

'Who's afraid for William Wordsworth?': Some Thoughts on 'Romanticism' in 2012

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WHEN HE ANNOUNCED HIS INTENTION TO WITHDRAW FROM THE REPUBLICAN primary contest in 2012, Newt Gingrich declared his commitment to a 'romantic' vision of America (Williamson and Yadron). Googling the words 'Romantic' and 'Gingrich' reveals that the politician has a long history of self-identification as a romantic, going back to the early 1990s, when he challenged budget cuts to the space program on the grounds that he was a 'romantic utopian idealist'. When he argued for a colony on the moon in January 2012, in a speech for which he was widely ridiculed, he also defended his proposal as 'a *romantic* idea'. One journalist claimed that, far from being exceptional, Gingrich's romanticism pointed to 'the essential Newt, simultaneously sublime and ridiculous' (Ball). The Gingrich example highlights the enduring potency as well as the slippery complexity of the keyword Romanticism and the related adjective 'romantic'. As a student of history, Gingrich was trying to harness nineteenth-century century transcendentalism and ultimately the myths of the founding fathers in the service of his politics. For many commentators though, the sense of history was lost in the pejorative connotations of the romantic as a foolish, inconsequential dreamer: the ridiculous trumped the sublime. The Gingrich example illustrates the significance of Romanticism as a cultural movement the potency of which can still be invoked in 2012. However, the failure of Gingrich's attempt to re-energise the heroic ideal of American free enterprise suggests that like a signal from a dying planet, and

perhaps the American dream itself, Romanticism's communicative power may be becoming exhausted.

This article explores this theme in relation to the history and current state of British Romanticism as sub-field of the discipline of English Literature. Some leading scholars in this field have recently begun to express doubts about the long-term prospects for Romantic studies as we know it, a notable example being James Chandler's *Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, which appeared in 2009. The previous volume in the series is entitled *The Cambridge History of English Literature 1660-1780* so its successor stands out, both for its lack of chronological boundaries and for its emphasis on the term Romantic, suggesting that there was something radically and qualitatively different about English literary history after 1780. Chandler's book, *England in 1819*, is also significant here, given its identification of the historically representative, the case study and casuistry as scholarly preoccupations that first took root in the Romantic period. The foregrounding of 'Romantic' in Chandler's introduction to the *Cambridge History* is, however, beset with some anxiety. Apart from concluding with an essay by Jerome McGann entitled 'Is Romanticism finished?', the volume is notable for the last paragraph of Chandler's introduction in which he states:

It is ... a matter of extreme uncertainty what we might expect of a *Cambridge History of English Literature* a century hence. It is possible, with the speed of English-language use around the world, that even more of its contributors might come from an even greater number of places abroad. Then again, it is also possible, if 'English literary history' is not nourished outside Britain, that many fewer contributors will come from abroad. There is of course no assurance that such a History will actually be undertaken again in a century's time—nor, if it is, that it will appear in books like this one. (Chandler, 'Introduction' 17)

The context for Chandler's concern is declining support for the Humanities in the United States, undermining the position of the U.S. as a world leader in British studies, and the diversification of English into fields such as cultural, gender, and film and media studies, competing for the space and authority previously occupied by English and Romantic literature in particular. Chandler's questioning of the long term viability of 'books like this one' as a medium for scholarship can also be said to reflect uncertainty over the future of traditional forums for academic publishing, chiefly the printed book.¹ The sense here of the immanence of cultural change, the magnitude and consequences of which cannot

¹ It's significant also, in this context, that James Chandler's forthcoming book, *An Archaeology of Sympathy* (2013), forges a link between eighteenth-century representations of sentimentality and twentieth-century cinema.

be properly discerned, is characteristically Romantic, making Chandler's introduction itself a kind of Romantic text. A famous precedent is William Wordsworth's 1800 *Preface* to the *Lyrical Ballads*, which is characterized by the same profound sense of de-familiarization, of awareness of the ground shifting below one. In it Wordsworth wrote:

... a multitude of causes unknown to former times are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the encreasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. (Wordsworth and Coleridge 249)

This passage is characteristically Romantic in its acute consciousness of historical change, the sense that the 1790s represented a radical break with the past and also that time itself had speeded up, producing a collective stupefaction, a 'savage torpor'. Partly these changes were the result of events such as the French Revolution but they were also, Wordsworth suggests, the effect of a revolution in print media—the 'rapid communication' of news via the press which one could 'hourly' refresh. Then as now Romanticism takes shape around the condition of a media shift: in Wordsworth's 1790s the transformative potential of daily, penetrating information; in Chandler's case the uncertain status and long term viability of 'books like this one' in the context of a radical transformation of the Humanities and higher education world-wide.

