



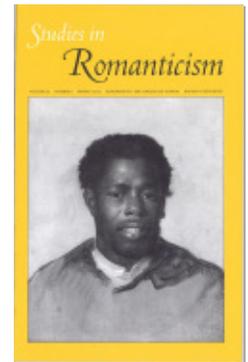
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*Mind's World: Imagination and Subjectivity from Descartes  
to Romanticism* by Alexander Schlotz (review)

Robert Mitchell

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magazine full of gunpowder. Wolfson is particularly good on the history and impact of Byron's portraits and the contradictory currents of his influence on female writers following his death, especially Laetitia Landon and Felicia Hemans. Even those among his female epigones who felt compelled to condemn his behavior toward Lady Byron, not to mention women in general, could not resist the power of his poetic example. After casting aside Moore's *Life of Byron* in disgust, Hemans's subsequent poetry showed that she still "couldn't separate from Lord Byron," but "kept true to her textual marriage" (269).

*Romantic Interactions* is a worthy successor to *Borderlines* and can be read with profit selectively or serially. Like all of Wolfson's work, its value lies as much in its example as in its content. If anyone still clings to the idea that close reading blinds us to history, ideology, or *différance*, let him or her read ten consecutive pages of this book, chosen at random. For Wolfson, reading closely means observing every point of connection between the text and all its relevant contexts: literary history as well as material history; etymology as well as orthography; bibliography, biography, and autobiography; reaction and reception; revisions and transmissions; culture and its constructs; and, of course, the relationship of every relevant detail of a text to its place and function within the work as a whole. Exemplary as well is Wolfson's prose: precise but not fussy, sophisticated without strain, and mixing the colloquial with the formal in a combination that De Quincey, whose description of his mother's writing Wolfson cites with admiration in *Borderlines* (24), would call "racy and fresh with idiomatic graces." "Racy" may sound incongruent with the motto, "Not so fast," but in slowing your pace to Wolfson's, you'll be surprised at how time flies.

Charles J. Rzepka  
Boston University

Alexander Schlutz. *Mind's World: Imagination and Subjectivity from Descartes to Romanticism*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009. Pp. 332. \$60.00 cloth/\$30.00 paper.

Arguably one of the most significant, if largely unintended, consequences of the theory wars of the 1980s and 1990s was a narrowing of the historical framework within which literary scholars situated and understood "Romanticism." Whereas the generations of Wellek, Lovejoy, Abrams, and Bloom tended to understand Romanticism as a transnational movement (or movements) situated between the Enlightenment and Modernism, deconstructive approaches to Romantic texts tended to ignore such narra-

tives in favor of much less historically specific reflections on the metaphysics of language, while new historical approaches to Romanticism focused on more local and geographically specific historical sites. Thus, though deconstruction and new historicism enriched and deepened our understanding of the complex nature of Romantic engagements with language and our awareness of the various ways in which Romantic-era authors wove elements of their swiftly changing historical milieux into their literary works, these virtues often generated an understanding of Romanticism able to speak only to a relatively small professional community of scholars. In an era of apparently interminable university budget cuts in the humanities, such a development was worrying partly for crassly professional reasons. Yet such a narrowing of focus was also worrying because it did not seem to build upon that sense, shared widely by scholars of the Romantic era, that Romanticism is much more than an abstract reflection on language or a locally and temporally bounded phenomenon, and that the multiple logics of Romanticism are of fundamental importance to the wider field of literary criticism.

Happily, then, we now seem to be at least a decade into a solid *détente* between warring schools of interpretation, and we are beginning to see Romanticism once again emplotted within more extended historical narratives. Recent eco-historical narratives, for example, are intrinsically transnational, emphasizing a very long *durée* and positioning Romanticism not simply as one field among others but as a key theoretical resource for eco-critical thinking itself. (Jonathan Bate and Timothy Morton provide two quite divergent examples of this eco-critical tendency.) Recent interest in “secularization” by scholars such as Hans Blumenberg, Charles Taylor, and William Connolly has also focused attention on broader historical narratives, emphasizing Romanticism’s importance for any understanding of the paradoxical way in which secularization seems to retain an unacknowledged religious dimension. These new accounts are not a return to earlier scholarly narratives, but instead incorporate the methodologies and discoveries of the theory wars into larger, more complex historical frameworks.

