

Book Reviews

in some cases contest the period's historicist tendencies. Of particular interest to readers of this journal is Byron's prominence in these discussions. Cronin, in the chapter already cited, sets *Don Juan* up as the antithesis of Scott's Waverley novels, reading it as a distinctively modern poem that 'recognise[s] and even [...] celebrates[s] the shallowness of time'. Similarly Michael O'Neill and Paul Hamilton, in their respective chapters, have Byron as their central focus as they both argue that authorial decisions with regard to literary form and craft may be in themselves a significant 'mode of historiographical expression'. Elsewhere Christopher Bundock considers Shelley's *Hellas* as a form of prophecy that is not concerned with predicting the future so much as foregrounding the future's inchoate potentiality—an exercise that he sees as predicated in part on the shock that the French Revolution gave to Enlightenment notions of history as slow, additive process and steady evolution. Then Fiona Robertson and Claire Connolly conclude the volume with chapters on, respectively, how Charlotte Smith and Walter Scott negotiated through fiction British defeat in the American War of Independence, and the historiographical dimensions of the Irish 'national tale' as developed by Maria Edgeworth and John and Michael Banim. Overall, the collection forms an excellent companion to Campbell's monograph, and both of these volumes constitute an excellent, up-to-date resource to anyone investigating Romantic-era historicism and historiography.

CARL THOMPSON
University of Surrey

THE TWO ROMANTICISMS, AND OTHER ESSAYS: MYSTERY AND INTERPRETATION IN ROMANTIC LITERATURE. By William Christie. Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2016. Pp. 324. ISBN: 978-1-74332-464-6. Aus\$30.00.

In *The Two Romanticisms*, William Christie provides an introduction to Romanticism, aimed at senior school students and undergraduates, focusing on canonical writings by Austen, Byron, Coleridge, Keats, Mary and Percy Shelley and Wordsworth. As an expert on Romantic-era literary reviews, a biographer of both Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Dylan Thomas, an editor of Francis Jeffrey's correspondence, and a teacher of Romanticism for many years, Christie is ideally placed for this task.

Christie proposes that we view Romanticism as two distinctive tendencies. The first, which Christie labels 'small "r" romantic', comprises works that are 'exotic, remote in time or place, strange, fabulous, extravagant, improbable, unrealistic', exemplified by 'the Gothic; graveyard poetry; Bardism and Druidism and Celticism; Medievalism; Orientalism'. The second, 'capital "r" romantic' indicates writing that engages with 'the idea of a vitally creative human imagination in collaborative relation to a sublime and/or beautiful natural world'. If we follow Christie's model, we could say that Lord Byron's fascination with foreign lands is 'small 'r' romantic' but his egalitarian political aspirations 'capital 'r' romantic'.

Indeed, according to Christie, Byron epitomises the dualistic nature of Romanticism in his agitated oscillation between idealism and cynicism. Christie observes that 'Byron is always careful to identify beneath the hardened, cynical exterior of his Byronic hero the disappointed idealist' and detects in the poet a 'characteristically Romantic mixture of sympathetic egalitarianism and arrogant spiritual elitism'. Christie recommends *Don Juan* as Byron's paradigmatic poem, asserting that its originality lies in its inconsistency: 'Byron makes a unifying theme [...] out of the poem's disunity'.

In keeping with his emphasis upon Byron and Romanticism's duality, Christie also draws attention to Percy Bysshe Shelley's poetic portrait of Byron and himself *Julian and Maddalo: A Conversation*. Christie characterises 'Shelley's [...] metapoem for Byron' as a verse operating on two levels. The first—'what Shelley is saying *with* Byron'—consists of Shelley's use of Byron to communicate ideas to a general audience. The second—'what Shelley is saying *to* Byron'—comprises the conversation Shelley is having with Byron within the poem. Christie argues that Shelley's representation of Byron recognises the senior poet's double persona, registering 'a paradoxical split between Maddalo's public pessimism and private warmth and generosity'.

