer attention from reconstitutions of the past to the constitution of history as a discourse in the present, highlighting the function of style in the writing and reception of historical works. Chapter 4, nicely pairing Thomas Macaulay and Carlyle, rereads their contrasting styles to advance a notion of historical style as a mode of historical thinking, one of the book's most valuable lines of argument. Chapter 5, turning to the context of reception, represents a change in method, presenting a survey of nineteenth-century periodical reviewing culture with particular attention to the use of style as a sorting device in establishing the historical protocols that partitioned the historical field into amateur and professional zones. The chapter picks up threads that run throughout the study, but its shift in method tends to distract and break the book's momentum as it moves toward the epilogue. The epilogue is a model of its kind, offering a lucid summation of the central argument and a thoughtful reflection on the book's conceptual building blocks that reverberates with current thinking on questions of modernity, experience, and consciousness. A fitting conclusion, it encapsulates the achievement of *Romantic Pasts* as a whole. Spotlighting neglected corners of the historical field, it adds dimension and depth to the field while expanding its horizon so as to amplify channels of critical entry and stimulate the rethinking it has sought to set in motion.

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*Mediating Cultural Memory in Britain and Ireland: From the 1688 Revolution to the 1745 Jacobite Rising* by Leith Davis

Cambridge University Press, 2022. 299pp. £75. ISBN 978-1316510810.

Review by Daniel Cook, University of Dundee,  
Dundee, Scotland, United Kingdom

Readers of Leith Davis's 1998 interdisciplinary account of eighteenth-century Scottish literature and politics, *Acts of Union: Scotland and the Literary Negotiation of the British Nation, 1707–1830*, among other publications, will know what to expect with her latest book. They will not be disappointed. The range of Davis's learning, as well as the purposefulness of her investigative approach, remain as astonishing as ever. Ballads, official documents, manuscript newsletters, printed correspondence, newspapers, and popular histories fall under her ken. And, most impressively of all, she weaves together the tenets of a range of burgeoning critical fields in an indefatigable exploration of five pivotal and highly contentious episodes in the histories of England, Scotland, and Ireland: the 1688 "Glorious" Revolution; The War of the Two Kings in Ireland (1688–91); the Scottish colonial enterprise in Darien that helped to establish the conditions for the Acts of Union in 1707 (1695–1700); the series of conflicts that resulted in the 1715 Jacobite Rising; and the 1745 Jacobite Rising. Principally, she draws on and contributes to book history, British studies, and memory studies. With calm authority, Davis addresses some significant gaps in these fields, not least of all the curious lack of eighteenth-century material in the latter. As this new book amply demonstrates, print media of the first half of the century was unique, even alien to subsequent periods, but its reach has been just as influential.

Memory studies scholars have tended to focus solely on John Locke and David Hume from the earlier part of the period under scrutiny. As important as those thinkers were for their contemporaries and the following generations, an author-centric exploration of cultural memory formation will always be limited and partial. This is not to suggest authors do not feature prominently here. Hume, Walter Scott, and Tobias Smollett occupy the concluding chapter, which explores Scottish cultural memory after the '45. Their presence is contrastive: national histories by Hume and Smollett, the argument runs, replicated counter-memories that appeared decades earlier. Scott instead turned the complex knot of memory and counter-memory inherited from his sources into a metafictional meditation on the narrative value of national discourse at a time of enforced political assimilation. Think of that moment in *Waverley* (1814) where the eponymous English Jacobite describes the aftermath of battle: the unnamed, unseen bodies have

vanished, but the bloodshed leaves an unsettling mark that will forever affect political and personal relations within Britain and Ireland. For the bulk of *Mediating Cultural Memory*, as Davis models throughout, case studies of stored memories (to bring in Aleida Assmann's notion) allow for and even demand a wider ranging scope. Certainly, the case studies will play their part in shifting the Anglo-centrism of studies of eighteenth-century Britain in general but especially in political histories.

