**Consumption and Literature: The Making of the Romantic ...**
Sha, Richard C
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elucidates the ways in which Laura Riding disappears from the biographical and historical record, only to be replaced by Graves's conjuration of the mythological White Goddess. Vogel negotiates the Freudian elements of this story with an admirably light touch.

The final section, "Writing Back: Postcolonial and Contemporary Contestation and Retrospection," brings the critical conversation about joint authorship into fresh territory. Its provocative "writing back" model, within which Demers's idea of deferred collaboration comfortably fits, represents the most liberal employment of the term "collaborative authorship" in the collection. Rebecca Carpenter's "Competing Versions of a Love Story: Mircea Eliade and Maitreyi Devi" opens this section by juxtaposing versions of history that appear in two different novels: Eliade's *Bengal Nights* (1933) and Devi's *It Does Not Die* (1974). What might be called an instance of "deferred contestation," Devi's novel lays bare the orientalist fantasies upon which Eliade's fiction is constructed. Carpenter demonstrates that in "writing back" Devi essentially reclaims narrative authority for her life. Sarah Churchwell's "'Your Sentence was Mine Too': Reading Sylvia Plath in Ted Hughes's *Birthday Letters*" pursues yet another, albeit somewhat attenuated instance of deferred collaboration. Here, Churchwell argues that Ted Hughes's *Birthday Letters* reanimates Plath and her writing within various scenes from the famously (and publicly) contentious marriage. Hughes's side of the story, Churchwell suggests, is not so much a "secret" revealed to the reading public as a foray into the inter-textuality—indeed the "hetero-textuality"—of the poets' lives and work.

Closing this section, Lorraine York compares the reception histories of lesbian collaborators who lived a century apart. In "Crowding the Garret: Women's Collaborative Writing and the Problematics of Space," York first discusses Victorian partners Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper (a.k.a. "Michael Field") and Edith Somerville and Violet Marin ("Somerville and Ross") before turning to three contemporary writing relationships complicated by postcolonial and cross-cultural dimensions: those of Ayanna Black and Lee Maracle, Gillian Hanscombe and Suniti Namjoshi, and Daphne Marlatt and Betsy Warland. However open and even acceptable, these contemporary relationships nevertheless struggle to reconcile lesbian desire with the anxieties of national and cultural identity.

Thompson and Stone conclude *Literary Couplings* with an essay on literary collaboration and its critical history. "Taking Joint Stock: A Critical Survey of Scholarship on Literary Couples and Collaboration" superbly complements the introduction and will be an invaluable asset to any researcher in this field. A handful of seminal studies, Jack Stillinger's *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of the Solitary Genius* (1991) among them, paved the way for books like *Literary Couplings.* Stone and Thompson readily acknowledge the debt and deserve recognition for having advanced the critical conversation to such a point that concerns over the earlier myths of solitary genius are giving way to new concerns over myths of collaborative authorship. *Literary Couplings* raises questions about what constitutes collaboration and about the human intimacies that produce and that are produced by shared literary work. It is an important and welcome addition to the growing body of research on the construction of authorship.

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## Clark Lawlor, *Consumption and Literature: The Making of the Romantic Disease*

(Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) viii + 243 $ 65/ £32.50

A Review by Richard C. Sha
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Good books open with piquant questions. Clark Lawlor asks, how did the horrific symptoms of consumption (tuberculosis) become transmogrified into an aesthetics of literary sensibility? The question gains urgency when one considers that this disease killed up to 25% of the American and European populations from the 17th to the 19th centuries (5). Lawlor's answer takes him back to the Renaissance, when consumption was understood as love sickness (Chapter One). From there, victims of the disease were considered God's chosen, since consumption allowed its patients to take care of their spiritual affairs before they died (Chapter Two). In the Enlightenment, by contrast, the consumptive look helped to define feminine beauty—thin, delicate, and wasting. Throughout, Lawlor considers both the medical and aesthetic implications of this disease. Literature, he believes, matters: it shapes the way in which people experience their diseases, but not in the ways one expects.

Lawlor begins this study with a chapter on Renaissance lovesickness and consumption. To begin in the Renaissance is to return to the Classical Age, to Hippocrates's and Galen's understandings of the disease (16-18), though not in their actual language. Chapter Two examines how seventeenth-century Protestants associated the disease with theological grace, which the relatively mild symptoms allowed them to do (37). Enlightenment writers like George Cheyne, Defoe,

## Kirstie Blair, *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart.*

(Clarendon Press, 2006) vi + 273 $115/£56



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Smollett, Richardson, and Sterne elide nerves with phthisus, and thereby use consumption to enhance male creativity and female beauty (58). Cheyne, in particular, equated consumption with the beautiful and better sort of people (107). Sure to raise eyebrows is Lawlor's claim that Clarissa died of consumption, but he offers a persuasive account of how her death modeled the highly gendered death from consumption. Lawlor shows how Sterne conflates sentimental love with consumption (105) in *Tristram Shandy*, *A Sentimental Journey*, and his *Journal to Eliza* (98-107).

