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work in a planned ‘lyrical drama’ about the Book of Job, or to the various false starts which Shelley made prior to hitting on the final format. Again, though, it is inevitable in a work of this scope that depth be sacrificed to range of analysis. Overall, The Theatre of Shelley is a valuable contribution to critical understanding of an often-neglected aspect of Shelley’s work. Mulhallen’s greatest achievement, perhaps, lies in gathering together in a single volume the disparate strands of a particular area of Shelley scholarship. What emerges from this synthesis, however, is an undeniably new sense of the importance of the theatre in Shelley’s work.

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April London aptly begins her book, Literary History Writing, 1770-1820, with a commentary on the elusive nature of literary history. Referencing David Perkins, Lawrence Lipking, and others, she notes the extent to which deconstruction, structuralism, new historicism, and cultural materialism have problematized the naive certainties of previous generations of literary historians. Distancing not only herself but also her ‘Romantic’ predecessors from the teleological narratives associated with canon formation, London argues that literary historians from 1770-1820, far from being hegemonic in their approach to the literary past, could have several agendas, not all of which were ‘consolidating and conservative ones’ (2). In particular, London suggests that literary history writers in the period drew more on contextual and comparative than on linear and teleological narratives, rejecting arguments by scholars such as Leah Price and Barbara Benedict that after 1774 canon formation and literary history were ‘mutually constituted ordering systems’ (24).

In making these claims, London joins a spate of recent monographs arguing for the historiographical continuities between early nineteenth-century writers and their eighteenth-century antecedents, but, by studiously avoiding the term ‘Romantic,’ she draws on a more diverse and complex range of textual evidence than most scholars. Like Mark Salber Phillips’s Society and Sentiment (2000), London presents a series of inter-connected case studies drawn together by two main arguments: the first is that there was a shift after 1800 from the type of literary history writing associated with historical and cultural perspectives to ‘a lesser…branch of literary criticism’ (6); the second suggests that the ‘generic instability’ and ‘loosening of formal protocols’ in the period was a reflection of changes in both print and political cultures (7). London rejects, for example, the idea that Johnson and Warton regularized the production of literary history writing, demonstrating in chapter 1 the extent to which Henry Headley, Alexander Chalmers, and others contested Johnson’s biographical model by drawing on social and comparative accounts. The book’s second chapter considers the ideological nature of life writing, looking at little known works by writers such as Robert Bisset, William Godwin, and William Beloes. In comparing the ideological foundations of these texts, London provocatively argues that the dominant mid-nineteenth-century understanding of literary history as a narrative of canonicity was a direct result of the nexus of defensiveness, denial, and restraint following the French Revolution and its radical heritage (32).

The second part of the book looks at the intersection between antiquarian studies and the bibliomania controversy, arguing in chapters 3 and 4 that access to rare books and manuscripts, as well as their proliferation in the form of ‘specimens,’ profoundly affected the way in which writers conceived and represented their literary past. Chapter 3 focuses in particular on the changes in reading and publishing practices that followed the ending of perpetual copyright in 1774, arguing that the sale of private libraries to the market place encouraged the dissemination of ‘recondite information about the past’ (54). In chapter 4 London claims that standard representations of Warton’s History of English Poetry seriously downplay the book’s antiquarian intent. Her reassessment of Warton
not only argues for his reader-driven model of literary change, but also stresses the extent to which he was aware of the proximity of literary history to social history and popular taste. The rest of the chapter considers examples of ‘specimens,’ persuasively arguing that works by writers such as Ellis, Southey, and Campbell do not ‘confirm the triumph of canonicity in the terms that a narrowly conceived “Romantic” criticism supplies’ (72).

Yet rather than focusing on one of these doyennes of literary history writing, London instead devotes two chapters to a single figure: Isaac D’Israeli. A less consistently radical figure than Godwin, D’Israeli, a Jewish outsider, nonetheless evinces a sense of scepticism towards the spirit of system and a preference for the incomplete, the marginal, and the anecdotal. London sees D’Israeli as ‘formative’ figure for the period in his preference for the private and domestic over the public and the overtly political, his generic eclecticism, and his historical self-consciousness, as well as in his penchant for what she calls ‘psychological history’ or the ‘history of the human mind’ (83, 91). While D’Israeli’s representative status is, perhaps, not as fully argued as it might have been, London nonetheless makes a convincing case for his relevance to the period’s ways of conceiving its literary-historical past.

The final part of the book argues for the gradual standardization of literary history after 1800. For London, a crucial element in this standardization is ‘the defense of a uniquely British “national mind” vested in a canonic “national literature”’ (111). Chapter 7 accordingly looks at the ways in which a range of domestic histories and pedagogical texts reflect this ‘mind of the nation’ paradigm, while chapter 8 focuses on the more familiar ‘Cockneys and Laker’s controversy, arguing that writers of periodical reviews and institutional lectures series with ‘diametrically opposed political views’ nonetheless drew on ‘remarkably similar assumptions about England’s literary past’ (112). Occasionally judgemental in its attitude to the onset of high Victorianism and its literary-critical categories, London’s study is nonetheless an impressive and long overdue ‘history of the history of literary history’ from 1770-1820 (160). Combining the intricacies of close reading with the larger historical perspectives of material and book history, it carefully and scrupulously navigates the much-neglected waters of the period’s literary history.

Porscha Fermanis
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Here are two books, timely and open-eyed in their different ways, which are happy to disclose a complicated Romanticism that seems all the more urgent for its resistance to capture.

Ferber’s volume is distinguished by historical depth as well as an encyclopaedic knowledge of its subject, although its explicit formal abruptness does not always suit topic or authorial intelligence. Tackling the question of what might be meant by ‘Romanticism’ is always, to an extent, to deal oneself a losing hand. Ferber does it with seriousness and without flinching in his opening chapter, and he does it with more openness to nuance than some. He is wary of ideological aggregation and is meaningfully historicist – there is something refreshing about the way that his ‘Romanticism’ is always and at the same time literary and multimodal, British and European, past and present. The author is also alive to the fact that ‘Romanticism’ – as inhabitant of the world of living ideas – isn’t something that we can adequately imagine by drying it out into the units of current academic exchange; and this is to say more than that the volume is ‘accessible to the general reader’ (although it is this).

Ferber’s intellectual courage engages, but it also precipitates an unconvincing attempt to