The historicizing self-consciousness of Romanticists and the theatricality of how they stage themselves in relation to their historical moment are therefore deeply engrained, but in the last three years this tendency has taken a particularly anxious turn. This development relates to the 'great national events' post 2001 as well as academia's own increasingly fraught battlegrounds—the 'crisis of the Public University' which is currently the focus of intense debate and attention in a variety of media, both academic and non-academic.² In the United States in late 2011 campus activism in relation to the higher education crisis coalesced with the politics and practices of the Occupy movement. In November 2011 staff and students at the University of California, Berkeley, formed 'Occupy Cal' to protest against tuition fees and staff redundancies. Holding a placard with the slogan 'We're afraid for Virginia Woolf', the English professor Celeste Langan became involved in a confrontation with the UC Berkeley police. Grabbed by the hair and

² For 2012 debate on this issue see the special *Representations* issue, 'The Humanities and the Crisis of the Public University'; Lorenz; 'Against the Day', a special section in *South Atlantic Quarterly*.

pulled to the ground, Langan was later charged with resisting arrest and remaining at the scene of a riot, charges which were eventually dropped in May 2012 (Chen). Langan is a notable Romanticist, best known for *Romantic Vagrancy: Wordsworth and the Simulation of Freedom* (1995), an account of the constitutive importance of the vagrant to Romantic ideas of subjectivity and to sociality. Her background as a Romanticist underpins her defence of Virginia Woolf and a liberal humanist education, much in the same way as it entitles Chandler in the *Cambridge History* to address the future of English literary history as a whole. Such claims are not simply aggrandizing: they speak to the importance of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as the period when English Literature acquires fully fledged authority and social power, entitling Romanticism as a sub-field to speak for the discipline as a whole.

Before returning to the state of Romanticism in 2012 I want to sketch an outline of the complex history of this keyword, with reference to Raymond Williams's account of the term in *Keywords*. Williams identifies its origins in the tradition of medieval and early modern narratives in prose and verse called romances which dealt with exotic tales of love and adventure. By the late eighteenth century 'romantic' was being used to describe the extravagant, the picturesque or the quaintly affecting. The application of romantic to the idea of a cultural movement, its transmutation into an 'ism', only begins to occur in the early nineteenth century, chiefly in Germany, later extending to other art forms, and branches of knowledge—philosophy, the visual arts, music, theatre and so on (Williams 274-76). 'Romantic' in the specific sense of a Romantic literary movement with different national configurations dates from the late nineteenth century, whereas Romanticism as a branch of literary study in the academy, a constitutive field of the discipline of English Literature, is an invention of the twentieth.

James Chandler draws attention to the two dimensions of the 'ism' in Romanticism—the idea of a doctrinal position, on the lines of ancient philosophies such as stoicism and Epicureanism, and the more modern sense of an ideological movement, something that wants to change society and lives such as Marxism, feminism or economic rationalism ('Introduction' 8). Arguably therefore, the Romantic movement is the first modern 'ism' and the later 'isms' would have been impossible without it. It is this quality which makes Romanticism so difficult to pin down and define; it has the potential to cross many spheres and fields of endeavour, and to cast them in its own penetrating 'atmosphere'. The idea of cultures and times having an atmosphere or climate, and of there being the possibility of change in the climate of culture, is itself an

invention of this period.³ Romanticism's status as an 'ism' has meant that it has been a priori an interdisciplinary or even an indisciplinatory phenomenon, in the sense of being resistant to capture by a single or even a range of disciplines. Its rhizomatic reach can be seen in the cognate entries at the end of Williams's keyword entry on 'Romantic': he asks us to 'see CREATIVE, FICTION, FOLK, GENERATION, MYTH, NOVEL, ORIGINAL, SEX, SUBJECTIVE' (Williams 276).