In this regard, Davis's book aligns well with an increased attention to commemoration and national forgetting in Scotland. Kenneth McNeill's *Scottish Romanticism and Collective Memory in the British Atlantic* (2021) perhaps appeared too late for Davis's purposes. Although covering different areas, spatially and temporally, each book attends to the role and function of collective memory in discourses of all kinds. At the same time, as Davis acknowledges, case studies predominately focused on the eighteenth century are curiously timely for reasons that extend beyond accounts of national formations. Our collective media ecology today is vastly different from the primarily print-based media of the period under examination. And the contexts of Brexit, independence referenda in Scotland, and the like cannot be factored out of modern treatments. Of particular interest for readers of *Mediating Cultural Memory*, to my mind, is its attentiveness to the historical silencing of competing counter-memories. Such counter-memories leave a tantalizing trace that proves elusive. The duplicative powers of print, as book historian Elizabeth Eisenstein once posited, gave words physical permanence. This gave rise to portability, as Ann Rigney has shown in her studies of the circulation of cultural memory. But permanence and portability threaten to obfuscate the impermanent and the unportable, whether by design or neglect. Impressively synthesizing the work of scholars from different fields, Davis also revisits and revises others. For example, Benedict Anderson argues for the importance of specific genres in print, such as the newspaper and the novel, in understanding imagined communities. The present book offers a different way, one that considers but does not explain away the complex media ecology that articulated a nation's memories. We might perceive a silent slippage between imagined communities and nationhood, which is exacerbated by Davis's pragmatic focus on methodology over terminology.

Nation might be the distracting term here. Perhaps a variation on William St Clair's reading nation—the media nation—might unlock things for us, though we risk prioritizing mechanisms over processes. Davis picks up the challenge posed by Clifford Siskin and William Warner to scholars of eighteenth-century studies, to prioritize mediation. Mediation still requires clearer definition, or at least wider acceptance

across disciplines, and perhaps a more thorough disentanglement from accounts that fetishize print technologies at the expense of materiality. Davis prefers to lead by example. Bringing in an array of sources from different genres and modes, Davis not only revises long-engrained assumptions about the people's reactions to current events, but she also shows how concerted the efforts to shape popular perceptions of such events were. Davis approaches the Glorious Revolution as something more than a top-down political change wrought at the end of the seventeenth century. It is, she claims, also a moment of media change, in which the use of printed works to inscribe and circulate sites of memory became possible even while the event unfolded. Davis's account of the conflict in Ireland known in Gaelic as *Cogadh an Dá Rí* (The War of the Two Kings) draws attention not only to the potent newspaper coverage that circulated throughout the four nations but also to the advertisements for other works in print that more quietly shaped wider assumptions about Ireland. Looking at how events that led to the parliamentary union between England and Scotland were reported, Davis notes the prominence of the Darien venture—and its failures—in propaganda spread through manuscript as much as print.

Foundational yet fraught, eighteenth-century mediations of cultural memory repay our attention from whatever vantage point we take. Historical responses to political events shaped modern media in specific ways, but not always in a teleological sense. In other words, eighteenth-century media looks familiar yet is fundamentally different: this knotty tension drives the present study and will further ongoing conversations that are reshaping a number of burgeoning and established fields of inquiry, including memory studies, book history, Jacobite studies, and British and Irish literature writ large.

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*British Romanticism and Peace* by John Bugg

Oxford University Press, 2022. 240pp. \$80. ISBN 978-0198839668.

Review by Paula Yurss Lasanta, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona,  
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International conflicts marked the Romantic era in Britain—the American Revolutionary Wars (1775–83), the French Revolutionary Wars (1792–1802), and the Napoleonic Wars (1803–15). In 1992, the influential study *Britons* by Linda Colley argued that, during the eighteenth century, British national identity was forged as a response to the antagonism with France; therefore, the way in which Romantic writers tackle war in their texts has been a primary focus of analysis for scholars of the period. *British Romanticism and Peace* offers an alternative perspective: it examines the participation of Romantic authors in the discourse of peace that followed the cessation of military conflicts—Treaty of Paris (1783), Treaty of Amiens (1802), and Treaty of Paris (1814). In this compelling study, John Bugg demonstrates that the authors whom he studies did not envision an intrinsically belligerent future. On the contrary, he shows that these authors advocated for peace and believed that pacifist policies would secure the well-being of the nation.

