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Introduction Don Juan in the Pub

I am for an art that embroils itself with the everyday crap and still comes out on top.

-CLAES OLDENBURG1

ONE NIGHT, Dandy Mick saw Don Juan in The Cat and Fiddle. He'd been drinking gin twist, but he wasn't seeing things: Juan was a fixture in this particular gin palace. Benjamin Disraeli described the encounter in his novel *Sybil* (1845), basing his fictional scene on a tavern of the same name in Stockport, or perhaps one he saw during his 1844 visit to Manchester. Dandy Mick took two factory girls, Caroline and Harriet, to the pub that night. They made their way to an upper room named "The Temple of the Muses." [I]f I had called it the Saloon," the proprietor "Chaffing Jack" explained, "it never would have filled, and perhaps the magistrates never have granted a licence." The room's décor suited its name:

The ceiling was even richly decorated; the walls were painted, and by a brush of considerable power. Each panel represented some well-known scene from Shakespeare, Byron, or Scott: King Richard, Mazeppa, the Lady of the Lake were easily recognized: in one panel, Hubert menaced Arthur; here Haidee rescued Juan; and there Jeanie Deans curtsied before the Queen.⁴

Caroline was delighted ("Oh! I love the Temple! 'Tis so genteel!") and Harriet was dazzled ("It's just what I thought the Queen lived in"). Mick looked around "with a careless *nil admirari* glance," and showed Harriet the murals. "'You never were here before; it's the only place. That's the Lady of the Lake,' he added, pointing to a picture; 'I've seen her at the Circus, with real water.'" He might have been remembering one of several spectacular adaptations of

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Walter Scott's 1810 poem that appeared in Victorian theaters and circuses, where he could also have seen staged versions of Byron's *Mazeppa* (1819), which was one of the period's most popular hippodramas.⁶ Though he had little time for reading poetry, Mick encountered the works of Byron and Scott through other channels.

This book is about those kinds of encounters. In it, I study the material artifacts and cultural practices that shaped the reputations of Romantic authors in Victorian Britain and recirculated some of their works, often in fragmented or modified forms. I show how Romantic authors and their works were naturalized in a new media ecology and recruited to address new cultural concerns. Dandy Mick's encounter with characters from Romantic literature in his local tavern would be overlooked by most reception histories, but it is just the kind of reception that interests me here. Mick encounters Scott and Byron through a new material artifact, a painting on a tavern wall by an unknown artist. It remediates its source material, shifting it from writing to painting, and so reminds us that the reception of literature is not itself always literary or literary-critical but happens across several media. Indeed, it offers a second-order remediation: Mick sees a painting of a staging of a poem. It is popular and commercial: Chaffing Jack puts up the mural to attract customers, not because he loves literature. It is historically fugitive: the mural apparently disappears when the Temple is "newly painted, and re-burnished" at the end of the novel. And Mick's encounter is embedded in social practices such as dating (or "treating") and cultural institutions such as the tavern.

The mural in "The Temple of the Muses," like every artifact I examine in this book, both implied a reading of an author or a work and recruited them to serve some present purpose. On one hand, painting scenes from Byron and Scott alongside scenes from Shakespeare helped to canonize the recently deceased poets, and selecting the episode in which Haidee rescues Juan indicated a preference for the early, romantic cantos of *Don Juan* over the more outspoken later cantos, a preference shared by Victorian anthologies. On the other hand, Byron and Scott were recruited by Chaffing Jack to lend a genteel tone to his establishment, by Dandy Mick to impress his date, and by Benjamin Disraeli to provide a documentary account of lower-class life with a comic inflection.

Dandy Mick may not have been much of a reader, but he still took his place in a dark web of reception made up of many strands. This web of reception, I argue, is not incidental but essential to the continued vitality of literature. It is the matrix in which literature exists, if it exists at all for people beyond the time and place in which it was written. Authors' reputations never simply endure, and their works never simply find readers unaided. The web's different strands weave together stewardship, which is attentive to the meaning and integrity

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of an author's works, and appropriation, which conscripts authors and their works for its own purposes. But authors and their works do not simply survive: either they are renewed or they are forgotten. For this reason, the cultural work of reception is never finished, although it may be abandoned. The web of reception is still being woven in the present. This book, too, is part of it.

Most reception histories illuminate only one or two strands of the web. They uncover genealogies of poetic influence, or assemble narratives of the critical heritage. These strands are familiar to modern critics because they structure our own place in the web. But the web extends in other directions, through other media. As well as poetry and criticism, it weaves in sermons, statues, engravings, anthologies, postcards, photographs, cigarette cards, memorial plaques, and much else besides. Things and people, objects and practices, have their place. The web is rhizomatic: it has no center, no one strand from which all others branch, and there is no Archimedean point outside the web from which to see and judge all strands. It is intermedial: the reception of literary works often involves their remediation into other media, both "old" and "new," and requires us to think in terms of a media ecology. Its operations often appear chaotic or stochastic: the chains of contingency that cause a line of poetry to be reprinted in an anthology, read by a clergyman, quoted in a sermon, and remembered by a congregant are inscrutable. But the web is also disciplined by traditions: multiple, intersecting, temporally extended discourse communities that share usually unarticulated assumptions about how literature should be approached. It is, no doubt, traversed by flows of power: different interests woven into the web contest the reputations of authors and the readings of their works. And therefore it is usually presentist: the actors in the web turn back to the literature of the past as a way to engage with pressing contemporary concerns.

