



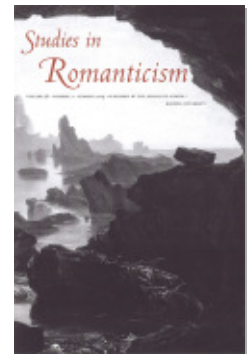
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Remaking Romanticism: The Radical Politics of the Excerpt by
Casie LeGette (review)

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(Review)

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her daughter, the heroine Matilda, takes them up as part of her study. “Books, decorative objects in the first part of *A Simple Story*, are now key actors in its plot” (134). The second part fulfills a promise of reading, a shift that tracks with the progression of Inchbald’s own life. Lupton then turns to William Godwin, not just a novelist and political philosopher but a prolific reader. An advocate for greater free time for all, time to be spent at least partly in the study of books, Godwin shares with Inchbald a cognizance of the value of future reading: “Both Godwin and Inchbald advocate the recognition of time as something revolutionary when it is given to education, and to books, because it entails a commitment to the future that is different from the present” (150). For anyone invested in reading books, teaching books, or simply making time for books, *Reading and the Making of Time in the Eighteenth Century* is just such a worthwhile commitment.

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Casie LeGette. *Remaking Romanticism: The Radical Politics of the Excerpt*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. Pp. 245. \$109.99.

In his keynote address “Romanticism, Empire and Resistance” at the Resistance in the Spirit of Romanticism Conference held at the University of Colorado, Boulder, in 2018, Saree Makdisi provocatively called into question the very premise of the conference, “the relevance of romantic politics to our current moment of cultural change,” to borrow the language from the call for papers. Makdisi argued that the world we face today is fundamentally different—politically, economically, culturally—than that which the Romantics faced, and as a result it would be a mistake to look to Romantic texts in order to discover enduring political relevance. As if in response to Makdisi, Casie LeGette’s *Remaking Romanticism* identifies one way in which we can, and indeed should, explore the enduring relevance of Romantic texts: the political uses to which radical editors and publishers have repeatedly and effectively put Romantic texts since the 1810s. LeGette’s monograph is not a study in reception history, but rather a focused examination of the work of editors and publishers who excerpted, edited, and re-contextualized Romantic texts so as to make them speak to new political contexts, even when this work entailed butchering the original texts.

LeGette argues that through the excerpt, all Romantic texts, from sonnet to philosophical treatise, were “transformed into lyric poetry”; quotation

lifted passages from their original contexts so that their relevance could be renewed and reinvigorated in new ones (15, 67–68). LeGette acknowledges that her method is, in part, inspired by Sharon Cameron's *Lyric Time* (Johns Hopkins, 1981) and Virginia Jackson's *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton, 2005), but it is also in step with Jonathan Culler's more recent *Theory of the Lyric* (Harvard, 2015): "a distinctive feature of the lyric seems to be this attempt to create the impression of something happening now, in the present time of discourse," such that "the lyric works to create effects of presence" (Culler, 37). Like a lyric, the excerpt is a reiteration that gestures to past iterations, and is open to future iterations, but insists primarily upon its present relevance in the moment of its iteration. The excerpts from Godwin's *Political Justice* and Southey's *Wat Tyler*, both works of the early 1790s, that are placed at the top of the July, 1833 issues of the short-run, Chartist publication, *The Working Man's Friend, and Political Magazine* (1832–1833) are not irrelevant quotes, but are intended to speak poignantly to the pressing political issues of the day (LeGette, 31).

This is, perhaps, the greatest challenge that LeGette's argument poses for Romanticists, that the reconfiguring of relevance within new political contexts always involves a process of disfiguration and historical erasure. This is the concern of the first two chapters of the monograph, "Part 1: The 1790s, Extended." The subtleties and tact in argument that Godwin, Coleridge, Southey, or Wordsworth may have crafted with care in the 1790s are lost when, for example, Thomas J. Wooler, editor of the *Black Dwarf* (1817–1824), quotes them liberally to bolster his satirical attacks on the repression of the post-Napoleonic War era. Wooler set a precedent; LeGette tracks Godwin's works as they reappeared in excerpts in radical journals. While she explores in admirable close readings how 1790s texts were altered by their recontextualization during the Regency and afterwards, LeGette also underscores the significance of these excerpts: the *Black Dwarf* did much to disseminate Romantic texts among the working classes and to build a readership for Romantic authors. Moreover, Wooler's editorial work of identifying and collecting authors who seemingly shared common commitments made a substantial contribution to early notions of the canon of Romanticism. LeGette does discuss other editors and journals, but a highlight of these first two chapters is her discussion of Wooler's editorial maneuverings in relation to the scandalous 1817 publication of Southey's *Wat Tyler*, a radical play (it was "anti-taxes, anti-war, and rigorously anti-monarchy") perhaps never intended for publication, and a real embarrassment for the then-poet laureate, radical-turned-conservative, Southey (68–84).

