the emergence of civil society’ represented by Madeline and Porphyro (although Porphyro initially is said to participate in ‘the violence and bloodthirstiness that characterize the period’).

Chapter three argues that Hyperion’s ambivalent treatment of human progress, in part approving the demise of the Titans and advance of the superior Olympian gods and in part sympathizing with the defeated Titans, parallels similar depictions in histories by Voltaire and William Robertson. Robertson’s History of America is especially pertinent to Hyperion in that it remained a fragment. Robertson wrote the history of South America but never finished the section on North America, perhaps because of tensions between his belief in human progress and his sympathy for the brutally conquered native Americans.

Chapter four interprets both Isabella and Lamia as attacks on the decline of contemporary society resulting from excessive commercialism, luxury, and individualism and links Keats’s views with those of Leigh Hunt as well as accounts of Rome’s decline by Gibbon and others. Chapter five claims that The Fall of Hyperion portrays the poet-speaker’s ‘process of interpersonal and consequently social growth inspired by sympathy, suffering and fellow-feeling’ in terms that echo the theories of moral sense philosophers like Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith, and William Hazlitt. An Afterword briefly notes ways in which Ode to Psyche and Ode on a Grecian Urn are informed by Enlightenment ‘empirical, association and sceptical philosophy’.

Fermanis is well read in the eighteenth-century texts she cites as well as in scholarship on these works and recent criticism on Keats’s poetry. She offers a number of convincing parallels between Enlightenment works and passages in Keats’s poems and letters. Her efforts to link her individual points into unified readings of the poems often fall short, however. Each chapter is divided into multiple sections that treat separate issues, and these don’t always cohere into a consistent interpretation of the poem under consideration. Nor does the book offer an argument about the shape of Keats’s career. Fermanis declares that her approach is ‘more thematic than chronological’ and that she does not attempt to trace any development or progress in Keats’s writing. It seems odd that a book dealing with theories of historical development does not consider its subject’s growth, including the evolution of his beliefs about human progress. In a book designed to convince readers that Keats is a serious thinker, we actually get little sense of the man’s mental life. The fact that the odes are not treated, save for brief remarks on Psyche and Grecian Urn, contributes to the absence of a coherent, compelling understanding of Keats’s work as a whole.

John Keats and the Ideas of the Enlightenment is therefore more effective in illuminating particular passages in Keats’s writing than in offering major new readings of poems or of Keats’s oeuvre. Nonetheless, it is a well-informed study of its topic that offers a number of apt, suggestive individual points.

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There is little doubt that Keats studies have undergone an intense re-historicisation in the last two and a half decades. Critics from Jerome McGann to Nicholas Roe have shown us just how much was lost by focusing solely on author and genre-centred approaches to Keats’s poetry, as well as uncovering the relevance of a surprising number of historical, social, and political contexts. Some of these critical contexts, such as Keats’s radicalism and ‘Cockney’ credentials, have emerged from research first undertaken by Keats’s many biographers, but few biographies – with the exception, perhaps, of Walter Jackson Bate’s masterly John Keats (1963) and Stuart Sperry’s Keats the Poet (1973) – have returned the compliment by seriously considering the relationship between Keats’s life and work, tending instead to subordinate the creative
achievement of his poems either to the admittedly poignant narrative of his personal life or to the turbulent politics of his age. With some of the more current biographies reaching over 600 pages and few presenting any genuinely new material, it is unsurprising that the most notable recent additions to Keats’s biographical corpus have been meditative rather than scholarly studies, such as Stanley Plumly’s evocative Posthumous Keats: A Personal Biography (2008).

Elegantly written and expertly crafted, R. S. White’s John Keats: A Literary Life aims to redress just this kind of imbalance between biography and critical commentary, not only managing to synthesise the most innovative current criticism on Keats’s life and work in less than 300 pages, but also establishing a fresh set of contexts with which to read them. Declining to simply regurgitate the same old material on Keats’s childhood or medical studies, White provides new details of three different versions of an 1816 guidebook to Guy’s Hospital, which may have been written by Sir Astley Cooper, as well as being the first scholar to consider the literary relevance of Keats’s botanical textbook, James Edward Smith’s An Introduction to Physiological and Systematical Botany (1807). From these texts, White draws important conclusions about the relationship between ‘the creative imagination of Romanticism’ and ‘the humanism of enlightened medical practice’, shedding new light on the origins of Keatsian conceptions of ‘disinterestedness’ and ‘negative capability.’ Indeed, it is the insightful commentary that White repeatedly brings to apparently well-established events, ideas, and contexts that makes this book so valuable. Keats frequently represented his own development as a staged progression or ‘very gradual ripening of the intellectual powers’ (Letters, 23 January 1818), but White takes a sceptical approach to familiar ‘life of allegory’ narratives, refusing to reinforce either anxiety-ridden ‘influence’ theories or the snobbery of Blackwood’s attacks on the ‘Cockney School.’ Nor does he overplay the importance of typically Keatsian terms such as ‘Soul-making’ and ‘negative capability,’ seeing these ideas as only two of many in Keats’s philosophical repertoire.

