

ture 1740–1830 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. xi.

3. Keymer and Mee, p. xii.

4. By the terms “riperian” or “riverbank-revisited” poetry, Fairer designates a late 18th-century British tradition of poetry that “established the revisiting of a river bank as the locus for a meditative self-assessment in terms of past and present” (110). The tradition originated with Thomas Warton’s sonnet “To the River Lodon” and in the 1780s and 90s drew contributions from various poets such as William Lisle Bowles, Thomas Park, Edward Gardner, Charlotte Smith, Henry Kett, Robert Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth.

About Romanticism through Genre

David Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

“To argue for a Romantic genre theory may seem surprising. This is the period when William Wordsworth writes that every author must ‘creat[e] the taste by which he is to be enjoyed,’ when Madame de Stael praises Germany as opposed to France because its authors ‘form [their] public,’ and when Victor Hugo insists that writers be judged by the ‘laws of their personal organization’ instead of ‘rules and genres.’ But as Hugo indicates Romanticism may not so much reject genre as expand its provenance so that it is no longer a system of exclusion.”¹ These opening

lines of Tilottama Rajan’s essay, “Theories of Genre” provide a perfect summary of the underlying argument of *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre*. In his new book, David Duff systematically investigates the literary, cultural, social and political context of the long-standing critical assumption that the Romantics were “hostile to genre” (1) or that they were interested in them “only to transcend or dissolve them” (1). His confessed aim is to go against the anti-generic view of Romanticism and to display its very opposite: the Romantics’ hyperconsciousness about genre. This does not seem to be a new claim. Duff points to studies by Susan Wolfson² and Stuart Curran³ as hallmarks in approaching the Romantic period from a generic perspective; the former with the focus on the politicization of the poetic form, the latter with an insistence on the Romantic expansion of generic repertoire. The real novelty of Duff’s recent book lies in its comprehensive focus. Duff’s interest is not restricted to the development of a single genre, as is the case with Tilottama Rajan’s “Romanticism and the Death of Lyric Consciousness,”⁴ where the transformation of the lyric form from a monological to a dialogical discourse is addressed; Chapter 5 in Cyrus Hamlin’s *Hermeneutics of Form*,⁵ which relates Romantic treatment of the ode through particular pieces by Coleridge, Keats and Shelley; essays on the sonnet or the romantic fragment in *Romanticism and Form*;⁶ or Duff’s own

study on the politicization of the romance in Shelley's poetics.⁷ Although he does occasionally address the specific nature of the Romantic treatment of particular genres like the sonnet or the ode, Duff claims in the "Preface" that his intent was to map out "assumptions about and attitudes to genre" in British Romanticism and to analyze the "historical and cultural force fields that shape the long-term destinies of genres" (vii). In its more general generic scope, though the emphasis is on poetry, the book also considers "the destiny" of drama and the novel. What makes Duff's observations even more fascinating is his constant alertness to paratextual minutiae such as titles, subtitles or prefaces; as well as letters, table-talk, epigraphs, footnotes, and marginalia, not to mention references to non-canonical writers and texts. The comprehensive nature of the discussion implies one further perspective: Duff creates an international as well as a historical context in which he analyzes the British Romantics' attitude to genre. German aesthetic theories are systematically brought into the picture and related to the British scene, thus establishing a fruitful dialogue between generic concepts of the two nations that excelled most in Romantic genre theory and practice. If spatial relations within the Romantic field are noted, the temporal relation between Romanticism and the preceding period is equally indispensable. Accordingly, notions about the Neo-

classical genre system with its strict classification of literary genres, as well as the gradual modifications it went through, recur in almost every chapter, thus widening the spectrum of information necessary to our understanding the tendencies that engendered the emergence of the new system. Before going into further details, it is important to mention the source to which this book owes a considerable debt: M. H. Abrams's groundbreaking study on Romantic literary theory, *The Mirror and the Lamp*.⁸ Though written more than half a century earlier, Abrams's impact can easily be pinpointed on the pages of the present book. Apart from the citations included in the heading of each chapter, Duff clearly draws on Abrams's findings, especially when Neoclassical literary criticism is concerned. However, what Abrams did not include in his study, namely particulars about the Romantics' genre consciousness, is exactly what Duff explores chapter by chapter.

