

Shun-liang Chao and John Michael Corrigan, eds., *Romantic Legacies: Transnational and Transdisciplinary Contexts*, New York: Routledge, 2019. 360 pp. £120. ISBN: 978-0-367-07672-6.

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Romanticism first emerged as an artistic and literary movement more than two hundred years ago, but its afterlife transcends not only different periods of time, but the boundary between high art and popular culture. In *Red Dragon* (2002), one of the films that feature Anthony Hopkins' iconic portrayals of the psychiatrist and cannibalistic murderer, Dr. Hannibal Lecter, the serial killer played by Ralph Fiennes attempts to invoke a sense of awe in his victim by revealing a full-scale tattoo on his back that emulates William Blake's watercolour painting, *The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed in Sun*. In an episode of the long-running television series *The Mentalist*, mysterious serial killer "Red John" whispers the opening lines of Blake's famed poem, "The Tyger," perplexing and somehow fascinating the protagonist Patrick Jane, a Sherlock-Holmes-like consultant to the California Bureau of Investigation who is in pursuit of him. More recently, viewers of the British television series *The Frankenstein Chronicles* follow inspector John Marlott (portrayed by Sean Bean) as he encounters historical figures related to Romanticism such as Blake, Mary Shelley, Ada Lovelace, and even Charles Dickens, while solving a series of child murders clearly inspired by Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

The examples above attest to the continuing presence and transformation of Romanticism in popular culture. That such presence is often associated with crime and murder also suggests the Romantics' intrinsically conflicting state of mind. While valuing poetic imagination, political/religious liberty, and beliefs in constant amelioration of the human world, the Romantics also explore exuberant and violent emotions that may threaten and unsettle social harmony, interpersonal connections, and individual subjectivity. The heterogeneity in Romanticism—encompassing both positive and negative experiences—is perhaps the very reason behind its timeless and cross-cultural prevalence in different literary genres and art forms. The enduring evolution

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and transformation of this sensibility is explored in the present collection, *Romantic Legacies: Transnational and Transdisciplinary Contexts*.

The sixteen essays in *Romantic Legacies* are categorized into five sections, each focusing on Romanticism's intertextual relationship with a succeeding literary/artistic movement or tradition. In the introduction, Shun-liang Chao and John Michael Corrigan propose that "Romanticism is always in the state of becoming" (2). They then indicate that the approach of comparative literature enables readers to "understand Romanticism not merely as an artistic heritage but as a dynamic site of intellectual engagement that crosses nations and time periods" (3). Chao and Corrigan provide a comprehensive review of the preceding comparative research on the legacies of Romanticism, and perceive a crucial lack of in-depth examination and extensive scope beyond the boundaries between nations and disciplines. Such insufficiency will be amended in the present collection by "offering transnational contexts and transdisciplinary perspectives" (11).

Chao and Corrigan identify three pivotal figures who can be credited with the sustenance of Romanticism in social, aesthetic, and philosophical aspects: John Ruskin, Charles Baudelaire, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Ruskin's determination that aesthetics and morality were both necessary components of the social ideal extended Romanticism's influence to the political domain, impacting the founding of the Labour Party in Britain and Gandhi's fight against imperial colonialism. On the level of aesthetics, Baudelaire carries on the spirit of Romanticism "with a modern twist" (12) by versifying the contemporary life in Paris and reconciling opposing modern drives: "industrial and aesthetic, bourgeois and Romantic" (13). Chao and Corrigan sharply observe that "Baudelaire modernised Romantic beauty" with the evil and the grotesque in human nature, thus evincing Romanticism's heterogeneity and ceaseless transformation. Finally, acknowledging that there is no definite truth in metaphysical structure, Nietzsche aligns himself with the Romantics who embrace an infinite human restlessness in the perpetual process of becoming. Chao and Corrigan explicate Nietzsche's rejection of Christianity and Platonism as the denouncement of a pathology that "entails the repression of instinct and desire" (18). The Romantic resonance is more manifest here as Nietzsche deepens the Romantic exploration of self-annihilating instinctual drives and further regards these "Dionysiac" drives as indispensable for artistic creation. In short, Chao's and Corrigan's comments

on Ruskin, Baudelaire and Nietzsche informatively underline the general tenet of the present collection, which examines Romantic legacies from social, aesthetic, and philosophical perspectives by engaging Romanticism with other distinct literary movements in different periods of time.

The essays in Part I look into the transition from Romanticism to realism. But instead of reiterating the conventional disparity between the two, the authors demonstrate that the boundary is actually obscured in nineteenth-century literature. For instance, in her essay “Romantic Walking and Railway Realism,” Rachel Bowlby reconsiders the notion that the advent of railways exemplifies the beginning of an “unromantic” (37) age of realism. Traditionally, railways mark a further stage of industrial development that might be considered repulsive to the Romantic eye. However, in her reading of Gérard de Nerval, Balzac, and Thomas Hardy, Bowlby argues that railways enabled people to see the sights that were inaccessible in the past and gave those sights—natural landscapes and human dwellings—an “anachronistic” (42) sense of beauty that is not unfamiliar to the Romantics. The emergence of trains also instilled new meanings into walking, giving pedestrians a sense of Romantic nostalgia that rebels against the modern emphasis on speed and efficiency. The age of railways witnessed a sort of realignment of the tensions between Romanticism and realism.

The turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century saw the fierce conflict between opposing understandings of art: the moralism that stressed the artist’s social responsibility and the Fin-de-Siècle decadence that espoused the tenet of “art for art’s sake.” Part II of *Romantic Legacies* focuses on the Romantic afterlife at this turning point of the history of art and literature. In her article, Ya-feng Wu approaches the aforementioned conflict by delving into John Keats’s prominent presence in Oscar Wilde’s works. Wilde relives Keats’s valuation of “a life of Sensations” and praises the poet’s synthesis of Hellenism and Romanticism. Wu points out that these Keatsian qualities are drawn by Wilde to generate “an artistic and erotic form of self-becoming” in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (92). Subtly juxtaposing Wilde’s self-identification with Jesus Christ in *De Profundis* with Apollo’s transfiguration in *Hyperion: A Fragment*, Wu’s intertextual reading indicates that Wilde is inspired by Apollo’s final “becoming” that entails a painful severance of the past life in order to welcome the new. With Keats’s image as the “Prototype Aesthete” (85) in mind, Wilde was able to resist the moral authorities that

condemned him to prison. Thus, as an incarcerated “Man of Sorrows,” Wilde could retain a valid form of self-fashioning empowered by an immovable belief in art, in Keats’s “poetical character” (99).

In addition to literature, the section also explores the realms of art and music. Shao-chien Tseng’s essay investigates Eugene Delacroix’s influence on Paul Signac, demonstrating how Signac adapts Delacroix’s Romantic aesthetics to project “an anarchist existence motivated by creative dissent” (102). Looking into Richard Wagner’s and Henry Bishop’s legacies, David Chandler discusses how the traditions of German and British Romantic opera are presented in Fredrick Corder’s works and how the two traditions divert from each other regarding the restraints caused by commercialism.

The third section of the collection highlights Romanticism’s life-affirming power in the twentieth century that marks an epoch of loss and disillusion. Authors of Part III make the case that modernist and postmodernist thinkers inherit the Romantic spirit of inner cultivation to transcend individual and cosmological predicaments that typify the years darkened by the great wars. Justin Prystash’s essay, for example, analyses Georges Bataille’s and Luce Irigaray’s idealism as a continuation of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s construal of self-transcendence. Such an idea represents the desire to blur the boundary between the subject and objects, “a mystical desire, ultimately, to dissolve subjectivity into the animate universe, variously identified with Spirit, Mind, or God” (158). Prystash adopts the term “Romantic idealism” (159) to indicate the intended synthesis of Eastern and Western philosophies, with which one can achieve self-transcendence. With the practice of meditation, Coleridge’s poetic creation is “a series of intellectual and affective states that arise when imperceptible objects permeate the body” (162). For Coleridge, poetic imagination invigorates lifeless outer objects, and at the same time decentralises subjectivity, so that the poet can access the realm of transcendence, in which self is annihilated and integrated into the world. This conception, as Prystash adeptly observes, resonates with Bataille’s mystical idea of “inner experience” that also incorporates Hindu meditation. For Bataille, poetic experience belongs to “the sacred,” a realm in which all human activities are no longer devoted to utility, production, and accumulation of resources. In the realm of sacredness, life energy is exuberant and violently consumed in the acts of poetic creation, eroticism, and religious sacrifice. Echoing Coleridge, the Bataillean self is transcended and no more

distinguished from the exterior world; “one’s body is part of a continuous stream of objects” (168). Prystash then involves Irigaray’s conception of sexual difference, pointing out that she construes heterosexual intercourse as acts of “carnal sharing that enable two people to transcend the exploitative subject/object relation” (170). In Bataille and Irigaray, Prystash keenly discerns the continuation of Coleridge’s Romantic idealism that signals a “turn towards difference and the nonhuman” (171) and a departure from Kant’s devaluation of Romanticism, which still stands as a life-affirming power in the (post)modern era.

The other two essays in this section delve into similar issues. In his “Platonism, Its Heir, and the Last Romantic,” Arthur Versluis argues that Romanticism is not only a reaction to modern industrialization, but also an affirmation of life, which finds its source in Platonism and its regeneration in Transcendentalism. Expanding the scope to popular culture, John Corrigan’s article focuses on Emerson’s and Whitman’s influence on the television drama *Mad Men*, highlighting the lingering Romantic spirit of inner cultivation of creative powers.

