

# ROMANTIC TEXTUALITIES

LITERATURE AND PRINT CULTURE, 1780–1840



ISSN 1748-0116

ISSUE 23

SUMMER 2020



◆ SPECIAL ISSUE : THE MINERVA PRESS AND THE LITERARY MARKETPLACE ◆

[www.romtext.org.uk](http://www.romtext.org.uk)

◆ CARDIFF UNIVERSITY PRESS ◆

***Romantic Textualities: Literature and Print Culture, 1780–1840, 23 (Summer 2020)***

Available online at <[www.romtext.org.uk/](http://www.romtext.org.uk/)>; archive of record at  
<<https://publications.cardiffuniversitypress.org/index.php/RomText>>.

**Journal DOI:** 10.18573/ISSN.1748-0116 ♦ **Issue DOI:** 10.18573/romtext.i23

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**Aims and Scope:** Formerly *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text* (1997–2005), *Romantic Textualities: Literature and Print Culture, 1780–1840* is an online journal that is committed to foregrounding innovative Romantic-studies research into bibliography, book history, intertextuality and textual studies. To this end, we publish material in a number of formats: among them, peer-reviewed articles, reports on individual/group research projects, bibliographical checklists and biographical profiles of overlooked Romantic writers. *Romantic Textualities* also carries reviews of books that reflect the growing academic interest in the fields of book history, print culture, intertextuality and cultural materialism, as they relate to Romantic studies.

Ross Wilson, *Shelley and the Apprehension of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), viii + 225pp. ISBN 978-1-1396-4944-5; £19.99 (pb).

THERE'S AN INFINITIVE VERB THAT SCHOLARS have been using with increasing relish over the last decade or so: 'to problematise'. I am a fan neither of the term nor of the practice, believing that for most readers, poetry is opaque enough as it is, the critic's job being to offer what clarity she can. But it is something we do in any case, casting and recasting arguments from an increasing number of unique, sometimes obscure, angles, refracting the light, turning what might have been telescopes—a way of bringing something far off and lovely across the boundaries of time, place, genre or identity, into our newly resplendent ken—into kaleidoscopes: pretty, interesting but useless as navigational aids.

Percy Bysshe Shelley's was already a problematic corpus, fraught with fragments, co-authorings, deletions, contradictory manuscript copies and titular revisions, almost to the same rank degree that his was a problematic corpse: decayed, dismembered, sainted, quarantined; all of it dubious and difficult and intensely intriguing. Surprisingly, one subject on which the poet was more or less consistent throughout his brief career, was his conception of 'life' as that which quenches the original fire, fades the inspirational coals and stains 'the white radiance of eternity'. Over and again in poems, essays and letters, he tries new ways of saying the same thing about the dulling effects of the passage of time on one's ability to perceive. For him, poetry was the one antidote, the tool capable of restoring that lost vision, that freshness and vitality. And one can see why he returned to the topic: it's an *ars poetica*. Writing poetry, for Shelley, matters to the practical health—political, spiritual, relational—of the whole world, else why write it?


In *Shelley and Apprehension of Life*, Ross Wilson surveys this territory, asking, what is unique in Shelley's mode of apprehension, what is consistent in it? Along the way, he problematises what had been clear for most Shelleyans. Wilson begins a paragraph in the book's Introduction with a dropped quote—odd for a topic sentence, but a stylistic choice I suppose—from Shelley's essay 'On Life'. It reads: 'We live on, and in living, we lose the apprehension of Life' (p. 2). Wilson then offers his own *ars poetica*, giving us as near a thing to a thesis as we find here, in, 'this book is an extended reading of this statement'. He then qualifies—in particular, I argue—that Shelley does not merely acquiesce in the obliteration of 'the apprehension of life' by 'living'. On the contrary, his work is at once a profoundly informed, incisive critique of what might be called mere life and an attempt to bring the resources of poetic imagination to bear on the restoration of what he calls 'the apprehension of life'.