Romanticism as a branch of the study of English literature reached its ascendancy in the period after the Second World War, particularly in the U.S., where Romantic studies played a leading role in enhancing the cultural capital of both English Literature and the post war academy. By 1960, when the journal *Studies in Romanticism* was founded, Romanticism was firmly identified with a particular form, poetry, and with a supercanon of male poets—the famous 'Big Six' of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, Byron, Shelley and Keats. In the 1970s this canon was effectively narrowed to the work of one man, Wordsworth. The post-war period, between 1945 and 1970, is when Romanticists were most assured and confident about their object of study. René Wellek, for example, described the Romantic 'creed' as the 'implication of imagination, symbol, myth and organic nature ... part of the great endeavour to overcome the split between subject and object. ... It is a closely coherent body of thought and feeling' (220). This confidence also found expression in monumental editing projects such as the Cornell Wordsworth and the Princeton Coleridge which simultaneously enhanced the prestige of these writers and that of the institutions sponsoring these editions. Many of the enduring ideas and popular perceptions of Romantic writers were cemented in this post-war period, such as the idea of Romantic poetry (and indeed poetry in general) as primarily the expression of feeling. Post-war Romanticism consolidated the view of the writer as the solitary creative genius dwelling in his imagination and using that imagination to address the meaning of truth, knowledge and selfhood, roaming across the temporal boundaries of past, present and future. The imaginative faculty set the poet apart from other writers, enabling him to transcend the vicissitudes of history and distinguishing poetry from other forms of literature and writing in general as the pre-eminent mode of literary expression. As commentators have noted, Romantic scholarship of the period had its own Romantic idealism, the heroic individualism of a Wordsworth or a Coleridge being a model for the self-fashioning of the male academic in the post-war U.S., a response to what were intensely politicised times, comparable to the 1790s or post-1815. What Jerome McGann later famously characterised as the 'grand illusion of every Romantic poet ... the idea that poetry, or even consciousness, can set one free of the ruins

³ See forthcoming work by Thomas J. Ford, *Romantic Atmospheres: The Poetics of Aerial Culture, 1774-1848*.

of history and culture' also applied to those who were studying and teaching Romanticism in this period (McGann, *The Romantic Ideology* 91).⁴

Romanticism's pre-eminence was re-configured but not fundamentally challenged by the rise of deconstruction in the 1980s. Work on Wordsworth was one of the main conduits by which deconstruction entered U.S. English departments in this period. A greater threat to the coherence of the mid-century version of Romanticism came from the more historical and materialist emphases of the late eighties and nineties, notably new historicism and feminism, influenced by British cultural studies that had been pioneered by Raymond Williams and Marxist-influenced histories such as E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*. Thompson was a profoundly romantic historian as well as an historian of literary Romanticism, particularly Blake (see also Thompson's *Witness*). In an important statement about the field which appeared in 1981, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760-1830*, Marilyn Butler challenged what she called 'the cult of the Romantic writer' by emphasizing literary production as a 'collective activity'. 'Authors are not the solitaires of the Romantic myth', Butler claimed, 'but citizens. ... Though writers are gifted with tongues to articulate the Spirit of the Age, they are moulded by the age' (Butler 9-10). The interrogation of the mid-century myths of Romanticism by more materialist approaches was apparent in the 1980s and 90s in books with titles such as *Questioning Romanticism*, *Beyond Romanticism*, *Revisioning Romanticism*, and by the yoking of Romanticism as a category to other emergent isms such as postcolonialism and feminism, the 'Big Six' being a dream target for feminist critique (Beer; *Beyond Romanticism; Revisioning Romanticism*). The category of English Romantic literature also underwent a form of devolution as Ireland, Wales and Scotland were recognised as centres of separate, distinctive Romantic traditions (Pittock). Robert Burns who, until the early twentieth century, was prominent in the canon of Romantic poets and then disappeared, has experienced a critical revival in the last few years with major biographies and critical studies (Crawford, Leask). It could be argued that the centre of Romantic studies in the U.K. today is not the axis of Oxford, Cambridge and London but that of Edinburgh and Glasgow. In addition poetry has been to some extent decentred as *the* Romantic genre: the prose fiction of the period, particularly the work of women writers such as Charlotte Smith, Mary Hays, Lady Morgan and Maria Edgeworth, is receiving more recognition. It is still remarkable however that the first study explicitly to link Jane Austen with the category of Romanticism was Clara Tuite's *Romantic Austen*, published in 2002 (Tuite).

