This brilliantly conceived, exhilarating, and wide-ranging collection of essays is essential reading for all those interested in taking the long view of the historical, literary, and philosophical times of British Romanticism.

Pamela Clemitt, Queen Mary, University of London

Romanticism and Time is a remarkable affirmation of border-crossings and international exchanges in many ways. This major collection of essays represents the work of eminent scholars from France, Germany, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as they in turn represent the Romanticisms that emerged not only from the "four nations" of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland but also from Continental Europe and America. With their commitment to diversity, to change, and to exchange, and because of their awareness of the romanticism of periodization itself, the authors in this volume produce, as Wordsworth might say, a "timely utterance."

Kevis Goodman, University of California, Berkeley

This volume considers Romantic poetry as embedded in and reflecting on the march of time, regarding it not merely as a reaction to the course of events between the late-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, but also as a form of creative engagement with history in the making. Revising current thinking about periodisation, these essays survey the Romantic canon's evolution over time and approach Romanticism as a phenomenon unfolding across national borders.

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Introduction: The Times of Romanticism

Sophie Laniel-Musitelli and Céline Sabiron

‘Eternity is in love with the productions of time’.³

In this volume, we have decided to take Blake’s aphorism as an invitation to see Romantic writing as a ‘production of time’; to look for the work of time within Romantic literature. One of the aims of this collection is to understand Romanticism as the product of its own time, in its ability to reflect history and in the emergence of its specific poetics through time. Blake’s words can also be read as a meditation on poetics unfolding ‘in time’: on poetic form as the product of rhyme and rhythm. Yet, if we attend to the reversibility that characterises Blake’s ‘Proverbs of Hell’, this aphorism also offers a vision of Romanticism as an active ‘production of time’, not only registering the passing of time but also shaping conceptions of time and making history. Romantic writing then also appears as an art of time, creating new representations of temporal phenomena and generating new modes of time-consciousness. The contributions in this collection, which includes a selection of revised papers from the ‘Romanticism and Time’ conference as well as specially

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commissioned essays,⁴ are thus held together by the common ambition to study Romantic writing as ‘authentically temporal’,⁵ as a process in time that displays a form of agency over time.

This collection explores the ways in which British Romantic literature creates its own sense of time, from the end of the eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, from William Blake, William Wordsworth, John Keats, Lord Byron, and Percy Shelley, to John Clare and Samuel Rogers, raising the question of the evolution of the Romantic canon over time. The presence of poets such as Clare and Rogers, who eluded academia’s field of vision for so long, exposes our own temporal locatedness as academics. It gestures towards the writers who still elude that field of vision and towards those who are surreptitiously drifting out of it. The essays are bound by a common approach to the creative relations Romanticism entertains with the notion of time, with an emphasis on poetry.⁶ It aims at offering a reflection on the role of poetic writing as a mode of perception of time. The Romantics explored the possibilities opened up by poetry as a form of time, as experiences of time were reflected but also took shape within poetic forms.

Nevertheless, the scope of this collection is not limited to the realm of poetry. The affinities between temporality and narrative, but also between temporality and the order of reason in essay-writing manifest themselves in the multiple temporalities of prose.⁷ This is why this volume also looks into the temporalities of Romantic novels and essays, from Mary Shelley to Charles Lamb and William Hazlitt. Furthermore, some of our contributors were particularly sensitive to the Romantics’ eager exploration of other forms of artistic manipulation of time, and

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⁴ The conference was held in November 2018 and organised jointly by the French Society for the Study of British Romanticism and by the Universités de Lille and Lorraine, with the support of the Institut Universitaire de France.


to their tropism towards music in particular, hence the place given to Beethoven’s *Fidelio* in Section I.

Few have attempted to consider the various temporalities of Romanticism as a form of cross-fertilisation between nations, with the notable exception of Martin Procházka, Nicholas Halmi and Paul Hamilton,\(^8\) also contributors to this volume. We share their ambition to study the Romantic poetics of history as a European phenomenon. As ‘a literature that represents its own fluid conditions of becoming,’\(^9\) Romanticism is also a process in time, constructed by various generations of artists and critics in a complex dynamic of transience and persistence. With the aim of confronting British Romanticism with some of its later European counterparts, some chapters explore the dialogues between Byron and Nietzsche, and between Shelley and Beckett. Challenging the linearity of deterministic conceptions of influence, Romantic texts experiment with creative modes of intertextuality, inventing their origins and imagining their legacies. This volume thus offers a vision of Romanticism as a moment of ‘obstinate questionings’ of the temporalities of literature,\(^10\) as its uncanny persistence into later literary movements generates turbulence in the course of traditional literary history.