Part IV investigates another significant legacy bestowed by Romanticism upon modern society: its influence on environmentalism. The essays in this section evaluate the Romantic perception of nature as an alternative way to view and understand all nonhuman creatures in the environment. In Romanticism, there is a will to prevail over the ill-conceived dichotomy between humanity and nature, as well as a possibility to merge human subjectivity into the surrounding world. Caroline Schaumann’s reading of Ludwig Tieck reveals a scene of intense symbiosis between humanity and nature, with a lamentation of the human inability to perceive and appreciate such a profound relationship.

Exploring the nonhuman visionary powers in Blake’s poetry, Sophie Laniel-Musitelli argues that the poet utilises images of animals and plants to make readers “see through nonhuman eyes” and “see with the eye of the Earth” (214). Laniel-Musitelli notes that for Blake, the ultimate state of divine humanity does not exclude other forms of life. On the contrary, it shows “the identification of nonhumans as part of a regenerated body politic” (216) and “the endeavour to envision a political revolution encompassing nonhumans” (217). Evoking Timothy Morton’s reading of Blake, Laniel-Musitelli further accentuates the importance of decentering human perception in order to

appreciate the “fierce beauty” of nonhuman vision that “resists and cannot be subsumed” (230). Finally, she effectively links Blake’s espousal of nonhuman visionary powers with contemporary environmental discourse that calls for a more inclusive attitude to all other living things on the Earth.

Approaching the issue from the perspective of visual art, Carmen Casaliggi evokes John Ruskin’s evaluation of J. M. W. Turner’s works, shedding light on Turner’s environmental awareness in an age of rapid industrial development. Casaliggi’s essay concludes the section with an innovative observation that both Ruskin and Turner potentially envisioned the concept of sustainability.

The final section extends the discourse to Asia, investigating Romanticism’s cross-continental impact on countries such as China, India, and Japan, where Romantic literature became a major component of cultural modernisation. Steve Clark starts the section with his “ReOrienting Romanticism,” in which he challenges the very notion of “Romantic legacy.” He argues against the idea that Romanticism was disseminated from Europe to Asian countries in a chronological order and became devalued there. By examining the works of British Indian poets, Clark proposes that these poetic works considered minor and ignorable actually form a legacy in English—a reversal of the process of “Romantic legacy” in our common understanding. Johannes D. Kaminski’s “Romanticism onto the Chinese Revolution” locates Romanticism in early twentieth century China that witnessed a drastic transition from imperial totalitarianism to nationalist democracy. Kaminski offers an in-depth intertextual analysis of how German Romanticism helped shape Chinese literary movements and productions in an era of political turmoil. Focusing on Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s influence on the young poet Guo Morou, Kaminski suggests that Goethe’s novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* landed in China at the time when Western philosophy of individualism was supplanting Confucian tradition. In addition to evaluating Goethe’s presence in contemporary Chinese literary circles as an embodiment of Jacques Derrida’s concept of “grafting,” Kaminski probes Guo’s translation of *Werther* that involves the Chinese poet’s arbitrary interpretation. His observation of Guo’s merging of *Werther* with Chinese philosophies in order to achieve his own self-transcendence insightfully demonstrates that a “Romantic legacy” need not be a one-way process of influence, but may involve a reciprocal operation of transformation. As Kaminski further points

out, Guo later detached himself from aestheticism and reinterpreted Romantic self-transcendence as the service to the proletarian revolution after he embraced Marxism and the Communist Party. The final discussion provides a compelling example of political ideology's intrusion into artistic creation, which reshaped a Romantic legacy into political propaganda.

Taking a similar approach, Ou Li's essay accounts for Wordsworth's legacy in China. She illustrates how modern Chinese literati adopted Wordsworth's poetry and fused it with traditional Chinese values to become an inspiration for the New Cultural Movement. Wordsworth's afterlife in China, as Li points out, was shadowed by the rise of the Communist Party and later re-emerged in the 1980s. Li's analysis offers a clear picture of how Wordsworth was engaged with different literary movements in modern China. The section is concluded by Shun-liang Chao's "The world must be made Romantic," which examines Japanese artist Tetsuya Ishida's self-portrait as a representation of "the grotesque"—originating from German Romanticism—and a Romantic sense of humour that conveys love and sympathy through self-derision.

Each of the articles in *Romantic Legacies* contributes significantly to the knowledge of Romanticism and its afterlife in cross-cultural contexts and distinct art forms, duly fulfilling the transnational and transdisciplinary aspiration evoked in the introduction. The only shortcoming of this comprehensive collection might be the lack of engagement with works outside the spheres of high art and serious literature, with only one essay focusing on a television series. I believe that the same approach, proved to be extremely fruitful by this collection, can be adopted to examine Romanticism's regeneration in current popular culture—pop music, graphic novels, films, and television dramas—which, as suggested in the beginning of this review, attests to Romanticism's timeless and genre-crossing powers. While standing as an exceptional and insightful read for scholars in art and literature, the present collection further unveils a course of research that can be undertaken to lead Romantic literature to a wider audience, beyond the exclusive realm of academic studies.