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Diane Hoeveler
Marquette University, diane.hoeveler@marquette.edu

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INTRODUCTION

Critical Studies in Romanticism Today

Diane Long Hoeveler*

Marquette University, USA

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I should state at the outset that it is a humbling task to be the Book Review Editor for a journal in romanticism these days. The sheer volume of titles being published suggests not only the keen interest in the field, but also its scholarly vigor and appeal. For instance, in an average week I will walk anywhere from two to six new books down to my office, all of them worthy of review and all of them representing the sustained critical work and diligence of a scholar in our field. To say that every book published cannot be reviewed is to say the obvious. When I assumed this position in 2004, however, I vowed that I would do as much as I could to see that every scholarly book published in European romanticism would be reviewed by the most appropriate specialist working in the same field. To do that, however, it became necessary to group books in essay reviews that would discuss two or three titles together, and so *ERR* began to alter its reviewing policy from a focus on a single volume to multiple titles. This special issue devoted completely to book reviews presents a number of those reviews and at the same time, it allows us to examine a cross-section of what has been published in romantic studies during the past five years. Looking at 44 recent titles gives us something of a snapshot of where the field is now and permits us, somewhat cautiously, to predict where the field might be going in the future.

As I organized these reviews in a roughly chronological order I realized that they also could be grouped loosely into a few large categories. First, it is interesting to note that, for all the hew and cry about assaults on the canon, there are a number of books here that present focused studies of one of the major male canonical British poets (Percy Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, or Byron). There would seem to be little if any slighting in critical attention to these poets, although the books published on them now tend to be informed by a cultural studies approach (reception history or a focus on class issues), and they are no longer the sort of formalist studies of their work that were popular about two decades or more ago. The next broad category of books consists of what I would call cultural studies approaches to romanticism, such as Ted Underwood's study of romantic texts in relation to science and the economy, or Debbie Lee's study of what she calls "romantic liars," women imposters who had an impact on their culture. These books, along with genre studies, like James O'Rourke's study of autobiography, the cluster of books on the gothic reviewed by Stephen Behrendt, or Steven Jones's collection of essays on satire in the romantic period, have gone a long way toward broadening our understanding of the field and the critical approaches that can be taken to analyzing the expanded canon of works produced.

The next large category of books is focused on the topic of gender, from specialized studies like Dino Felluga's on "male genius" to broader works, like Kari Lokke's, that

*Email: diane.hoeveler@marquette.edu

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attempt to situate women's writings within a large intellectual tradition like transcendence. On the basis of what I have seen recently, the importance of gender as an explanatory category does not seem to have lessened, although increasingly gender is situated within a variety of historical contexts, such as nationalism. There are also a number of books that are simply difficult to neatly categorize because they gesture toward critical approaches that are not yet in the mainstream or widely practised. One such study is Judith Pascoe's *The Hummingbird Cabinet*, a work that seems to be part of the growing interest in "thing-theory" that has emerged in romanticism conferences in the past year or so (i.e., International Conference on Romanticism, Towson State-Loyola U, Baltimore, 2007). There can also be no denying the importance of the sudden spate of books about Scotland and Scottish romanticism. In addition to the three titles reviewed here by Evan Gottlieb, two other three-title essay reviews on Scotland and Scottish literature will be published in *ERR* during the next two years. Finally, works on German romanticism are enjoying something of a renaissance and are examined here in two essay reviews.

On the basis of what I have seen over the past five years I think it is possible to predict that critical studies of romanticism will move increasingly toward broadening the range of texts that are studied, read, and taught, while at the same time taking a global perspective on literary production between 1789 and 1835. Imperialism, racial relations, orientalism, and trans-European and trans-Atlantic influences and contacts will, I think, be increasingly emphasized in studies that attempt to understand the epistemological shift that was made during this period, a transformation that we might label as a move toward the modern and secular (and the topic of NASSR's 2009 conference at Duke University). The program of the 2008 NASSR conference at the University of Toronto reveals how thoroughly the field is shifting toward an examination of "diversity" or globalization, and away from the parochial emphasis of "British-only" that characterized critical work just a decade ago.

It has been an interesting, enlightening, and, as I said at the outset, humbling experience to be the book review editor for *ERR* these past five years. The reviewers for *ERR* have been generous with their time and expertise, almost always willing to assume assignments and to meet deadlines with a professionalism that was inspiring. With Volume 20.1, I will move to coedit the journal with Regina Hewitt, and I am pleased to hand the book review assignment to Benjamin Colbert who, I trust, will find the same stimulation and collegiality I have found in working with so many able reviewers. Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank and acknowledge Fred Burwick, the guiding spirit of ERR, and co-editors Grant Scott and Regina Hewitt for their patience and support. Working with them has been a pleasure.

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