To such a claim, it seems to me that the only possible response is: 'well, yes'. It isn't that he's wrong: Wilson has as thorough a command not only of Shelley's work, but of the drafts, minutiae, scholarly tradition and philosophical allusions that make it up as I've seen anywhere. He's right. Such a restoration is (one of) Shelley's intellectual projects. But isn't the point so correct as to be obvious? Had any of us thought Shelley on the side of acquiescence? Had we imagined that



he thought poetry impotent against such forces? Shelley's energetic optimism, despite everything, his belief in the possibility of cultural renewal is more or less the one thing people know about Shelley apart from that he was rebellious all the way down to his blackened, lofty soul.

Wilson's prose is full of verbal tics that one is welcome to find endearing—it takes all types to make a world, does it not? Here, we'll encounter 'to be sure' and 'certainly' as double qualifiers in the same sentence (p. 3). There (and there, and there), the term 'however' used, yea though the sentence contains no contrary (p. 2). Over yonder ridge, a large handful of sentences with missing articles ('life is [...] nor [a] more broadly thematic concern') and there some misplaced modifiers ('Life in this book is [...] performance itself'). The book has the most fun with problematising English idioms. We find such exotica as 'acquiesce in' where 'acquiesce to' is meant, or poems that 'tail off into infinity,' rather than 'trail off' (p. 43). We are rapt in the fun redundancy of 'also, moreover' (p. 26), and a recurrent 'then' (as on p. 35) not at the conclusion of an argument, as would be expected, but at the start of a new point. So Wilson knows how to keep things lively. We're often strained, thinking, *what do you mean by 'x'?* and then, having reworked the sentence into proper syntactic form, concluding, 'oh, that old thing? Of course', as we piece together that the point is something we've assumed since our first readings of Shelley as undergraduates.

But this isn't such a bad thing. It shows, to my mind, how thoroughly Wilson is a Shelleyan. If, as the poet has it in *Defence of Poetry* (1821), 'Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world', it also 'makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar'. This is what Wilson's book does so well. Who isn't familiar with the old dictum that 'life turns out never to confirm mere thoughts about it' (p. 38)? Or who hasn't in their pockets an old penny, inscribed with 'language's ability to articulate regret is close to being overwhelmed' (p. 36)? Or again, who doesn't wish they had one for every time they'd heard some version of 'thinking happens differently in poetry and in prose' (pp. 16–17)? And what object could be more familiar than 'tyranny [...] is [...] exploitation' (p. 20)? But Wilson burnishes those dull pennies, casting away the veil of familiarity—every thought herein has been thought a thousand times—and making them appear strange, even revelatory. *Shelley and the Apprehension of Life* is a problematic book, despite its truly wonderful-to-behold textual and philosophical work, but only because it is so dedicated to problematising the familiar, which is to say, only because it is so much like poetry. 

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<<https://doi.org/10.18573/romtext.95>>

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Date of acceptance: 3 September 2018.



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**Carmen Casaliggi** is Reader in English at Cardiff Metropolitan University. Her research interests include Romantic literature and art, the relationship between British and European Romanticism, and Romantic sociability culture. She has published widely on the long nineteenth century and her books include: *Ruskin in Perspective: Contemporary Essays* (Cambridge Scholars, 2007) and *Legacies of Romanticism: Literature, Culture, Aesthetics* (Routledge, 2012), both co-edited with Paul March-Russell; and *Romanticism: A Literary and Cultural History* (Routledge, 2016), with Porscha Fermanis). She is currently working on a new book-length study entitled *Romantic Networks in Europe: Transnational Encounters, 1786–1850* for EUP and she is guest editor for a special issue on 'Housing Romanticism' for the *European Romantic Review*. She was a Visiting Fellow in the Arts and Humanities Institute at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth (2019–20) and is recipient of a fully funded Visiting

Fellowship awarded by the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University (2020–21).