Chapter 1, entitled "The Old Imperial Code," begins with the discussion of *Bell's Classical Arrangement of Fugitive Poetry*, an anthology published in 1789 which attempted to arrange non-canonical poems along the lines of a neo-Aristotelian genre system. As Duff notes, the publisher John Bell had to face the problem that the classical genre system is "no longer an adequate map of the modern literary terrain" (28). However, French Classicism with its adherence to generic laws and rules

is presented without the usual Romantic bias: Duff actually shows that the Neoclassical paradigm was not as rigid as many expect and that it went through serious modifications in the second half of the 18th century thanks to newly emerging aesthetic theories of the Enlightenment – such as primitivism, the theory of the sublime and the new rhetoric of the Scottish Enlightenment. He does not hesitate to highlight the fact that the old system was being pulled down from the inside; Pope, Addison and Shaftesbury had a vital role in the process of modification. In the same vein, Wordsworth and Coleridge are not celebrated for their revolutionizing genre theory but depicted as having serious doubts engendered by their peculiar position between the old and the new systems.

The ancient and modern attitudes to genre are polarized in an excerpt from Friedrich Schlegel's *Dialogue on Poetry*, which opens the second chapter. It is meant to inform the reader that the co-existence of these two attitudes in the so-called High Romantic period provided writers, most notably Wordsworth and Coleridge, with a dilemma and that their attitude to genre was far more complicated than a traditional reading of texts by these authors might suggest. The other important issue raised in this chapter is the theoretical findings of the Jena circle and the intricate interrelation of British and German theories. Though Duff admits that "genre theory in Britain is more

empirical and descriptive and less abstract and speculative than its German counterpart" (73), he also claims that "on its own terms the British debate on genre was as profound and far-reaching as the German" (74, my italics). An in-depth analysis of certain parts from Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* and Wordsworth's Preface to his 1815 collection of *Poems* serves to substantiate this hypothesis.

The very title of Chapter 3 – "(Anti)-Didacticism," with the prefix in parentheses – implies that once again Duff has something up in his sleeve against preconceived notions about the anti-didactic strain in British Romanticism. First, he lists a number of texts and paratexts from Blake, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley and Anna Barbauld, which do indeed support this belief, then he enumerates the counter-currents to anti-didacticism in the Romantic period by way of reference to Coleridge, Shelley, Isaac D'Israeli and Joanna Baillie, who all celebrated "poetry's irresistible influence" and "writers' political power" (107). Duff calls our attention to the fact that the genre dedicated to instructing the reader, namely the didactic poem, was "far from disappearing in this period" but it "acquired a visibility and prestige it had not experienced since the time of Pope" (111); furthermore, the end of the chapter is devoted to spotting the inconsistencies of some notable figures concerning didacticism. The example offered here is Wordsworth's *The Ex-*

ursion which invited much controversy; it was labeled either “arrogantly didactic” (by Francis Jeffrey) or criticized (by Coleridge and Hazlitt) for its “breach of generic decorum” (114). Duff eventually arrives at the conclusion that teaching and instruction were only acceptable in literary texts if they were not offered in a direct, not to say palpable, way.

In Chapter 4 (“Archaism and Innovation”), the problem of temporality in the critical discussion of genres is addressed. At the beginning of the chapter, Duff cites Bakhtin’s very strong claim that the birth of the novel rendered every other genre obsolete, the novel being the only genre endowed with a future. Duff, however, insists on proving that the Romantics did stand up to the challenge of modernity as far as ancient poetic forms were concerned. Duff sets out from the well-known Ancients versus Moderns dispute prevalent in the eighteenth century. He discusses the two opposite responses to the challenge of the past: the Neoclassical project of improvement (to make it new), and the antiquarian movement subsequent to it (to make it old), conceived in the spirit of primitivism. From here he proceeds to the Romantics’ answer to the call of the past, via an extensive analysis of the fragment, the Romantic genre par excellence. He offers most valuable insights into the psychological condition of Neoclassical as well as Romantic writers. He claims that while the Neo-

classics relieved the burden of the past by getting as close as possible to ancient poetic forms, the Romantics registered their “belatedness in their chosen genre while still making an original contribution to it” (149). Another interesting feature in Duff’s argument is his following up the etymology of such terms as ‘ancient’ and ‘innovating,’ and what connotations they had to an 18th-century reading public. Such instances do not only serve to make the argument well-founded: it is here that the author’s thoroughness and attention to details emerge.

Helen Darbishire’s famous joke about Wordsworth closes the chapter, which cleverly summarizes Duff’s idea about Romantic tension with regards to possibilities of artistic performance. The essence of the joke is that Wordsworth could not write his *magnum opus*, *The Recluse*, he could only write a Prelude to it and an Excursion from it, which is interpreted by Duff as perfectly symbolic of the “gap between [the Romantics’] generic ambitions and [their] actual performances” (153).