⁴ See also Marilyn Butler, 'Plotting the Revolution', on the 'fabling' of Romanticism around 1950. Butler writes 'what better models for (male) literary academics than a line of THINKING MEN who are plainly idealized versions of themselves?' (138).

As a result of the historical and cultural turn since the 1980s there has been a certain distancing or disassociation from the mythic, transcendental and transhistorical connotations of Romanticism with the formulations 'Romantic studies' or 'Romantic period studies' emerging as alternatives. 'Romantic period' as a label came to the fore in the mid-90s with the publication of Jerome McGann's *New Oxford Book of Romantic Period Verse*. The innovation of this volume was its organization of poems by year of publication rather than by author, thereby de-emphasizing and re-contextualising the work of the 'Big Six'. As an alternative to Romanticism, 'Romantic period studies' has its own drawbacks, because of the difficulty of defining when that period begins and ends. The Romantic 'age' is often framed by key political events, with the French Revolution of 1789 as the beginning and the Reform Act of 1832 marking the transition to the Victorian era. Some studies, such as the *Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, choose to begin with the American Declaration of Independence in 1776. In *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries*, Marilyn Butler moves her start date back to 1760, but avoids categorizing the period 1760-1789 as 'pre-romanticism' as some critics have done. Not only is it uncertain when the Romantic period precisely began, it is also unclear whether or not it has actually ended, as the concluding essay in the *Cambridge History*, 'Is Romanticism finished?' suggests. Butler herself made the claim that "'Romanticism" is inchoate because it is not a single intellectual movement but a complex of responses to certain conditions that Western society has experienced and *continues to experience* since the middle of the eighteenth century' (Butler 184; my emphasis). In other words we are still in the Romantic period. Conversely, why begin with 1776 or 1760? The Romantic 'period' can be said to have started with the print culture revolution of the seventeenth century or even with the invention of print itself. As an alternative categorization 'Romantic period' is thus in some ways as problematic as Romanticism. 'Late Georgian' is not much better as an alternative because it tends to elide the magnitude and scope of cultural change after 1760—the fact that something different, though maybe we do not know the precise date when it started, did happen. I referred previously to the cognates of the term 'romantic' in Raymond Williams's *Keywords*: many of the other keywords in that book such as 'class', 'criticism', 'conservative', 'country', 'culture', 'genius', 'organic', 'originality', 'popular', 'representative', and 'revolution' either have their origins in or are given new definitive meanings in the late eighteenth-early nineteenth centuries. Indeed *Keywords* could be described as a Romantic project in the way that it conveys an acute sense of the urgency of addressing a powerfully immanent and inchoate 'present'. Williams described the context of *Keywords* as a 'moment' in the 1950s when his attempts to 'understand several urgent contemporary problems—problems quite literally of understanding my immediate world——achieved a particular shape in trying to understand a tradition', a critical stance not dissimilar from Wordsworth's in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (Williams 13).

Romanticism is therefore embedded in questions of historiography, particularly relating to periodization.⁵ Romanticism invents and reifies the concepts of 'period' and 'movement' as a way of objectifying the historical moment, particularly the sense of the immanence of change, as well as simultaneously putting these very concepts into question. There are other more pragmatic difficulties with how periodization functions in Romantic studies. If theoretically the Romantic period is boundless, this is not the case with what is researched and taught due to academic specialisation and also the increasing need to assert and defend the institutional interests of the sub-field. There have been turf wars in US academia between Romantic and eighteenth-century studies, with some Romanticists viewing the encroachment of the 'long' in 'long eighteenth-century' as leading to a loss of jobs and authority for Romantic studies. Thus, in spite of the questioning of the meaning of periodization in Romanticism, the traditional view of that period is still very powerful, with negative effects on how the 'inchoate' complexity of Romantic literary culture is understood. Continuing emphases on the 1790s and on first generation poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge and on the years 1812-1824 associated with second generation figures such as Byron, Keats and Shelley, have led to the neglect of the 1820s and 30s, decades which tend to slip into the cracks between Romanticism and Victorianism. Similarly, in spite of Butler's starting date of 1760, the years between the ascension of George III and the French Revolution have not received the attention they deserve. In terms of chronology as well as the definition of its canon, Romanticism can be very narrow indeed.