Bugg's analysis covers a variety of literary genres, ranging from poetry to journalism to novels. Each chapter focuses on the response of a specific author to the arrival of peace. Chapter 1 is dedicated to Helen Maria Williams's *An Ode on the Peace* (1783). Chapter 2 examines the poems that William Wordsworth wrote in 1802. Chapter 3 explores William Cobbett's journalistic pieces. Finally, chapter 4 pays attention to John Keats's "On Peace" (1804) and Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (1817). Each chapter is brilliantly contextualized, as Bugg always provides an elaborate historical background. The works of Williams, Wordsworth, Cobbett, Keats, and Austen are discussed alongside those of other contemporary writers who also reacted to the arrival of peace. For instance, chapter 2 does not study Wordsworth's poetry in isolation, but also considers the travel accounts by Thomas Holcroft, Maria Edgeworth, and Anne Plumptre, who visited France in the same years. By including the response of various authors to the end of war, Bugg provides a thorough picture of public opinion that expands our knowledge of the development of pacifist thinking during the period.

The introduction defines the terms drawn from peace studies, such as the difference between positive and negative peace. Bugg explains these terms in a clear and illustrative manner that is useful for readers who might be unfamiliar with this academic field. In like manner, he sheds light on the intellectual background that contributed to the development of the peace movement before the 1780s. With this contextualization,

readers obtain a comprehensive notion of the ideological debates in which the authors he discusses were engaged.

Although the start of British Romanticism has traditionally been considered to be in the 1790s, Bugg begins his study with the end of the American Revolutionary War. He convincingly explains the reasoning behind this decision, as he locates the emergence of Britain's first popular peace movement in 1783. He reaches this conclusion by paying attention to literary productions and popular activism, an argument that implicitly reinforces the idea that the pro-peace writings also constituted a form of political action. Speaking against war could be regarded as anti-patriotic, and Bugg shows that the authors who openly promoted peace were undertaking a dangerous task.

Chapter 1 discusses Williams's celebration of the end of the American Revolutionary War. Taking into consideration that Williams was an acute commentator on political affairs throughout the period covered by this book, I believe that this chapter insufficiently explores Williams's contribution to the pro-peace movement. I would have been interested in learning about the development of the concept of peace in her writing, as she witnessed other major historical events.

Wordsworth's peacetime sonnets have been traditionally interpreted as an expression of his anxiety about the cessation of the military conflict. Bugg offers a different reading and demonstrates that, in these poems, Wordsworth cherishes peace and deliberately departs from the rhetoric of alarm. Although Bugg succeeds in proving this point, Wordsworth's role as a peace advocate remains ambiguous, especially when taking into account how his stance on peace changed after 1803.

Chapter 3 explores William Cobbett's ideological evolution from war supporter to pro-peace propagandist and shows his arguments both in favour of and against perpetual peace. This approach is unique when compared to the rest of the chapters because Cobbett's literary career is explored as a whole. This kind of approach would have been useful in Bugg's discussion of other authors, especially Williams, who also engaged with the topic of peace narrative at various points in her career.

Chapter 4 deals with the great bulk of responses to the arrival of peace in 1814, starting with Keats's "On Peace"; however, much of the chapter is dedicated to an analysis of Austen's *Persuasion*. Once again, Bugg challenges the traditional understanding of Austen's novel as pro-military. Instead, he successfully argues that Austen responds to the alarmism in the pro-war faction in order to present a portrait of Britain that has the potential of flourishing after the war in both the economic and the social terrain.

This book shows that, despite the recent interest in pro-peace discourses, the Romantic debate on peace has been overshadowed by the attention paid to writings on war. Bugg leaves readers wondering if the assumed perception of the Romantic period as fundamentally militaristic has been the result of scholarly misunderstandings of the movement. For that reason, this study's contribution is remarkably valuable. *British Romanticism and Peace* stresses the complexities and plurality of opinions that coexisted in the period and offers a comprehensive understanding of the writing it produced.

