

Susanne Schmid, *British Literary Salons of the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*, New York: Palgrave, 2013. 252pp. \$30.23. ISBN 9780230110656.

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Susanne Schmid's monograph aims to expand the "regrettably under-researched" field of British salon culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, an area the author highlights as particularly neglected in comparison with its German and French counterparts. The monograph sets itself a worthy mission: to revise the salon as an active and parallel site for cultural exchange in Britain, a sociable location which has frequently been obfuscated by the idealized isolation of the so-called Romantic "lonely" poems, despite having intersected with and, at times, fostered Romantic era poets. Early on, Schmid draws the methodological difficulties in tracing and recovering cultural production and spaces mediated by conversation, an engaging thread that runs throughout. By investigating the liminal and slippery arena of conversation, the text echoes studies in Romanticism in recent decades such as Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite's edited collection, *Romantic Sociability*. Schmid valuably extends and enhances the discussion by casting focus on how conversation coalesced around and was leveraged by three prolific yet neglected agents of British salon culture: Mary Berry, Lady Holland, and the Countess of Blessington. Each is generously located within the wider context of their own lives and literary output in two dedicated chapters that explore both the expansive possibilities and notable limitations available to women positioned at the centre of British salon culture, as well as uniquely cosmopolitan figures importing and restaging continental salon culture for British drawing rooms. Schmid suggests that scholarly movements toward a recovery of salon sociability can only be successful by casting an extremely broad methodological net, one that draws in biographical data, gossip and chatter, travel writing, voluminous archives, editorial work, as well as an ever-expanding range of published texts. This approach is convincing and highly readable, and allows for nuanced readings of Berry, Lady Holland,

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and the Countess of Blessington, with sensitive attention paid to each woman's individual strategies of anonymity or presence as a means of impacting and curating literary culture from a central position in the republic of letters. Consequent discussions of the salon as an extremely pliable and creative realm situated between the public and private, both a place and a "non-place" open to British women, provide food for thought, and imply that the topics and voices treated in Schmid's study warrant further careful attention. This recent Palgrave paperback edition will be a welcome contribution to scholars of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women's studies, as well as those with an interest in the sociable and political culture of the period.