**Daniel Cook** is Head of English and Associate Director of the Centre for Scottish Culture at the University of Dundee. He has published widely on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British and Irish literature, from Pope to Wordsworth. Recent books include *Reading Swift's Poetry* (2020) and *The Afterlives of Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (2015), both published by CUP.

**Eric Daffron** is Professor of Literature at Ramapo College of New Jersey, where he teaches gothic literature and literary theory. He has published widely on those and other topics.

**Colette Davies** is an AHRC M4C PhD candidate at the University of Nottingham. Her research explores novels published by the Minerva Press written by a range of neglected professional women writers. These works shed light on how women writers responded to an era of transformation in the literary marketplace and to a socially turbulent context through their works of fiction. Colette is one of two Postgraduate Representatives for the British Association for Romantic Studies and co-organised the BARS 2019 International Conference, 'Romantic Facts and Fantasies' and the BARS 2020 ECR/PGR Conference, 'Romantic Futurities'. She is a co-contributor for the 'Romantic Novel' section of the *Year's Work in English Studies* and has published blogs with *Romantic Textualities* and the British Association for Romantic Studies.

**JoEllen DeLucia** is Professor of English at Central Michigan University and the author of *A Feminine Enlightenment: British Women Writers and the Philosophy of Progress, 1759–1820* (EUP, 2015). Recently, she co-edited an essay collection with Juliet Shields entitled *Migration and Modernities: the State of Being Stateless, 1750–1850* (EUP, 2019). Portions of her current research project on George Robinson's media network and Romantic-era literature have appeared in *European Romantic Review* and Jennie Batchelor and Manushag Powell's *Women's Magazines and Print Culture 1690–1820s: The Long Eighteenth Century* (2018).

**Michael Falk** is Lecturer in Eighteenth-Century Studies at the University of Kent, and an Adjunct Fellow in Digital Humanities at Western Sydney University. His key interests include digital methods, the global aspects of Romanticism and the Enlightenment, and the literary history of the self. He has published on Maria Edgeworth, Charlotte Smith, John Clare and Charles Harpur; co-edits the Romantic Poetry section of *Year's Work in English Studies*; and has work forthcoming on the problem of Artificial Stupidity and on eighteenth-century Swiss book history. He is a keen digital humanities educator, and has run workshops on coding and other skills across the UK and Australia. He is currently at work on his monograph, *Frankenstein's Siblings*, a digital study of contingent selfhood in Romantic literature.

**Peter Garside** taught English Literature for more than thirty years at Cardiff University, where he became founding Director of the Centre for Editorial and Intertextual Research. Subsequently, he was appointed Professor of Bibliography and Textual Studies at the University of Edinburgh. He served on the Boards of the Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels and the Stirling/South Carolina Collected Edition of the Works of James Hogg, and has produced three volumes apiece for each of these scholarly editions. He was one of the general editors of the bibliographical survey *The English Novel, 1770–1829*, 2 vols (OUP, 2000), and directed the AHRC-funded *British Fiction, 1800–1829* database (2004). More recently, he has co-edited *English and British Fiction 1750–1820* (2015), Volume 2 of the Oxford History of the Novel in English; and forthcoming publications include an edition of Scott's *Shorter Poems*, along with Gillian Hughes, for the Edinburgh Edition of Walter Scott's Poetry.

**Michael John Goodman** is a postdoctoral researcher based at Cardiff University's Centre of Editorial and Intertextual Research. He is the director of the *Victorian Illustrated Shakespeare Archive*, an online open-access resource that contains over 3000 illustrations taken from Victorian editions of Shakespeare's plays. He is currently writing his first monograph, *Shakespeare in Bits and Bytes*, which explores how the digital can help students and the general public engage meaningfully with the humanities.