In the Romantic period, sensibility becomes "morbid" as the individual devolves into melancholy (115). As the creative genius aligns himself or herself with irritability, the stage is set for disease to testify to poetic talent. Here, Lawlor sketches the roles of Brunonian medicine, Humphrey Davy, Joseph Priestly, and Thomas Trotter. Lawlor wonders why the myth of consumption continued to have force, especially since the Victorians were identified with a muscular Christianity (Chapter 7, p. 172). One key explanation was Hermann von Helmholtz's statement of the First Law of Thermodynamics concerning the conservation of energy: this law rehearsed and lent scientific credibility to the vitalist notion that life was a limited force (174-77). The study concludes with a chapter on germ theory and a biting treatment of *Dracula*.

To his credit, Lawlor ranges widely, covering consumptive literature and medicine from the Renaissance to the Victorian periods in both Britain and America. His attention to medicine is sound if a bit tidy. He demonstrates persuasively how the Romantic period used historical models to understand consumption and how consumption shaped notions of feminine delicacy in the period. Yet in his rush to cover territory, he neglects poetry. An appendix with the full text of these poems would have been helpful.

Contextual studies, often crowd out the text itself and overlook poetic nuance. One key symptom of this contextual flaw is Lawlor's neglect of Keats's consumption and its implications for his poetry (133-37). While Keats's portrait is on the cover of the book, he does not get his own section while Henry Kirke White does. Although Lawlor's claim that "the medicine of sensibility was combined with a Romantic vitalism that viewed man's life (both physical and mental) as a burning flame with a fixed amount of fuel" (115) is helpful, one would like more of a sense of how this concept impacts Keats's poetry. Lawlor's discussion of Shelley's definition of a "virile, consumptive effeminacy-symbolised by the 'Cockney' Keats" (139) is more suggestive. And did women poets like Mary Tighe, Felicia Hemans, and Maria Davidson writing about consumption never hold up the cultural ideal of the delicate female to critical scrutiny? Given Wollstonecraft's insistent demands for female mental and physical strength, why can't her depictions of consumption have an ironic edge to them?

One might also quibble with Lawlor's assertion that consumption is *the* Romantic disease. The fact that this disease goes back to the Renaissance further begs the question of why Romanticism should have the defining power here. Because germ theory did not evolve until the late Victorian period, no one knew what caused consumption, which was framed, as Lawlor demonstrates, as a nervous disease or, as others have claimed, Yellow Fever (Bewell), Hypochondria (Grinnell), Madness (Youngquist, Burwick, and others), Masturbation (Levinson and Felluga) and Venereal Disease. If one is going to make the bold claim that consumption is *the* Romantic disease, then one wants to know more about how this disease enriches one's understanding of Romanticism itself. Nonetheless, *Consumption and Literature: The Making of the Romantic Disease* is a well-written and wide-ranging study, one sure to infect—here, a term of praise—future studies of this disease and its literary representations.

Kirstie Blair opens *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart* by asking "what was at stake for poets in writing of and from the heart" (3). Moreover, "what kind of culture of the heart existed in the Victorian period—and what was being surmised about its workings—and how did this impinge upon poetry" (3). Drawing upon powerful slippages in the Victorian period from the figural to medical workings of the heart, Blair shows how Tennyson, Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Arnold exploited the heart's ability to play a curative role for poetry, its proximity to affect, and its gendered clichés so that these can be revised.

Blair's chapter on heart disease in the Victorian period shrewdly opens with Laennec's invention of the stethoscope in 1819, which allowed physicians to examine their female patients without the specter of indecency (24). In practice, however, the stethoscope revealed the irregularities of the affective pulse (24). Poets, for example, steeped in emotions, were especially vulnerable to irregular heartbeats. Such a connection between affective strength and poetic ability meant that poets began to wear their hearts on their sleeves. Heart disease, despite its being deadly, became a badge of high status, "tinged with romance" (29). Because the heart and its affective baggage lay at the crossroads between spiritual and material concerns, researchers turned to it because it licensed physiological study and philosophical speculation. The heart, Blair argues, was more important than the mind and brain on which most of the research in the Victorian period focused(43). Even headaches were believed to have been caused by the heart and circulation (48).