As the expansive historical range of its subtitle suggests, Alexander Schlutz’s *Mind’s World: Imagination and Subjectivity from Descartes to Romanticism* is part of this new wave of Romantic criticism. Whether understood as the faculty mostly closely aligned with genius and artistic production or as an element of ideological mystification, “imagination” has long been a central term for scholars of the Romantic era. Yet even as the majority of the book is given over to discussion of the role of imagination in the theoretical writings of Romantic-era authors—specifically, Kant, Fichte, von Hardenberg (aka Novalis), and Coleridge—Schlutz’s discussion of the fate of the imagination in the Romantic era is framed by a larger historical nar-

rative, one aligned with recent accounts of secularization and modernity, especially those developed by Taylor and Blumenberg. Schlutz suggests that the traditional narrative about the fate of imagination between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries—that earlier authors denigrated the imagination because of its association with the body and irrationality, but German and British Romantics valorized it as the foundation of subjectivity—is too simple. First, Schlutz argues, Descartes *also* positioned imagination as the foundation of subjectivity, which means that there is a far greater role for ecstatic exuberance in Cartesian rationalism than we have been inclined to think. Second, Romantic authors found themselves expressing the same fears as their predecessors about the link between imagination and irrationality, which means that the Romantics were less fully committed to ecstatic exuberance than might seem the case. This revision of the traditional narrative, Schlutz suggests, allows us to see the fundamentally *religious* dimension of philosophical debates about the imagination, for what motivated both the Romantics and their predecessors was the attempt to theorize, via the concept of the imagination, an ecstatic source of knowledge that could not be grasped solely by philosophical discourse.

The first chapter of *Mind's World* establishes the distant backdrop for Schlutz's account. Schlutz argues that while Plato and Aristotle sought to downplay the role of *phantasia* in the production of knowledge, Plato also ended up arguing that knowledge depended upon "a moment of ecstatic recognition" that was itself dependent upon *phantasia* (25). Schlutz argues that Plato's dialogues, particularly as reinterpreted by Neoplatonic philosophers, established a paradigm for future reflections on the imagination by stressing "the paradoxical predicament that philosophical inquiry finds itself ultimately dependent upon an inspirational type of knowledge that is incompatible with the rational approach necessary to ground philosophical discourse and to differentiate it from poetry, religion, and sophistry" (26). The second chapter documents the persistence of this tension in a period closer to the Romantics, focusing on the imagination's role in Descartes' philosophy. Within Cartesian doxa, outlined in the *Meditations* and *Discourse on Method*, the faculty of imagination plays no role in the proof of the certitude of the cogito. However, drawing on Descartes' notebooks and self-analysis of his dreams, Schlutz argues that Descartes also connected his "method for combining all the sciences . . . to a form of poetic wisdom that is best accessed by means of imagination" (62).

While the paradoxical role of the imagination remained largely submerged in Descartes' unpublished writings, Schlutz's next three chapters chart the *increasing emergence of, and engagement with, this paradox* in Romantic-era writing. Focusing on the tension between the accounts of imagination in Kant's *Critiques* and in his *Anthropology*, Schlutz argues that

Kant implied that this faculty was fundamentally “unprincipled [and] disruptive,” and as such “threatened the rational subject with delirium and madness . . . from which [Kant’s] critical system is unable to clearly separate itself” (7). This tension between philosophical system and imagination in Kant set the stage for Fichte’s and von Hardenberg’s epochal change of heart regarding the imagination, explored in chapters four and five. In contrast to Descartes and Kant, both Fichte and von Hardenberg were willing to situate the imagination in the very foundation of subjectivity. However, Schlutz argues that by simply revaluating that same understanding of the faculty that Descartes and Kant had sought to marginalize, Fichte does not resolve the problematic relationship of the imagination to philosophical foundation, but simply displaces this problem into a new dichotomy between (good) imagination and (bad) “fantasy.” Von Hardenberg’s “magical idealism,” by contrast, does not seek to “base the self on a static first principle at all, but rather describes imagination as a dynamic force guaranteeing the unity of the self as an organic whole of interconnected elements without a stable organizing center” (9–10). In principle, this might have allowed von Hardenberg to resolve the problem of imagination’s relationship to philosophical foundation. Yet as Schlutz outlines, von Hardenberg was also obsessed with defending a form of moral freedom that was free from bodily influence. Schlutz argues that this latter goal hindered von Hardenberg’s investigations of imagination, forcing this German Romantic as well to distinguish between good and bad forms of imagination. The last substantive chapter of *Mind’s World* is devoted to Coleridge. Schlutz argues that Coleridge’s explicit desire to join religion and philosophy led him to see that imagination must be understood as *both* a power of synthesis *and* of tearing apart—and that the “problem” of imagination was fundamentally not one that could be resolved within philosophy itself.