In its various instantiations in time and across borders, Romanticism ‘defines itself through a process of self-dissemination which leaves each moment of its instantiation characteristically fragmentary’,\(^11\) raising epistemological questions for the field of literary studies and its reliance on periodisation. The proceedings of the roundtable ‘Romanticism and Periodisation’, edited by David Duff, interrogate our critical practices,

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and fascination for Romantic presences, persistence, and legacies.\textsuperscript{12} In its ability to bend the course of literary chronologies, Romanticism thus appears as essentially untimely.

This volume looks for Romanticism as a movement out of time: generated by and precipitating the acceleration of history. The close readings here trace the ways in which Romantic ‘time disseminates itself’\textsuperscript{13} into widely varying scales, paces, and planes, in an age of political, industrial, and epistemological revolutions. Such a ‘vertiginous temporality’\textsuperscript{14} manifests itself in scalar discrepancies, from the span of a lifetime to unfathomable geological and astronomical sequences, especially in the passage from the timeless and tabular representation of a Linnean nature to the more arrow-like conception of time in pre-evolutionist theories. The emergence of Romanticism corresponds to the moment when geological time and human time collide, ‘as the Anthropocene simultaneously forces human and planetary timescales together and undoes our longstanding belief in the priority of the former over the latter’ (Evan Gottlieb). The experience of time takes varying paces: from the time of agricultural labour embedded in the cycles of nature to the capitalist time of feverish production and constant consumption. The epistemology of time is fragmented into competing paradigms and fields of knowledge, between the poles of Kantian time as an a priori intuition and Newtonian time, with its undifferentiated flow and homogenous course.

The Romantic poetics of time reflects that dissemination. It bears witness to ‘a disconnection and out-of-jointness’ at work within


chronological time.\textsuperscript{15} Contained in Shelley’s ‘We look before and after, /And pine for what is not—\textsuperscript{16} is that sense of an elusive present caught in the constant tension between past and future, between the poles of anamnesis and prophecy. Romantic temporality thus lies in the ‘co-existence of distinct timelines’ (Anne Rouhette) upsetting what Rancière calls ‘the self-coincidence of time’.\textsuperscript{17} It emerges within the discrepancy between a ‘transformational instant’ (Gregory Dart) and the \textit{longue durée} of history, within a ‘multiplicity of temporal lines, [with] several senses of time experienced at the “same” time’.\textsuperscript{18} This multilinear experience takes shape in the tension between the sense of time rooted in ‘the manifold quirks and variations of lived experience’ (Matthew Redmond) and the otherness of non-subjective temporalities. Romantic texts allow for embodied experiences of time to emerge: time fleshes itself out within the ‘body as a temporal medium’ (Oriane Monthéard). Poetic time encounters biological time: the opaque, often undecipherable temporality at work within the human body, its vital rhythms and its course towards ageing and death.

Blake’s meditation, ‘Eternity is in love with the productions of time’, challenges the mutual exclusion of the transient and the timeless. Romantic literature has sometimes been seen as cultivating the belief ‘that poetry by its nature can transcend the conflicts and transiences of this time and that place’,\textsuperscript{19} trying to avoid the wounds of time’s arrow in a tropism towards timelessness. Yet, in the words of Giorgio Agamben, ‘Those who are truly contemporary, who truly belong to their time, are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands. [...] But precisely because of this condition, precisely through this disconnection and this anachronism, they are more capable than others of perceiving and grasping their own time’.\textsuperscript{20} Romantic writers endeavour to bring about a new distribution of the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Ibid.
\item Agamben, ‘What is the Contemporary?’, p. 40.
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transient and the timeless by conferring on poetry a temporality that sees beyond current events and that bears the responsibility of political change. This collection considers the Romantic poetics of time less as a drive towards atemporal transcendence than as the record of a ‘falling into time’ (Ralf Haekel). It has chosen to look at Romanticism in time: embedded in time and reflecting on history. The close readings in this volume explore less the historiographical ambitions than the poetics of history in Romantic writing, ‘envisioning anew the role that poetic forms and stylistic techniques play [...] in the way Romantic literature engages with history’. Our aim is not to see Romantic poems as merely reactive to the course of events, but as creative engagements with history in the making. Romanticism was immersed in its own time, yet not passively so, inventing ‘new modes of historical consciousness’ and making history.