Having considered the cultural, social, historical, and aesthetic aspects of Romantic genre theory in Britain in the previous chapters, there is nothing left to be done but to offer a synthesis of the literary performance. Chapter 5, entitled “The Combinatorial Method,” discusses what is probably the most controversial issue in Romantic poetry, which elicited the assumption that the Romantics were hostile to genre:

genre-mixing. Friedrich Schlegel's theory of the combinatorial method serves as a starting point for the argument. Quite uniquely, Duff emphasizes Schlegel's use of chemical terminology to which Coleridge's use of the same terminology in his distinction between fancy and imagination might be traced back. Based on Coleridge's discussion of different mixings, Duff distinguishes between smooth-mixing and rough-mixing, the first being of a more familiar kind, where the different generic components are united in seamless unity. He categorizes Coleridge's conversation poems, Wordsworth's *Prelude* and Jane Austen's *Emma* as primary instances of smooth-mixing, whereas Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Byron's *Don Juan* are exemplary of rough-mixing, in which genres are juxtaposed rather than integrated. An exciting addition to this argument is the extension of genre-mixing to political discourse, primarily about the French Revolution which is itself seen as a "grotesque and sinister Mischgedicht" (188). Bearing in mind Duff's earlier scholarly interest, one is not surprised to see that it is Shelley and his Great Poem that is discussed as the most far-reaching achievement in genre-mixing: an in-depth analysis of his lyrical drama, *Prometheus Unbound*, which exemplifies Schlegel's ideal of a progressive, universal kind of poetry and incorporates Shelley's theo-

retical ideas into its text, closes this section of the book.

In the "Conclusion," the ode is discussed at some length, which seems to be a most appropriate summary of the book since "[t]hough being one of the oldest and most conventionalized of genres, the ode contributed to some of the strongest literary innovations of the period" (209).

There are a number of reasons why it is so difficult to put down this study once you started reading it. On the one hand, it might provide a Romantic scholar with a huge amount of invaluable information, not only because of the author's well documented arguments, but also because instead of concentrating on well-known texts, he has unearthed fascinating paratextual evidence that might have evaded professional eyes. In addition, thanks to its uniquely wide scope, scholars of Neoclassical literature and German aesthetic theory may also find it most profitable. On the other hand, the general reader is similarly addressed since Duff does not take anything for granted: he begins his argument with the most basic information necessary for the reader to follow him and constantly refers back to what he said earlier to enhance understanding. Critical response to the book has been immediate and very positive: it won the ESSE Book Award for Literatures in the English Language 2010.

Réka Tóth

Notes

1. Tilottama Rajan, "Theories of Genre," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Romanticism*, ed. Marshall Brown (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), p. 226.
2. Susan J. Wolfson, *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997).
3. Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (New York: OUP, 1986).
4. Tilottama Rajan, "Romanticism and the Death of Lyric Consciousness," in *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, ed. Chaviva Hosek and Patricia Parker (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985).
5. Cyrus Hamlin, *Hermeneutics of Form: Romantic Poetics in Theory and Practice* (New Haven: Schwabe, 1998).
6. Alan Rawes, ed., *Romanticism and Form* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
7. David Duff, *Romance and Revolution: Shelley and the Politics of a Genre* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994).
8. Meyer Howard Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (London: OUP, 1971).

"Brand" New Women?

Mária Kurdi, *Representations of Gender and Female Subjectivity in Contemporary Irish Drama by Women* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011)

Mária Kurdi's latest book *Representations of Gender and Female Subjectivity in Contemporary Irish Drama by Women* is an engaging and stimulating study of twentieth-century Irish drama

authored by women. As the title suggests, Kurdi examines the ways in which women's theatre re-presents Irish female experience in order to "interrogate, subvert and deconstruct conventional gendered norms and female roles" (13) historically constructed in the dramatic work of canonical male playwrights. The growing interest in critical readings of this kind is apparent in a number of recent publications, including *Irish Literature Since 1990: Diverse Voices* (ed. Scott Brewster and Michael Parker, Manchester: Manchester UP, 2009), *Sub-Versions: Transnational Readings of Modern Irish Literature* (ed. Ciaran Ross, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010) and *Irish Women Writers: New Critical Perspectives* (ed. Elke D'hoker, Raphael Ingelbien and Hedwig Schwall, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2010), all of which contain essay contributions by Mária Kurdi.

In *Representations of Gender*, Kurdi examines the ways Irish women's drama developed through the twentieth-century, especially in relation to the changing concept of women's roles in Irish society. Drawing on the work of contemporary feminist critics, including Melissa Shira, Margot Gayle Backhus and Moynagh Sullivan, Kurdi argues that in the plays of William Butler Yeats, John Millington Synge and Sean O'Casey women "appeared as largely phallic constructions in a patriarchal culture" in which "female characters were either pushed to the periphery of these [i.e. male] relationships, or de-