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**Aneta Lipska** holds a PhD from the University of Silesia and has recently taught at the State University of Applied Sciences in Włocławek, Poland. She is the author of *The Travel Writings of Marguerite Blessington: The Most Gorgeous Lady on the Tour* (Anthem Press, 2017). Her main research interests include travel literature of the nineteenth century, Anglo-Italian literary and cultural relations, and literature didactics.

**Simone Marshall** is Associate Professor in English at the University of Otago, New Zealand. Her research platform, *A World Shaped by Texts*, concerns how our understanding of the world around us is directly shaped by texts: religious, scientific, literary, legal and historical. Her research programmes include race, women, medievalisms and anonymity, as well as a specific focus on Chaucer. Marshall's research programme on Chaucer and his afterlives includes attention on the continuations of *The Squire's Tale*, an examination of an edition of John Urry's 1722 Chaucer located in Auckland City Library, as well as cross-cultural comparisons between Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowls* and Sufi poet Farid Ud-din Attar's *The Conference of the Birds*. Marshall's research has been featured in the media, including *The History of Anon*, a BBC Radio 4 series on the history of literary anonymity, broadcast 1–4 January 2013, as well as interviews on Radio New Zealand National in 2010 and 2013 on the 1807 Chaucer. Further details can be found at <https://simonecelinemarshall.com/>.

**Kelsey Paige Mason** is a PhD candidate at Ohio State University interested in nineteenth-century transatlantic literature, futurity and utopianism. She analyses nineteenth-century primary texts from ideological and repressive spaces (such as prisons and plantations), as well as from utopian communities and draws correlations between these primary texts and utopian/dystopian fiction. She is interested in how published and unpublished narratives portray the utopian impulse towards the future, including questioning which populations are excluded from future speculation. Her recent publications include 'Writing Revolution: Orwell's Not-So-Plain Style in *Animal Farm*' and 'A Lifetime Sowing the Blues: The Diary of Lucius Clark Smith, 1834–1915'.

**Kurt Edward Milberger** serves as Coordinating Editor in the College of Arts & Letters at Michigan State University. His work has appeared in *Jonathan Swift and Philosophy*, edited by Janelle Pötzsch (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), and in *From Enlightenment to Rebellion: Essays in Honor of Christopher Fox*, edited by James G Buickerood (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018). With Margaret Doody, he has edited Susannah Gunning's *Barford Abbey*, which is forthcoming from Broadview Press.

**Amy Milka** is a researcher in eighteenth-century history, literature and culture at the University of Adelaide. She is the author of several articles on law and emotions, including: (with David Lemmings) 'Narratives of Feeling and



Majesty: Mediated Emotions in the Eighteenth-Century Criminal Courtroom', *Journal of Legal History*, 38.2 (2017), 155–78; 'Feeling for Forgers: Character, Sympathy and Financial Crime in London during the Late Eighteenth Century', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 42.1 (2019), 7–25; and "'Preferring Death": Love, Crime, and Suicide in Eighteenth-Century England', which is forthcoming in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* in summer 2020.

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**Elizabeth Neiman** is an Associate Professor of English and also Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies at the University of Maine. Her monograph, *Minerva's Gothics: The Politics and Poetics of Romantic Exchange, 1780–1820* (UWP, 2019) shows that popular literary conventions connect now canonical male poets to their lesser-known female colleagues, drawing them into a dynamic if unequal set of exchanges that influences all of their work. A second book project explores what Minerva and other popular women's novels reveal when read for glimpses of the personal. Deathbed scenes are a convention in women's Romantic-era novels, but does this make the heroine's expression of grief impersonal, generic—her lamentations the language of cliché? Neiman is also currently writing a memoir that explores grief, love and loss, though from the distance of sister.

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**Mischa Willett** is author of two books of poetry as well as of essays, translations and reviews that appear in both popular and academic journals. A specialist in nineteenth-century aesthetics, he teaches English at Seattle Pacific University. More information can be found at [www.mischawillett.com](http://www.mischawillett.com).

