

Michael Tomko, *British Romanticism and the Catholic Question: Religion, History and National Identity, 1778–1829*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. xi + 224, £52.50, ISBN: 978-0-230-27951-3.

This densely packed scholarly monograph sets out to examine ‘how the Catholic Question contributed to framing and fracturing the romantic “spirit of the age”’. It begins with an attempt to provide ‘a literary and historical examination of the Catholic Question’s persistent role in the culture wars of the romantic period’, resulting in the identification of the

most 'salient sets of events and discourses'. The rest of the monograph is taken up with four case studies claimed to embody the main positions taken on Catholic Emancipation: Elizabeth Inchbald, whose *A Simple Story* is taken to exemplify 'the difficulty of reconciling sectarian histories'; William Wordsworth, who is argued to have articulated 'an aesthetic vision of the *via media* as a stabilizing force between the two extremes Inchbald embodied'; Percy Bysshe Shelley, whose *The Cenci* is argued to have been 'a drama about the lingering issues surrounding Catholic Emancipation' and Sir Walter Scott, whose 'roseate medievalism' might be expected 'to remedy this foreclosure of sympathy'.

Tomko is claimed on the book's dustjacket to write at 'the intersection of politics, religion and romantic literature', a difficult and commendable task, but which does not seem entirely to succeed in this book. Steeped in modern historiographical and literary discourses and littered with scare quotes, *British Romanticism and the Catholic Question* reads like a highly specialist monograph for literary scholars rather than a genuinely interdisciplinary study which might be equally accessible or salient to historians, political scientists or theologians. Tomko's conclusion, that the Catholic Question should be viewed 'not only as crucial to the complex religious and cultural politics in the romantic period but also as foundational to shaping the parameters of civil society, national memory and religious difference in nineteenth-century Britain', at first glance a rather grandiose claim, is probably right. It is a pity that the clear thesis and detailed literary case studies put forward in *British Romanticism and the Catholic Question* are not presented in a more accessible style.

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