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*Domestic Space in Britain, 1750–1840: Materiality, Sociability and Emotion* by Freya Gowrley

Bloomsbury, 2022. 272pp. \$110. ISBN 978-1501343353.

Review by Sara Pennell, University of Greenwich,  
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Some time ago, the UK TV station Channel 4 ran a series of “idents” (short films advertising the station's outputs) that asked some of the stars of its shows what they would rescue from their burning homes. Much of what was mentioned would sit comfortably under the label sneeringly given by the 4<sup>th</sup> earl of Chesterfield, Philip Stanhope, as knick-knacks, the objects of the “trifling and frivolous mind,” cited by Freya Gowrley in this, her first monograph. Gowrley delivers a close study of households in which knick-knacks vied with the paintings and sculptures that Chesterfield wished his son to focus his more virtuosic sights upon. She seeks to recuperate the ways in which objects as “trifling” as wafer tongs, canvas gazebos, and playbills for private theatricals were not only resonant in the formation of domestic “objectscapes” (Pitts and Versluys, 2021), but also constitutive of identities and networks, framing and sustaining them, even after the dissolution of the household, the death of the owner, or the dispersal of the objects.

Gowrley makes some sweeping claims for her study of “materiality, sociability and emotion” through these domestic objectscales, although we only encounter a handful of “homes” across her micro-historical case study chapters. These homes contain some of the most intriguingly “assembled” and aestheticized interiors of the second half of the long eighteenth century: A la Ronde, the collaged home of the Parminter cousins in Devon; Plas Newydd, the gothic cottage retreat in north Wales of Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby (both A la Ronde and

Plas Newydd are now in the care of the National Trust); and last, but definitely not least, Strawberry Hill, Horace Walpole's Arcadian self-fashioning project in southwest London. Gowrley's book is intended as the first study to examine and elucidate the "complex relationship between sociability, emotion and domestic material culture" in this period (5), which might come as something of a surprise to those whose works are cited in the introduction, notably Amanda Vickery, Sally Holloway, and Jane Hamlett. Nonetheless, the close reading of the selected domestic settings—or Caroline Lybbe Powys's epistolary accounts of domestic interiors she visited—is robustly framed around six themes: representation/description, dissemination/publication, translation, exchange, acquisition, and loss, which she handles with firm theoretical and methodological judgment, as well as a lightness of touch that is not always apparent in first books.

While the author steers a course away from "the country house and London town house" as more conventional sites of art historical enquiry into the resonances of the domestic environment, with one exception—John Wilkes's no longer surviving cottage retreat on the Isle of Wight—the sites of enquiry are far from "ordinary." A la Ronde and Strawberry Hill were purpose-built for their first occupants, while Plas Newydd was effectively transformed by Butler and Ponsonby, and, despite later nineteenth-century predations by subsequent owners, survives today as a heritage site dedicated to the extraordinary relationship it embodies. But, for all their exceptionality, these are domestic interiors about which Gowrley does find new and compelling things to say. For Plas Newydd, she makes a convincing case for looking at the material and visual gifts Butler and Ponsonby received and gave as constituting more than simply an artifact of their intimate friendship, but rather as a site of "Romantic friendship" (141, the capitalization is important here), where the landscape (and cuttings from it) as well as the disposition of the interiors, conjured up passionate and enduring memories for visitors such as Anna Seward. The careful crafting, collaging, and collaboration that constructed the bespoke structures, interiors, and furnishings of the Parminters' A la Ronde are likewise examined in relation to commemoration (of travel, people, and family) and material reconfiguration, whereby collected objects, fragments, and materials are translated into new objects, with new resonances for those who made them (or commissioned them to be made; we are not told whether the Parminters' specimen table, for example, was physically assembled by them, or designed by them but constructed by someone else). The means by which collecting, collaborating, and exchanging objects and the consequent associations emerging through those objects queered

conventional expectations of what domestic relations should and could be is likewise excavated in both the case studies of Plas Newydd and Strawberry Hill, without surrendering to the slipperiness of the framing discourse that Gowrley herself acknowledges.