The more Romanticism changes, then, the more it seems to stay the same. In spite of what Chandler calls the increasing 'suspicion' of the period category Romanticism, the apparent opening up of the field to a range of theories and critical approaches, and also the jeremiads of some scholars and commentators in the Murdoch press about the so-called triumph of cultural studies, the power of Romanticism as a literary brand is an enduring one (Chandler 12). Professional associations in the field, the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism (NASSR), British Association for Romantic Studies—set up in 1989—and the recently established Romantic Studies Association of Australasia are thriving. Nor could it be said that the 'Big Six' are being ignored or that the term Romanticism has been eclipsed by 'Romantic period'. Of the ten books published in the Cambridge Studies in Romanticism series between 2010 and 2012, eight devoted a major part of their attention to 'Big Six' writers: of these ten titles three were single author studies with two on Blake and one on Shelley.⁶

⁵ See, for example, Parker.

⁶ I refer to books published between Gillen D'Arcy Wood's *Romanticism and Music Culture in Britain, 1770-1840* (Cambridge Studies in Romanticism no. 82) and Claire

This evidence would suggest that the authority of the 'Big Six' as paradigmatic of Romanticism is as powerful as ever and that far from crowding them out, women writers in particular remain marginal. This pattern is also reflected in the teaching of Romanticism: a survey undertaken by Sharon Ruston in the UK in 2006 discovered that Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, Byron, Shelley and Keats still dominated the undergraduate curriculum (qtd in Pittock 4). From the vantage point of 2012 it seems that Romanticism has not changed as radically as some might think it has. Romanticism is remarkably adept at reinventing itself and the Big Six can be said to have colonised and outlasted Theory rather than the other way round.

Why then does the *Cambridge History* ask: 'Is Romanticism finished?' The threat to Romanticism, I would suggest, relates to an increasing anxiety about the category of Literature for which Romanticism is foundational. The meaning of literature undergoes a transformation in the Romantic period: whereas at the beginning, let us say the 1770s, literary endeavour encompassed a wide range of kinds of writing, by the 1820s the primacy of imaginative literature, hitherto a subset of the literary field, and the distinction of the author of such texts as artist or genius and a legitimate member of the professional classes, were becoming well established. The consolidation of this change in the nineteenth century formed the basis upon which the academic discipline of English literature emerged in the twentieth. In this respect, as in many others—the scientific disciplines are also being shaped in this period—the Romantic period is the crucible for modern disciplinarity. Two main challenges to the disciplinary security of 'English Literature' have emerged in recent years, however: firstly, the mercantilist model of higher education has undermined the cultural and social authority of English and the humanities as a whole. Academics are required to justify the value of what they do in terms of how it equips the graduate for the twentieth-century economy, not the humanistic concept of citizenship. Secondly, the digital revolution has led to an increased awareness of the materiality of the text, countering Romanticism's traditional emphasis on the immaterial, the ideal, the transcendent, and it has also potentially decentred the primacy of the book itself, by complicating our ideas of what constitutes communication.

One interesting and controversial response to the current situation has come from the *Re:Enlightenment Project*, led by Clifford Siskin and William B. Warner. Inaugurated in 2007, the Re:Enlightenment Project has taken the form of a series of gatherings, conference presentations, articles and a collection of essays, *This is Enlightenment*, published in 2010. In 2008 Warner and Siskin co-authored an