Rather than investigating the Romantic poetics of history as a memorial art, this volume focuses on what ‘permits the private space of the self entrance into those monumental moments recorded by, and for, history’ (Mark Sandy). In the same way, the Romantic ambition to attend to the ‘shadows which futurity casts upon the present’ is seen in this book as part of an endeavour to change the course of events. In the words of Ian Balfour, ‘Prophecy is a call and a claim much more than it is a prediction, a call oriented toward a present that is not present’. In the politics of Romanticism, prophecy is part of the will to shape the present: to liberate the efficacy of poetry and set the forces of history in motion.

That ability to envision futurity takes place in a moment of latency, as it awakens new political aspirations. According to Richard Eldridge, that moment, in between the promise of advent and indefinite deferral, is the temporality of political freedom: ‘This sense of simultaneous direction toward and deferral of the achievement of freedom accounts for the

21 No page number is indicated for references to the chapters in this volume.
23 Ernst Behler, German Romantic Literary Theory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 4, https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511519437
predominance in Romantic writing of remembrance and anticipation rather than of present statement of the features of things, revealing the political import of the Romantic poetics of time. The Romantics’ conception of futurity involves their commitment to envision the future in a dark present. In the words of Paul Hamilton, Romantic writing reveals ‘the interwoven quality of the future in past and present’.

The Romantic poetics of time thus transforms time from the inside, upsetting chronologies, introducing loops and detours, shaking the foundations of a ‘temporal economy […] of the sort implied in the concept of linear time’ (Laura Quinney). Taking an active part in the ‘essential dishomogeneity’ of its times, Romanticism refracts rather than merely reflects time. The Romantic poetics of time also redistributes origins and aftermaths when posterity becomes a driving force and a process of origination: ‘For the Romantics, […] posterity is not so much what comes after poetry as its necessary prerequisite—the judgement of future generations becomes the necessary condition of the act of writing itself’. Romantic poetics thus open up various lines of time, disjointing and combining temporal layers within the play of literary language: ‘dividing and interpolating time, [the poet] is capable of transforming it and putting it in relation with other times’. In order to attend to time in the making in Romantic texts, this volume looks into their ability to interweave various lines of time.

Romanticism is sometimes seen as dismissive of a clockwork conception of time that divides the continuum of temporal experience into a series of discrete units. Romantic poetics consists less in the rejection of quantifiable and linear time than in the subversion of its homogeneity based on the return of identical units. The Romantic poetics of time introduces difference within patterns of repetition, when poetic rhythm creates other forms of periodicity. Hence the swirling movement guiding the breath of the Spirit of the Hour in *Prometheus Unbound*: ‘Thou breathe into the many-folded Shell, /Loosening its

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27 Agamben, ‘What is the Contemporary?’, p. 52.


29 Agamben, ‘What is the Contemporary?’, p. 53.
mighty music’.\textsuperscript{30} The breath of the Spirit of the Hour turns into a melody within the spiral structure of the conch. In Shelley’s spiral vision of time, poetry emerges at the exact same time as the advent of a swerve or swirl, as the emergence of an open circular movement within the shell. That spiral motion manifests itself as a strain between reminiscence and prophecy:

\begin{quote}
PROMETHEUS [\ldots]

[Turning to the Spirit of the Hour.]

For thee, fair Spirit, one toil remains. Ione,

Give her that curved shell, which Proteus old

Made Asia’s nuptial boon, breathing within it

A voice to be accomplished, and which thou

Didst hide in grass under the hollow rock.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

The shell, given long ago by ‘Proteus old’, is a convoluted form bearing within itself the depths of time. The trochaic inversions at the onsets of the segments ‘Give her that curved shell’ and ‘breathing within it’ seem to invert the stress pattern for a spell of time before the iambic rhythm reasserts itself. They introduce a form of reversibility within the flow, offering a synthesis of linear and circular lines of time, a movement embodied by the motif of the spiral. As a remembrance and a promise intricately weaved into the rhythms of poetry, the voice contained within the shell points to the Romantic art of subverting the course of representation. It tells of the way Romantic poetics complicates the temporality of mimesis, in which the model is supposed to come before the work. In Shelley’s temporal spiral, poetry is mimetic of the future it envisions.