At the heart of this study, however, is a paradoxical process that Gowrley revisits time and again across her case studies, but which is not perhaps fully articulated in the concluding chapter that explicitly addresses it: material loss. While she continually stresses how objects “physicalize important relationships” within these homes (209), we return to the legal fact that such objects were always classified as movables: the Parminters’ grotto was a rare “fixture and fitting” that could not be legally dispersed. Although the title *Domestic Space in Britain* suggests a focus on spatiality and its material assemblages, we also get to confront the empty rooms (of Park Place), the decay of such spaces and collections (swiftly, in the case of Sandford Cottage, after Wilkes’s death), and the inherent mobility of these objects in and out of houses, collections, and families. For all the supposed power of legal bequest and testamentary invocation to translate an object into an heirloom and to conserve estates, the dynamics of a vibrant eighteenth-century market in everyday domestic second-hand goods, as well as objets d’art and books, meant dispersal and fragmentation were also forces in tension with those of preservation and memorialization. As we know from the infamous sales that broke up Walpole’s collections at Strawberry Hill and his father’s art collection a century before, the emotional heft of objects could be easily converted into hard cash and become someone else’s treasured possession. And, as the interiors that only survive today in the thickly descriptive Lybbe Powys letters also show us, we can only go so far with descriptive texts in summoning up the spirits of objects past; as Glenn Adamson argues, “When it comes to the material past, disappearance is the norm” (“The Case of the Missing Footstool: Reading the Absent Object,” in *History and Material Culture*, ed. K. Harvey [Routledge, 2009], 192). Of the six processes Gowrley shapes her lively account around, it is arguably material loss that we as historians of all stripes have to wrestle with most frequently and find techniques of enquiry and interpretation to account for. Gowrley’s work takes valuable steps in this direction, even if it perhaps oversells the textual mediation of “(im)material things” as a “compensatory methodology” (231).

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*Frances Burney and the Arts*, ed. Francesca Saggini  
 Palgrave, 2022. 144pp. £34.99. ISBN 978-3030988890.

Review by Katarina O’Brian, York University,  
 Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Ranging across a variety of topics and cultural objects—family juvenilia, needlework, opera, the muses—this collection provides a welcome addition to Burney scholarship and to the material studies turn. Such an eclectic set of interests and approaches might run the risk of engaging disparate topics without cohering into a single work, but one of the collection’s strengths is how these essays speak to each other, even when they appear to disagree, across diverse materials. As the editor Francesca Saggini puts it in her introduction, “‘Obscure Be Still the Unsuccessful Muse’: Frances Burney and the Arts,” each essay prioritizes a “plural and polyvocal Burney” by engaging “forms of multifaceted artistic expression in an inclusive and anti-hierarchical fashion” (3, 8). The spirit of the collection is illustrated by Saggini’s interpretation of the Valentine Greene mezzotint of *The Ladies Waldegrave* (Joshua Reynolds, 1780). In the world depicted by this collection, three sisters gathered around a piece of needlework might double as “the three goddesses of fate who collaboratively spin out the thread of Man’s future” (11). In Burney’s hands, and in the hands of these contributors, everyday spaces of craft, friendship, and domesticity become central to or set alongside seemingly more venerable forms of art.

Lorna J. Clark and Alicia Kerfoot engage this dynamic by examining handmade juvenilia and the needle arts respectively. Suggesting that Burney’s skill for drawing characters developed out of a wider Burney family culture, Clark dilates upon “Stories for Miss Cecilia,” a hand-stitched multimodal artifact made by, for, and about the Burney family children. A “study in contrasts” between two male cousins allows Clark to demonstrate the ways in which children’s material culture might cut across established social contexts, as a remarkably dissonant pair of illustrations suggests “a sneaking sympathy for the scapegrace, rather than the young prodigy” (121). Kerfoot’s study of the needle arts makes a case for the importance of stitched materials to Burney’s writing and to her navigation of various private, public, and court spaces. A form of labour that “connects mind and body,” Kerfoot submits, the needle arts are as much an internal exercise as an external work of handicraft (48). A means of soothing as well as an index to one’s grief or anxieties, embroidery complicates the development of heightened affects and psychological interiority for which Burney has long been known; as Kerfoot demonstrates across the four novels, a blush and a spoilt flower come to do similar narrative work (57).