article in *Profession* entitled 'Stopping Cultural Studies' in which they review the various directions which English has taken in the last thirty years or so. These trends, which the authors characterize as invocations—to theorize, to historicize and to go beyond the literary—are also those which have shaped Romantic studies in this period. Siskin and Warner's argument is that doing cultural studies has not really changed anything: cultural studies, they suggest, emerges out of and is bound up with the idea of Culture with a capital C, and both senses of culture, the division between small c culture and large C culture, are products of the Romantic period. For the literary scholar to go beyond Literature into cultural studies is analogous to doing a bungee jump, they claim: it is a thrilling fall into the free play of small c culture but because that idea of culture is conceptually tied to large C Culture, the pull back to old-fashioned disciplinarity is always there. 'Doing cultural studies' they say, 'is like doing Groundhog Day: you think you're getting somewhere different ... but then you always find yourself back where you started. You never get to do what cultural studies is supposed to do: change literary studies' (Warner and Siskin 104). Warner and Siskin's solution is to stop doing cultural studies in the sense of desisting from going beyond the literary (though stopping here also has connotations of resistance). However, this does not necessarily mean going back to literary criticism as it was before 1980. Stopping doing cultural studies means in effect stopping doing Literature with a capital L (which the authors italicize for effect). Warner and Siskin claim we need to 'break the spell of "Literature" by recovering the true scope of "literature" in its earliest comprehensive sense ... culture [remaining] the ubiquitous term that still occludes our past and our future' (Warner and Siskin 105). In this and subsequent publications the Re:Enlightenment Project has argued that there is an opportunity for English departments to reconfigure themselves as centres for the study of forms of mediation, linking literary texts and other kinds of print media to electronic, digital and algorithmic forms of communication: 'Our relevance to universities and to society at large depends on a retooling that mixes some established means of mediation with new tools—and that then deploys both across the newly altered and expanded range of literary activity' (Warner and Siskin 205).⁷

The implications of the Re:enlightenment Project are currently being seriously debated by Romanticists, partly because what Siskin and Warner are arguing for effectively by-passes Romanticism and potentially weakens its status as the foundational movement for English Literature as we know it today.⁸ Reconfiguring your discipline around 'the true scope of "literature" in its earlier

⁷ Romanticism has been influential in the development of the digital humanities: leading figures in the latter field such as Jerome McGann and Alan Liu are Romanticists and one of the first important online journals in literary studies was *Romanticism on the Net*. It is now known as Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net: <<http://ravnjournal.org/>>.

⁸ See Bewell, Lumpton, Klancher and Underwood's review.

comprehensive sense' means going back to the period before the meaning of Literature was refined and narrowed, that is, to the 'enlightenment' broadly conceived as extending from the Renaissance to the late eighteenth century. In an article from 2011 entitled 'If this is Enlightenment then what is Romanticism?' Siskin and Warner argue that Romanticism was not the radical break with the past that has been supposed but an outcome of long-term changes in various forms of mediation—new ways of transporting and communicating texts, new genres such as the newspaper, new spaces and associational practices in which these texts were read; and finally new rules or 'enabling constraints'. Enlightenment, they claimed, was 'an event' of which Romanticism was an outcome or 'eventuality' and the Victorian 'a variation' (Siskin and Warner 289). The article includes stage directions for how Siskin and Warner enacted this distinction in the keynote lecture at the NASSR conference on which it is based: 'If this is Enlightenment scaled to a hierarchy of change [*open hands wide*] then this is Romanticism [*open hands not so wide*]' (Siskin and Warner 289).

It is not clear exactly where the Re:Enlightenment Project is heading and what it might mean for Romanticism and literary studies more generally. In making their gestures at the NASSR conference, Siskin and Warner may have wanted the Romanticists present to rush into their arms, as it were, acknowledging the rightness of their cause and possibly giving the future of Romanticism over to them. The Re:Enlightenment Project can therefore be seen as not so much a debunking of Romanticism's power but an attempt to refashion that power in a different guise: it is still a Romantic project and as such it reinstates Romanticism's foundational significance for English Literature. Whereas in the past English departments were confident enough in their intellectual and institutional authority to generate satellite disciplines such as cultural studies, film studies and gender studies, in the current crisis in the Humanities and as a result of the impact of digital technology, English, according to Siskin and Warner, needs to retool or re-discipline itself. It can achieve this not by reabsorbing or remodelling itself in terms of the various studies that have emanated from it but by becoming something different altogether, reimagining what the study of literature might mean. Romanticism thus becomes emblematic of what needs to be left behind but also a conceptual model of the change that might be: in that sense Romanticism can never be truly finished.