In other chapters, Christie extends further his binary model of Romanticism. He presents Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* as an unresolved dialogue between 'two, discrepant perspectives or positions—one progressive, the other conservative'. Similarly, Christie typifies Wordsworth's 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey' as a debate between self-doubt and affirmation, describing the poem as an attempt 'to convert depression into self-possession and loss into power and transcendence'. And in a particularly lucid explication, Christie interprets 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' as a struggle between chaos and order. He asserts that '*The Rime* [...] is [...] about the need to reduce the mysterious and the irrational and the arbitrary in our world [...] to something manageable and ordered'.

One obvious objection to Christie's approach is that this dualistic procedure is too narrow, overlooking the diversity and richness of different Romanticisms. As Christie observes, even for A.O. Lovejoy 'the meanings of the word "Romanticism" in current usage in the 1920s were so many and so various, and at times so mutually incompatible, as effectively to render it meaningless'. Moreover, Christie's limited canon of Romantic writings not only overlooks numerous vital and essential writers, it also fails to acquaint the novice student with most of the topics—gender, race, nationalism, globalisation and the impact of print to name but a few—that have animated Romantic studies over the past thirty years or so and demonstrated the literature of the period's continued relevance today. In particular, the lack of explicit justification for the selection of texts may baffle the novice, especially since they are likely to be reading Christie alongside anthologies of Romantic-era texts that do not feature all of the texts under consideration. Such confusion may be exacerbated by a writing style that is heavy in emphatic and qualifying clauses.

A further objection to *The Two Romanticisms* is that, in practice, the two definitions so frequently collapse into one another as to be indistinct. Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' is both an exotic artefact and a rumination on imagination; Wordsworth's 'The Thirteen-Book Prelude' is famous for its author's assertion of the vital role of childhood engagement with the natural world in the formation of the self, but the poem also features Orientalist dreams and druidic reveries. One might also observe that Christie's analysis is more convincing in cases in which a writer seems genuinely to be caught between two contradictory positions—as one might claim of Byron or Wordsworth—but less persuasive in examples where one element predominates. For example, while it is plausible that liberal elements can be detected in Austen's writing, it seems clear that her overall stance is best described as conservative. Viewing literary texts as internal debates between two opposing positions risks simplifying them, and it is notable that Christie does not apply his dualistic mode of analysis as strongly in his chapters on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or John Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'.

However, one clear compensation for these disadvantages is that Christie provides neophytes with a clear model of Romanticism that they can apply to many different texts without asking them to endorse the label uncritically or overwhelming them with too much information. A

Book Reviews

further benefit of Christie's emphasis on Romanticism's dual character is that this account enables readers to relate texts under consideration to the notoriously polarised politics of the revolutionary era. Christie's distinction between the sensationalism of 'small "r"' romanticism and the vaulting intellectual ambition of the 'capital "R"' variant also allows beginners to ask questions about the relationship between popular literature and High Romanticism and explore their legacy in culture today. In the case of Byron, Christie's model is very effective in drawing students' attention to the dynamic and divided nature of the poet's life, work and personality, at the same time as enabling them to compare Byron in an informed manner with very different contemporaries such as Wordsworth and Coleridge.

For Christie, Byron's early appeal lay in his invocation of primitive passions: 'the public fascination with Byron is the fascination of a modern, enlightened, commercial world with a more irrational, more overtly passionate, darker, small 'r' romantic world'. Yet the poet's literary significance also derives from his anticipation of contemporary trends, in particular his work's 'awareness of its own fictiveness [...] anticipate[s] recent forms of anti-humanist deconstruction'. Christie thereby fashions a compelling and insightful image of Byron as a poet looking both back and forwards, reinventing the past in order to bring the future into being.

ALEX WATSON
University of Nagoya

Reproduced with permission of copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.