Blair's chapter on Elizabeth Barrett Browning considers how the gendering of the heart as feminine raised specific problems. As L.E. L. knew, laying bare her heart might expose her to charges of pornography or prostitution (115). These dangers were exacerbated when Valentines threatened to leave their indelible taint of commodification upon the heart: the Golden Age of Valentines was between 1820 and 1870 (116). Barrett Browning therefore either turns to irony



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when speaking of the heart or rewrites the cultural script of the heart to make clear that dabbling with coronary metaphors is insufficient because real blood and real suffering make the poet (122). Aurora thus invokes the female heart only to reject it. Throughout this chapter, Blair's nuanced readings show how meter and rhyme have an edge of critique to them.

Matthew Arnold, by contrast, worries that although the heart is supposed to be the locus of feeling, it is unresponsive (146). Here, Blair turns away from medical language to consider the heart's relation to high Anglicanism. Where Evangelicals could turn to God felt on the pulses to strengthen faith, Catholics reminded their parishioners that since Christ had a heart it was the body's most noble organ (150-51). Arnold was more skeptical: he invokes the heart to point out that his subjects do not feel it. Perhaps because he feared his own diseased heart, "dissociating the self from the heart's actions might be sensible" (174). Against Arnold, Tennyson in *In Memorium* seeks to rekindle the power of the heart, believing that it is beneficial to get rid of feelings that have no outlet for human action (186).

Blair's awareness of how the culture of the heart relies upon slippages between the medical and figural allows her to attend to the medical and poetic implications of this poetry. But she does not consider the possible gaps between the slippages she relies upon for her argument and the actual slippages within the discourse. To the extent that cardiologists had to be wary of the figurative dimensions for their arguments (figures are a potential liability in scientific argument), how did they attempt to arrest this slippage? Andrew Cunningham, for example, has argued that whereas earlier physiologists could begin with theory and add experiments which confirmed those theories, physiologists of the nineteenth century began to turn to actual experiment first. One wonders how physiology itself looked to the heart to bolster its status as science.

Blair's study is more attentive to the poetic than Lawlor's. In a fine chapter on the pulse of verse, she examines the ways in which poetry became a somatic experience, one that could cure or pathologize. Aware that aligning meter and the heart could reduce poetry to a galvanic period, Blair reads Arnold's refusal to keep a steady beat as a form of his skepticism about the heart which has become empty. Tennyson's pulsing meter, on the other hand, "represents simultaneously a reassuring natural or heavenly process that underpins the uncertainties of the poem, and the frail beat of the desperately weakened human heart, always threatening to stop, haunted by lingering sympathy with 'The darkened heart that beat no more'" (190). Despite these strengths, her study would have benefited from the kind of deep archaeology that Lawlor undertakes. Together, Lawlor and Blair show that there is still much to learn from combining medical history and literature.

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## Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, *Gothic and the Comic Turn*

(Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) ix + 205 $79.95

A Review by Christopher C. Nagle
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Interest in things Gothic shows no sign of abating. Nearly 80,000 listings come up if one searches Gothic on Amazon.com, and the MLA database shows over 1,300 entries in the past decade alone. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik's *Gothic and the Comic Turn* offers an original approach to one area that has received comparatively little attention. Horner and Zlosnik lay the groundwork for an ambitious project spanning nearly two centuries by establishing their notion of a "comic turn" that is flexible enough to avoid unreasonable narrowness, yet precise enough to distinguish between the comic and comedy, as well as satire, parody, and travesty. Similarly, their idea of the Gothic is capacious, as the authors acknowledge, including works that, either from their unfamiliarity or their "hybridity," some readers might exclude.

Hybridity emerges as a key attribute of the "comic turn," signaling "juxtaposition of incongruous textual effects" (3) in a literary work. Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* illustrates this mixture: along with the genuine horror from the bloody violence and sexual violation at the heart of the narrative, it sustains a consistent comic undercurrent. From the opening scene in which a gigantic helmet falls from the sky to crush the body of Manfred's son, Conrad (and, temporarily, the aspirations of Manfred), to the garrulity of the servant Bianca, horror mixes with levity that borders of self-parody. Parody proves central to Horner and Zlosnik, who draw inspiration from Linda Hutcheon's influential work while formulating their own definition: "a literary mode that, while engaging with a target text or genre, exhibits a keen sense of the comic, an acute awareness of intertextuality and an engagement with the idea of metafiction" (12). Additionally, the authors' sense of a "turn" bears the weight of deconstructive logic. Horner and Zlosnik argue "that the comic within the Gothic foregrounds a self-reflexivity and dialectic impulse intrinsic to the modern subject" and that "the comic Gothic



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