By way of a conclusion I would like to discuss briefly another manifestation of Romanticism's persistence in the cultural imaginary around 2012, Michael Winterbottom's television drama series *The Trip*, first broadcast by the BBC in the U.K. in 2010. Winterbottom has a long history of engagement with the classics of 'Eng. Lit' as a director of three adaptations of Thomas Hardy novels and also *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story* (2005), a film about trying to make a film of Laurence Sterne's novel, starring the British comedians Steve

Coogan and Rob Brydon who also appear in *The Trip*. In *The Trip* Coogan plays a celebrity actor-comedian called Steve Coogan who is hired by the *Observer* newspaper to write reviews of expensive gourmet restaurants in the north of England. He invites his friend, the comedian Rob Brydon, played by Rob Brydon, to accompany him when his preferred companion, his girlfriend, dumps him. The drama consists of visits to these restaurants with conversations over lunch as the centrepiece, often ending in competitive word games or impressions, Brydon's speciality being the voices of actors such as Roger Moore, Sean Connery and Al Pacino. Romanticism is a recurring theme in *The Trip*: Coogan and Brydon visit Greta Hall, where Southey and Coleridge lived, and Dove Cottage, which is now the centre of the Wordsworth industry both in a touristic and an academic sense. 'Coogan' in *The Trip* is the twenty-first century U.K. celebrity as Romantic artist—a hacking scandal Byron—who is tortured about his failure to break into Hollywood stardom, and troubled by his complicated family and love life. There are shots of him alone on top of a Lake District mountain, like the brooding solitary figure in a Caspar David Friedrich painting, but rather than communing with his deep interiority or the sublime, he is instead trying to get a mobile phone signal.

It is intriguing that Romanticism should surface in this way in 2010, post the 'great national events' of climate change and the Global Financial Crisis, a time of heightened historical consciousness and of a resurfacing of questions about humanity's future. It is tempting to see the references in *The Trip* to Wordsworth and Coleridge as signs of contemporary cultural decay, the travestying of Romantic ideals of English culture and tradition based on the sublimity of nature. The transformation of old English inns into gourmet tourist destinations is emblematic of the commodification of brand U.K., including its 'Literature', as high-end luxury goods and playground for the one percent super-wealthy, leaving the rest to pick up the tacky souvenirs in the Dove Cottage shop. But *The Trip*'s idea of Romanticism is not limited to Wordsworth and Coleridge or the solitary artist on the mountaintop. It also evokes Romantic culture as a mode of sociability and the importance of talk within it, by referring to another important Romantic writer, William Hazlitt. At one stage, Brydon quotes from Hazlitt's devastating essay on Coleridge in *The Spirit of the Age*: 'It was not supposed that Mr. Coleridge could keep on at the rate he set off; he could not realize all he knew or thought, and less could not fix his desultory ambition; other stimulants supplied the place, and kept up the intoxicating dream, the fever and the madness of his early impressions' (Hazlitt 134.) Hazlitt's essay, like his 'On the first acquaintance of poets', reflects the importance of Romantic genres such as the familiar essay in defining both the momentousness of cultural change embodied by figures such as Coleridge and the difficulty these figures had in living up to their roles: how, in a Gingrich sense, dreaming could yoke the sublime and the ridiculous. Hazlitt's presence in *The Trip* is a reminder of

another dimension of Romanticism: in Marilyn Butler's terms a Romanticism of citizens rather than solitaries, a Romanticism that was prosaic, sociable and also sometimes playfully subversive (another important Romantic writer, Charles Lamb, being adept in punning, as indeed was Keats). No-one could do impressions of Romanticism better than the Romanticists themselves—they were their own best impersonators. British Romanticism can be seen as achieving its most powerful expression not only in the great works of literature which have survived from it but also in male homosocial modes of talk, companionship and competitive banter that *The Trip* both satirizes and celebrates. From Wordsworth and Coleridge to Siskin and Warner, Romanticism has thrived on its male double acts, one reason perhaps why, in spite of the recent attention given to women's writing, and the prominence of numerous eminent female scholars in Romantic literary studies, the field remains in many ways still a boy's club, to a greater or lesser degree aware of its own theatricality. If Romanticism is to survive both in the academy and beyond, we may not only need to open wide our arms to change, but also to interrogate, in the spirit of Hazlitt's scrutiny of Coleridge, the performative and situated dimensions of how, where and who is doing the embracing. To echo Marilyn Butler's claim that Romanticism is 'inchoate', we might ask: not is Romanticism finished, but will 'romanticism' ever properly begin?

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