In the second half of the book, “Part 2: Politics and Poetics,” LeGette turns her attention to cases in which the intentions of Romantic authors and the aims of radical editors were fundamentally contradictory, and as a result, how editors reshaped Romantic texts to suit their own purposes. In Chapter Four, “The Lyric Speaker Goes to Jail: British Poetry and Radical Prisons,” she charts how Romantic poets, Byron in particular, often celebrated imprisonment in poems that associated poetic genius with solitude and isolation, while

the radical press was understandably less than enthralled by the Romantic fascination with isolation, given the British government’s regular imprisonment of radical leaders. It was politically necessary for the radical press to convince its readers that imprisonment was not really isolation at all, that radical prisoners like Samuel Bamford and Henry Vincent remained connected to the movement and their followers despite their physical location in jail.

(143)

The end result of this tension between poetics and politics was that “the tropes of isolation became tools in the project of transforming, and overcoming, isolation itself” (154). Then, in the final chapter of the monograph, LeGette builds upon the work of Mark Kipperman, tracing the history of how editors created “radical Shelley,” “schoolroom Shelley,” “encyclopedic Shelley,” and “textbook Shelley,” a history that might leave readers disappointed in the power that editors have in shaping the reception of Romantic texts, but that conversely should inspire: editors have continuously, since the 1810s, discovered new ways in which to render Romantic texts relevant. Even if not all of their work is inspirational, such as the use of Shelley’s most radical poems put as schoolroom recitation exercises (181), nonetheless LeGette effectively identifies a fascinating continuity from the Romantic era to our own. In just another instance in this history, the trailer for Mike Leigh’s film *Peterloo* (2019) excerpts the most celebrated stanza of *The Mask of Anarchy*.

While her approach has provocative theoretical implications, challenging conventional notions of periodization and authorship, LeGette grounds her book in detailed textual analyses of print culture. Her research is thorough and she develops her arguments in conversation with the relevant scholarship on the intersections of Romantic literature and radical culture. Noteworthy too are her brief discussions of relevant topics that inform her close readings, such as the evolution of British readerships, and the emergence of the political prisoner at the end of the eighteenth century; they are helpful overviews for scholars well-versed in the material, and invaluable for stu-

dents coming to the field. Her discoveries in her readings are often surprising, and sometimes quite humorous, which makes the book both exciting, and a pleasure to read. In short, the book charts brilliantly a way forward for political readings of Romanticism.

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J. C. C. Mays. *Coleridge's Experimental Poetics*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013. Pp. 287. \$49.99 paper.

J. C. C. Mays. *Coleridge's Ancient Mariner*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016. Pp. 267. \$49.99 paper.

J. C. C. Mays. *Coleridge's Dejection Ode*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019. Pp. 281. \$69.99.

Three monographs on Coleridge's poetry? Surely this is excessive. How much is there actually to say about his poetry? The canon is so limited. Perhaps a dozen important poems, with particular emphasis on the three supernatural poems ("The Ancient Mariner," "Kubla Khan," and "Christabel"), on all of which there has surely been more than enough criticism. With the completion of the Bollingen edition of the *Collected Coleridge*, ought we not concentrate instead on the critical writings in order to recognize Coleridge for what he essentially was—namely, a failed poet who succumbed to drug addiction and retreated into increasingly impenetrable prose when he wasn't idling away his time scribbling marginalia? Coleridge himself acknowledged his poetic dereliction, declaring to Godwin in 1801 that "the Poet is dead in me" to such a degree that "I have *forgotten* how to make a rhyme," and going so far as to instruct Godwin to say of him after his death that "'Wordsworth descended on him, like the *Gnōthi Seauton* [Know Thyself] from Heaven; by shewing to him what true Poetry was, he made him know, that he himself was no Poet'" (*Collected Letters*, ed. E. L. Griggs, 2, 714; hereafter *CL*). There it is: Coleridge wasn't really a poet. And to the degree that Coleridge the prose writer really concerns us, it is presumably as Wordsworth's critical adjunct, the one contemporary able to elucidate the greater poet's "true" poetry.

This is one version of the "encircling, stifling myth" that J. C. C. Mays attacks—indeed, relentlessly explodes—in his remarkable trilogy on Coleridge's long, varied, and distinguished career as a poet. No English writer's reputation, according to Mays, "has been stuck in such a rut for so long"