*Mind’s World* is remarkably clear and compelling. It is worth underscoring the clarity of Schultz’s prose, for many of the authors that he considers are notoriously difficult, even for readers schooled in German Idealism. Yet *Mind’s World* presents its arguments in a style that will be satisfying both to specialists as well as to those less familiar with the nuances of the intellectual traditions that Schultz considers. Moreover, because Schlutz is interested in the relation of imagination to the question of philosophical foundation, his readings bear upon each author’s system as a whole, rather than simply upon a narrow or local element. As a consequence, this book can easily and profitably be incorporated into graduate (and arguably even some undergraduate) courses. The tension between philosophical foundation and imagination that Schultz documents emphasizes one way in which deconstructive methodology can be incorporated into a larger historical narrative, and his discovery that the “unruly” version of the imagination

persistently occurs in notebook writings of authors as varied as Descartes and Coleridge suggests an implicit model of how to assess the difference between published and unpublished material. The book's readings of French, German, and English authors are solidly grounded in Schlutz's own multiple linguistic fluencies, which in turn pays another dividend, for the endnotes to *Mind's World* bring together, in a way that ought to be emulated more frequently, three different linguistic traditions of scholarship on these authors.

Precisely because of the many strengths of *Mind's World*, one regrets the absence of a more sustained engagement with Hegel. Hegel was finely attuned to the intractable aporiae that arise whenever knowledge is understood as (or as relying on) a mediation between heterogeneous elements, as is evident in that devastating account of the problems inherent in understanding cognition as either an "instrument" (*Werkzeug*) or "medium" (*Medium*) with which he begins the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel's solution to this problem—namely, absolute idealism—led him away from the faculty-philosophy that is the primary focus of Schlutz's book, and the relative neglect of Hegel in *Mind's World* can be justified by this fact. Yet one wishes that Schlutz had focused his clear, analytic approach explicitly on Hegel's "solution," if only to show what is lost by the movement away from faculty philosophy. This readerly wish is amplified by the fact that Hegel is not *entirely* absent from Schlutz's account, for the absolute idealist makes an important, if understated, cameo in the context of a discussion of Slavoj Žižek's critique of Kant. Žižek has argued that where Kant—and Heidegger, in his critique of Kant—understood imagination solely as a power of synthesis, Hegel's *Jenaer Realphilosophie* suggested that imagination must also be understood as a *destructive* power, a power (in Žižek's gloss of Hegel) "to tear up the images and reconnect them without any restraint." Though Schlutz aligns himself with the form of Žižek's critique of Kant, he at the same time distances himself from Žižek's use of Hegel as content for the argument. However, engaging Hegel more fully here would have been an opportunity to emphasize the extent to which Romantic-era approaches to the powers of imagination reappear in twentieth-century theory, having been transmitted via the "anthropologized" version of Hegel imported into France by Alexander Kojève and passed on to authors such as Lacan (and, through Lacan, to Žižek).

Yet to wish for more of the kind of close analysis that *Mind's World* already provides in spades is ultimately not a critique but rather an acknowledgement of the book's strength. This is a powerful and exciting book, one that will be of interest not just to scholars of Romanticism, but to all readers interested in the history of the concept of the imagination and the rela-

tionship of that history to philosophy, religion, and the process of secularization.

Robert Mitchell  
Duke University

Laura Quinney. *William Blake on Self and Soul*. Cambridge, MA, and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2009. Pp. xx+195. \$39.95.

The historical and political drive of much recent Blake scholarship, one might argue, treats Blake as a historical curiosity, the province of specialists, with little relevance to a wider readership. Laura Quinney's book has the virtue of treating Blake as a writer who addresses an issue of universal concern. It identifies his central theme as the confusion and unhappiness inherent in the very experience of selfhood.

In defining her approach to this issue, Quinney has little time for those who simply view "the discourses of soul, self, and subject as anachronisms." According to Quinney, such a view is "malformed" because it tends to dismiss not only the theoretical models of selfhood but also "the actual *experience* of subjectivity":

The self supposed to be obsolete is the unitary subject, the integral, transcendent self linked to the traditional religious idea of the immortal soul. I state categorically that the actual subject has never mistaken itself for a Subject of this kind. Modern skeptical thought congratulates itself for a work of demystification that the subject by virtue of its subjectivity performs every day. (2)

Her own approach rests upon a direct appeal to the ordinary experience of subjectivity, to an "actual 'self'" that always "fails to coincide with its own self-definition" (2). Quinney implicitly sets this self apart from historically-specific modes of conceptualizing selfhood and from the changing historical conditions in which selfhood is experienced. The "actual *experience*" of mundane subjectivity is ultimately ahistorical and universal, and Quinney's Blake, for all his obvious interest in the accumulating errors of history, seems ultimately to arrive at this view. In his earlier work, Blake may show that the major religions and philosophical movements of the West have built upon and strengthened the intuition of the self's unhappiness, and that Empiricism and the New Science (for Blake "the most recent avatars of this error") encourage the "I" "to regard itself as passive and helpless" (12). But Quinney insists that the subject would come to regard itself in this way "if Bacon and Newton and Locke had never existed" (14); and