Poetry comes first, and intimates the advent of what it longs for: the anticipation contained within a distant memory. In the Romantic poetics of intimation, the future is contained within the past and the past will blossom in the future. Romantic poetics reveals its apprehension of

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
the delicate fabric of time in transformative moments. Indeed, these involutes\textsuperscript{32} can be traced in the political concepts of revolution and restoration which, in the words of Paul Hamilton, offer ‘this future-rich understanding of the past in the present’. The collision of several temporalities ‘compose rhythms whose *tempi* are out of joint’\textsuperscript{33}. It consists in an act of composition in the musical sense. The Romantic poetics of time introduces a swerve in the structure of time, generating ripples and lapses. It derives its specific rhythm from the constant disjointing and interweaving of several temporal threads. The Romantic art of incipience, when the shell is about to ‘loos[en] its mighty music’, reawakens the force of the potential. It gestures toward that inchoate moment when the pen is about to touch the page. That moment of temporisation is an act of composition that interweaves actuality and potentiality. At that instant, textual potentialities—all the poems that might have been—dissolve before the poem that emerges. And yet, they somehow survive the moment of writing, vibrating in the background of the actual poem, generating alternative strata of time, embracing all its pasts, presents and futures.

Section I, ‘Restoration, Revival, and Revolution across Romantic Europe’, studies the way Romanticism developed at different moments and within different cultures in Europe. Paul Hamilton’s chapter, ‘Future Restoration’, lays the stress on the crucial importance of ‘restoration’, rather than ‘revolution’ (and its French historical representation, which has already been the subject of many a critical study), for English Romantics, in particular Blake and Wordsworth. They resorted to it creatively in their quest for a continuum between past, present and future, and through their grasp of both temporality and literature across Europe. The Romantics’ skill at unearthing a political imagery matching their perception of time is further developed in Evan Gottlieb’s essay on ‘Anthropocene Temporalities and British Romantic Poetry’. In the Romantic era, this sense of a human temporal continuity—partly based on the impression of a permanent imperishable natural world on which humanity relies and as conveyed by Wordsworth’s poetry—is yet

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\textsuperscript{32} This is a reference to De Quincey’s ‘involutes’ in *Suspiria de Profundis*, in Lindop, Grevel, ed., *Thomas De Quincey: Confessions of an English-Opium Eater and Other Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 104. \\
\textsuperscript{33} Didi-Huberman, *Devant le temps*, p. 39, our translation.
\end{tabular}
\end{footnotesize}
questioned by the rapid technological and industrial transformations and the geopolitical disturbances induced by the Napoleonic Wars. Wordsworth’s younger British contemporaries, especially Keats, P.B. Shelley and Byron, thus came up with alternative temporalities, four of which are traced back in the chapter. The Romantics’ self-reflexivity on their own historicity is eventually examined through a close-up on lyrical art and the way classical music, and particularly Beethoven’s operatic paean to freedom, *Fidelio*, interacts with and has an impact on the history of the period. Gregory Dart’s piece reflects on the various versions of the opera as ‘instances of a shifting political-historical consciousness’ and as a string of distinct but related “spots of time”, an allegory of history. He shows how music is gradually subjected to the pressures of real and historical times, and how timing becomes the political virtue of the future. The first section, dealing with the way poetry and the arts, especially music, are progressively shaped by historical events in the Romantic period, leads to a more subjective and intimate approach to time.

Section II focuses on the ‘Romantic Conceptions of Time’ as it is felt and experienced. Taking his cue from Walter Benjamin’s philosophy of time as developed in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Ralf Haekel investigates the temporality of the soul in William Wordsworth’s ‘Ode. Intimations of Immortality’ and Lord Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*. To him they both convey a much bleaker vision and even disillusioned picture of the nature of time and history than is usually agreed upon by critics like Helen Vendler, Michael O’Neill, James Chandler, and Jerome McGann, to quote but a few recent examples. Longing for an eternity that seems forever gone, the poets yet depict time as fleeting and transient. This perception of time coincides with the shift from an essentially eternal conception to a temporal and thereby finite concept of human nature. Byron’s epic, mirroring the hero’s walking in a disenchanted world echoes Keats’s perception of time as discussed by Oriane Monthéard in the following chapter. Taking a walking tour of Scotland in the summer of 1818, the poet got the chance to harmoniously connect with temporality. Wishing to break away from the constraints of the ordinary measurement of time, as he recorded in his letters, Keats ended up experiencing a fictionalised temporality through picturesque tourism when he visited the landscape with a literary gaze, thus
following the tracks of other poets. Past and present merged through
the poet’s physical act of walking on a ground pervaded with memories,
while he also felt much more anchored in his own time. This redefinition
of a more personal take on time needs studying and theorising; hence
the following section dedicated to the poetics of time.