White does well to remind us that Keats was a more serious thinker than either his contemporaries or later scholars have acknowledged, providing a convincing ‘Lockean’ reading of the ‘Vale of Soul-making’ letter and an astute interpretation of The Fall of Hyperion that registers the importance of William Robertson’s History of America (1777). But if White is fully conscious of the way in which recent historicist criticism has recast or reconfigured Keats, he is also keenly aware of the uniquely literary aspects of Keats’s aesthetic accomplishments, infusing his readings of the poems with his work on other literary periods and writers, particularly Shakespeare, Spenser, Donne, and Milton. Some of White’s most original and valuable contributions in the current volume include his nuanced reading of the relationship between Endymion and Shakespeare’s sonnets; his playful readings of the Odes, which question their deification but by no means ‘demean their profundity’; his reading of The Fall of Hyperion through Charlotte Smith’s The Emigrants (1793); and his argument that The Jealousies bears the imprint of Thomas Love Peacock’s satires. As this brief outline suggests, at no point does White simply rehash the canonical New Critical Keats, instead using historicist criticism to compliment rather than diminish the extraordinary achievement of Keats’s poems.

In any short biography there will, of course, always be room for additions and extensions, but the only point of general interest seems to me to be White’s minimalisation of Hazlitt’s role in Keats’s poetic development. While not ignoring Hazlitt, White does not give him the centrality of, say, Bate, who sees Hazlitt’s work on moral philosophy as an alternative way to medicine of understanding Keats’s reflections on the sensations, disinterestedness, and associative thinking. Given that White has already published extensively on Hazlitt in his excellent Keats as a Reader of Shakespeare (1987) and in his edited collection Hazlitt’s Criticism of Shakespeare (1996), I can only conclude that restricted space has forced him to choose
between familiar influence narratives and the more innovative contexts that he so expertly explores in this book. Academic readers will be glad that White has chosen to incorporate so much new material into his concise *Life*, but this is nonetheless one of those rare books that will appeal to both the general and the specialist reader: students requiring either a short biography of Keats or a critical overview of his major works will find White’s *Life* an invaluable starting point for further study. Considering the amount of material already published on Keats, it is a major achievement that this book is both accessible to students and an essential addition to our knowledge of Keats’s life and work.

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From the outset of his erudite and provocative *Perverse Romanticism*, Richard C. Sha enacts an unsettling of normative binaries that begins with the collapse of the routinely opposed concepts of the aesthetic and the sexual. Rather than being thought of as discrete, Sha contends that sexuality and aesthetics were ‘actually united in Romanticism by a common distrust of function’. While a lack of purpose is valued in aesthetic apprehension, Sha questions how the same functionlessness comes to distinguish perverse expressions of sexuality. In historicising the relation between a preoccupation with non- or anti-reproductive sex and the growing interest in function in the life sciences of the period, Sha focuses on the gap, anxiously recognised within this scientific discourse, between sexual pleasure and reproduction. When separated from reproductive function, sexual pleasure or perversion, as Sha defines it, could be read in aesthetic terms as analogous to the beautiful object’s purposiveness with-out purpose within Kantian aesthetics. This theoretical allying of purposiveness with the perverse develops into a controversial reading of how Romantics such as William Blake, Percy Shelley, Anna Seward, Mary Wollstonecraft and Byron de-coupled the casual connection between pleasure and reproduction in their writings, and in the process, exposed how heteronormativity impoverishes sexuality by limiting it to ‘reproduction and animal instinct’. Rather than view sex as a necessarily selfish pleasure with a reproductive teleology, these Romantics connected the erotic with a mutuality underwritten by perverse purposiveness, and in doing so, Sha argues, were able to ‘gauge the extent to which liberation had been achieved . . .’.

The monograph’s six chapters can be divided into two parts, with the first three chapters dedicated to a thorough examination of the intrinsic position of the perverse within the life sciences. The scope of primary sources here is suitably impressive, while Sha’s analysis demonstrates a skilful economy over diverse material that ranges from the physiological writings of Albrecht von Haller to the cataloguing of perversion in Linnaean Botany. In arguing for a Romantic preoccupation with the perverse, Sha takes issue with Michel Foucault’s monolithic discourse of ‘biopower’, outlined in the first volume of his *The History of Sexuality*. Intriguingly, Sha points to how the rise of vitalism in the long eighteenth-century is at odds with biopower’s two-fold reduction of the body to instrument, and broader specification of bodies to species insofar as it makes life a principle beyond material assessment, and places a recurring emphasis on the gap between organ and vital force. Arguing against Foucault’s implicit view of the natural sciences as operating to ‘constrain sex and sexuality and . . . naturalize these constraints’, Sha attempts to show how scientific enquiry was in fact helpful to liberation, as it worked to normalise the body at a time when normalcy, and indeed, heteronormativity was under construction. This is, perhaps, the least successful argument put forward, as aside from an erotic experience based on mutuality and a clichéd personal autonomy, what exactly this