Beth Kowaleski Wallace's contribution likewise defamiliarizes the embodied efforts behind the leisurely arts. Recovering the complex dynamics behind dancing as a form of labour that combines bodily discipline and improvisation, the essay might offer useful context for those interested in Alexander Pope's description of the studied carelessness of poetry, "As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance" (*An Essay on Criticism*, line 363). But a reading of the "tortured choreographic design" of *Camilla* (1796)—in which the forward and backward movement of the novel's protagonists positions dance as "a powerful metaphor for the narrative itself" (44, 46)—reveals the novel as a literary relative to this form of art, at once exhausting and spontaneous. Embodiment returns as the central problem of Cassandra Ulph's essay on music, gender, and shifting notions of audience and space, "'To Distinguish Us *Dilettanti* from the Artists': Instrumental Music in *The Wanderer*." Positioning harp playing in *The Wanderer* (1814) as a stark contrast to the "performative stillness" required of female musicians in the period, Ulph demonstrates how Ellis's "physicality is [made] visible, engaging her in a bodily economy as much as an artistic one" (81). Relocating public performance to the semi-private space of the family drawing room in the latter stages of her career, Ulph argues, Burney seeks to cultivate an alternative space of artistic professionalization, one that suspends the forces of audience and consumer economies.

Examining in turn the arts of opera, epic poetry, and historiography, Stephen A. Willier, Barbara Witucki, and Mascha Hansen each offer new angles on the question of cultural interpretation in Burney's life and works. Willier traces a history of Burney's encounters and correspondence with famed Italian castrato Gasparo Pacchierotti. Suggesting that Burney held "more than a purely musical interest" in the opera singer, Willier argues that Burney's affection for Pacchierotti derives in part from a personal investment in the connection between social marginalization and art (69). Here what Willier describes as Burney's insider "descriptions and interpretations of an operatic era" come from a place of mutual intimacy, of what Burney characterizes as "35 years of broken correspondence, though never broken esteem & regard" (76, 75). Reading *Camilla* in relation to four of the muses—Clio, Calliope, Thalia, and Melpomene—Witucki showcases how attention to classical genres and traditions tells a different sort of history, in which the continuation of the Tyrold family line is made parallel to the work of empire building, both ancient and modern. Such attention also allows Witucki to disentangle from *Camilla*'s narrative an inset Greek tragedy, in which Eugenia—seemingly made minor for her disfigurement and classical education—acts as the heroine. Whereas Witucki posits

national myth as central to domestic fiction, Hansen reads the *Memoirs of Doctor Burney* (1832) as a work that contests the very notion of what counts as history. More than an adept social observer, Hansen argues, Burney is also a historiographer of the present, prioritizing private and personal experience over landmark events. It feels appropriate for the collection to begin with Hansen's essay and end with Clark's: one of the many stories told by *Frances Burney and the Arts* is about an author who theorizes history with an awareness of the significance that something like a family scrapbook passed down for generations can have.

On their own, each of these essays makes a fine contribution to the thriving discipline of Burney studies; taken together, they do more—asking that we rethink the category of art, as well as the social divisions that Burney herself was often at pains to maintain. I was struck by how each of these essays highlighted the collective contexts behind Burney's engagement with the arts, less interested in solitary labour than in the friendships, networks, circles, and family culture that make such work possible. In this respect, the collection offers something like a counter-narrative to one of the most influential stories of Burney studies, her development of a liberal and privatized self. Gesturing toward the kind of collaborative engagement that humanistic inquiry tends to foreclose, they offer a welcome reorientation toward a study of the arts, broadly construed, and the collective ways in which scholars might study them.

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