Section III, entitled ‘The Poetics of Time’, considers the work of time
and the uneasy tension, in Lily Dessau’s chapter, between natural-
and man-made time (the mechanical church clock), simultaneously
tracked across the cyclical recurring of seasons and the daily schedule
of a farm labourer busy with various agricultural tasks in John Clare’s
extended work *The Shepherd’s Calendar* (1827). Dessau contrasts these
temporal variations and progressions with what happens in the ‘May’
poem in which, she says, ‘Clare keeps us perpetually trapped in the
present, denying access to the narrated past of custom and tradition’.
Through a close-reading analysis of the poem, she underlines the
cuts in the published version when compared to the manuscript, thus
metafictionally questioning the role played by both editors and patrons
in these compressions and contractions. The acceleration of time,
as also enabled by the development of print and the accompanying
industrialisation, is further discussed by Matthew Henry Redmond in
his chapter on two landmark essayists, the British Charles Lamb and the
American Washington Irving, presented as combative antiquarians in a
world of machines and breakneck speed. They both advocate reading
as a way to exercise one’s critical judgment and to escape from their
age’s most pressing and irrational controversies. If promoting reading
and antiquarianism may at first sound anachronistic in the Romantic
era, so do Victor’s alchemical pursuits in *Frankenstein*. In her chapter
dedicated to Mary Shelley’s novel, Anne Rouhette shows how the book
brings forward at least two approaches to time: historical and mythical.
Yet, instead of contrasting them, it tries to superimpose or even merge
them through the precarious, uneasy cohabitation of the linear and
the cyclical, thereby demonstrating that chronological disorder and
anachronism can be used to poetical ends. This creative handling of
time in literature and its effect on both the diegesis and the reader raises
questions pertaining to the field of reception studies.

Section IV, ‘Persistence and Afterlives’ turns to Romantic legacies
and the way Romantics, like Shelley and his last poem ‘The Triumph of
Life’, have paradoxically served as a source of inspiration for twentieth-century authors like Beckett, as demonstrated by Laura Quinney in her comparative study of the two writers. Her chapter, entitled ‘Heaps of Time in Beckett and Shelley’, undoes the difference between speed—as seemingly conceptualised in Shelley’s poem that stages the Chariot of Life hurtling forward on its destructive course and figuring the overwhelming momentum of time—and vacancy, as embodied by Beckett’s characters who feel entrapped in a time that never runs out, but perpetually runs on and in slow motion, up to the point when it becomes static, as if they had become prisoners of a purgatorial temporality. Mark Sandy eventually spirits the readers of this volume away to Venice, a place presented as both real, through its distinctive architecture and key historical sites, all rooted in time, but also mythical, thanks to the juxtaposition of several timelines and the creative intertwining of personal memories. This fanciful and yet genuine Italian cityscape is central to the poetics of atemporality in Byron and Shelley. It seems to be a welcome and just allegory of the way Romantic writing creates its own sense of time, in its own terms. Like the city that is a perpetually charmed spot and broken spell for Byron and Shelley, the movement appears as essentially untimely through its ability to bend the course of time and to persist beyond the so-called Romantic period.

Co-written by David Duff, Nicholas Halmi, Fiona Stafford, Martin Procházka, and Laurent Folliot, the closing section, entitled ‘Romanticism and Periodisation: A Roundtable’, explores the problem of literary periodisation in Romanticism. It is a vast, and yet little-studied issue in the literary field that becomes the specific focus of this forum, whose formal difference results from its dynamic interplay of voices and standpoints. It offers a qualified overview of the various attempts at defining the period by both contemporaries and later generations, and stresses the main characteristics of Romanticism in terms of keywords, timelines and perspectives, whose differences are induced by a new historical awareness at the turn of the eighteenth century. While it reopens the methodological issue of periodisation in literary history, it also broadens it by subtly highlighting cross-border differences, be they regional or transnational, with a reference to European or even Transatlantic Romanticism. This concluding debate, edited by David Duff, questions the effectiveness of the concept of the ‘Romantic period’
to approach literary history, and its aptness to reflect the multiple distinctions and nuances within Romantic literature.

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