This book unpicks some strands of the web of reception in visual, verbal, plastic, and print media. It focuses primarily on the reception of five Romantic writers: Lord Byron, Felicia Hemans, Walter Scott, Percy Shelley, and William Wordsworth. Canonical Victorians who discussed these writers feature in the following pages, but I'm mainly interested in what the Victorians made of Romanticism rather than what they wrote about it. By that, I mean how they renovated Romanticism for a new generation by producing material artifacts such as illustrations, anthologies, statues, photographs, and postcards and how those material objects, in turn, remade their understanding of Romantic writers and their works.

In part 1, I identify underlying conditions for this renovation project in shifting concepts of history, memory, and media. I examine developments in the media ecology between the Romantic and Victorian periods, suggest reasons why the Romantics seemed in danger of being forgotten, and argue

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that their works had to be naturalized in the changed media ecology if they were to reach new readers (chapter 1). I suggest that their reception is structured by multiple traditions operating in different media. Critics have either neglected reception history altogether, because they have tended to value the context of composition and first publication above all others—a tendency I call "punctual historicism"—or else they have focused on the tradition they inhabit themselves (chapter 2). Victorian commentators thought that a generation gap separated them from the Romantics, so that the writing of even the recent past no longer spoke to their concerns. This meant that Romantic writing needed to be renovated for a new generation if it was not to be forgotten (chapter 3).

I then turn to four different strands of the web of reception, in sections on illustrations, sermons, statues, and anthologies. In each section, I identify a problem and describe efforts to solve it. In part 2, the problem the Victorians faced was how to update the material forms in which Romantic writing circulated in a period of rapid change in book manufacture (chapter 4). Retrofitted illustrations—that is, new illustrations produced for works that initially appeared without illustrations—thematized this process of renovation (chapter 5), while illustrated frontmatter allowed readers to imagine bridging the generation gap (chapter 6). In part 3, I examine a distinctively religious reception tradition for Romantic writing, which had trouble accommodating apparently irreligious poets such as Byron and Shelley (chapter 7). I show how Victorian sermons first minimized Shelley's atheism and then dispensed with it altogether (chapter 8), and examine how one preacher read Byron's works in a variety of books and mediated them to his congregation in complex and inconsistent ways (chapter 9).

In part 4, I suggest that there was a pressing need to foster new forms of cultural consensus in the age of Reform. Pantheons of past heroes offered one version of the desired consensus, but existing pantheons were felt to be inadequate. Commemorating Romantic writers, I argue, played a key role in reimagining the pantheon. At first, this involved looking for new pantheonic structures (chapter 10), but the pantheon rapidly spread across the cityscapes of London and Edinburgh, and eventually the whole country (chapter 11). This allowed for new local, regional, national, and even international constellations of monuments to create new networks of significance (chapter 12). Finally, in part 5, I turn to anthologies. Here the problem was a mismatch between the format in which much Romantic poetry originally appeared, as stand-alone volumes, and the format in which it often circulated to Victorian readers, in anthologies (chapter 13). I show how Victorian anthologies privileged Romantic short poems (chapter 14) and scanned long poems for detachable sections that could be treated like short poems, creating them through

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editorial intervention where they did not exist (chapter 15). In the process, Victorian anthologies not only made Romantic poems conform to Victorian media of cultural transmission but also eliminated parts of those poems that seemed alien or threatening to Victorian sensibilities.

Each part of the book, then, identifies a large-scale historical change and situates the reception of Romantic writing in relation to it. Part 1 concerns the shift into full-blown modernity, with its attendant sense of acceleration and dislocation from the past, its distinctive kind of historical consciousness and crisis of cultural memory, and its shifting media ecology. Part 2 concerns the sense that the cultural products of the past needed to be made new once again or disappear from consciousness. Part 3 concerns the process of secularization, which throws religious faith into sharp relief and makes religious ways of reading newly distinctive. Part 4 concerns the prolonged uncertainty about national identity produced by the Reform movement, and the sense that new histories were needed to renew social cohesion. And Part 5 concerns a period of media change, as the modern, mass-produced anthology emerged alongside universal state-supported education and became the material form in which many people encountered poetry for the first time. In thinking across the boundaries of periods, disciplines, and media, What the Victorians Made of Romanticism necessarily cultivates a variety of methods. Throughout, I draw on literary history, book history, cultural history, and media archaeology, as well as a range of theoretical and historiographical models. Part 1 outlines my approach in detail. I also employ some quantitative methodologies in part 5, which are described in more detail in chapter 13. These different methods allow me to triangulate my object of inquiry by approaching it from different angles. The object of inquiry itself is twofold: the reputations of Romantic authors in Victorian Britain, and the circulation and reception of their works in multiple media.

Unpicking the web of reception reveals new histories of appropriation, remediation, and renewal, showing how the Romantics were naturalized in the Victorian media ecology and recruited to address new cultural concerns. Understanding how this happened in the past should also model how it could happen again, indeed—as I suggest in the coda—how it is still happening. Like the Victorians, we find ourselves living through a moment of media change in which the cultural products of the past often seem in danger of being forgotten if they are not remade for the new media ecology. Those of us who assume responsibility for curating those cultural products, critiquing them, and introducing new generations to them are often asked to justify our work's relevance. This demand is itself a modern one, predicated on the idea that the present is detached from the past. Our critical tendency to stitch literary texts tightly into the context of their composition or first publication sometimes

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makes it harder to respond to such demands. The first response might be to reject "relevance" altogether, or to historicize the demand for relevance, but paying attention to the dark and densely woven web of reception also offers a way to explain literature's continuing vitality. It reminds us that a literary text is not a singular historical event but something that is repeatedly renewed in different contexts and media, in ways beyond the imagination of its author or its first readers. This web of remaking extends into the present, and not only in the academy but also—as Dandy Mick discovered—in the pub.

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