

# Introduction

Joel Faflak and Julia M. Wright

The relationship between the Romantic period and the Victorian era has long been a subject of scholarly enquiry, from tracings of literary and ideological debts between specific writers to formulations of the transformation of English culture from the “Age of Revolution” to the age of “muscular Christianity.” Recent volumes such as Andrew Elfenbein’s *Byron and the Victorians*, Stephen Gill’s *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, and C. C. Barfoot’s *Victorian Keats and Romantic Carlyle: The Fusions and Confusions of Literary Periods* testify to the ongoing interest in this fertile area of enquiry.<sup>1</sup> The present collection seeks to contribute to this general project of interrogating the complex, and mutually determining, relationship between Romantic and Victorian literatures. But it does so not in the well-established terms of authorial influence, especially among poets such as William Wordsworth, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Tennyson, Robert Browning, and Matthew Arnold. The chapters in this volume, rather, consider the construction of nervousness as a figure through which Victorian writers represented their response to the Romantic in a variety of genres. This response is not monolithic but, in many regards, pivots on the changing denotation of *nervousness*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* records that, from the fifteenth century forward, *nervous* was commonly used to refer to musculature, and so denoted strength, energy, and force in a variety of senses. Beginning in the eighteenth century, however, nervousness was used to describe feeling: In the literature and philosophy of sensibility, the nervous subject was connected to his or her fellow beings through a capacity to sympathize that writers such as David Hume and Adam Smith argued was the

basis for justice and social cohesion. By the late eighteenth century, this capacity was pathologized to refer not to a state of health but of disorder—of an excessive sensibility, an undisciplined propensity to emotional reaction, that threatens not only psychological stability but also the health of the body itself. The shift in usage took place largely during the nineteenth century, when both usages are readily found but the former is increasingly rare. The writers considered here draw on these different valences of nervousness, identifying it in the empowered female subject and the enervated male subject, the maddened crowd and the productive populace, excessive female sexuality and male creativity, the Romantic poet and the Victorian Sage.

## I

The division of the nineteenth century into two literary periods has, of course, been widely challenged, in part because the key distinction is variously defined and historically located: The First Reform Bill in 1832, the accession of Victoria in 1837, and the death of Wordsworth in 1850 have all been represented as transformational events that separate the Romantic from the Victorian. But Britain in the 1820s was closer to the First Reform Bill and the beginning of Victoria's sixty-four-year reign than to the Revolutionary year of 1789 or to the 1798 publication of *Lyrical Ballads*. Although P. B. Shelley announced in 1821 that English literature "has arisen as it were from a new birth" because of "the spirit of the age," that "spirit" was already being prepared for memorialization just four years later by writers such as William Hazlitt.<sup>2</sup> Such memorialization is less a commemoration than a premature burial, a way of stowing the Romantic safely in the past along with the bodies of the newly dead poets, Byron, P. B. Shelley, and John Keats.<sup>3</sup> Such heraldings and commemorations, however, beg the question of what constitutes "the spirit of the age," or Romanticism. The answer involves, in part, the priority of poetry in early constructions of Romanticism, and the ways in which poetry intersects with nineteenth-century notions of the feeling subject and literature's effects on that subject (and, by extension, groups of subjects, particularly the national body politic).

As scholars have lamented for some time, in a debate that is usually traced back to Arthur O. Lovejoy's "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms" (1924),<sup>4</sup> Romanticism itself has never been as fully coherent a category as those literary nominalizations that rely on the fixities of monarchs' reigns or century boundaries. In 1982, William C. Spengemann called for an end to the division of the nineteenth century into Romantic, Victorian, and American, arguing that

the definition of our subject as literature written in English between 1775 and 1918 has several clear advantages over our customary tripartite scheme. First of all, it includes and gives equal value, at least initially, to every literary work written in English in the period instead of conferring preeminence on those works which happen to support our notions concerning the nature of Romantic, Victorian and American writing.<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, in subtitling this volume “Victorian Recollections of Romanticism,” we do not wish to resurrect traditions concerning “the nature of Romantic [and] Victorian” literature, but to use those categories provisionally in order to interrogate the ways in which influential notions of Romanticism emerged during what we term the “Victorian period.” If the Victorians invented Romanticism, or at least began the process of its institutionalization as a given of literary history, then the child is not only father to the man. This construction of origins also calls into question traditional notions of influence by attending to the ways in which literary debts are defined by those who owe them and literary periods are constructed retroactively. More importantly for the chapters included here, understanding the degree to which “Romanticism” is a Victorian construct facilitates an investigation of the ways in which particular kinds of literature served specific Victorian interests.

Our concern, then, is not with the familiar and important topics of Wordsworth’s influence on the Victorian novel or the Decadents’ debts to P. B. Shelley and Keats. It is instead with the myriad ways in which literary history and social history were mutually determining as “Romanticism” was invented by the Victorians: a Romanticism in which Byron is scandalous, Mary Shelley’s only important work is *Frankenstein* (1818), the growth of the poet’s mind is the basis for narrative, and private contemplation is the vehicle of personal growth. As Romanticists are often painfully aware, this period of literary study takes as its name a common pejorative term for a starry-eyed idealism. This naming arose from and perpetuated the privileging of a body of literature that represented transcendence rather than social engagement and neoplatonism rather than radical politics and rhetorical address. The literature of the period was thus winnowed down to that of the “Big Six”—William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Wordsworth, P. B. Shelley, Keats, and Byron—or the “Big Five” (the Big Six with either Byron or Blake left on the margins). It is more than a little ironic that M. H. Abrams takes the title of his influential study of English Romantic literature, *Natural Supernaturalism*, from Thomas Carlyle, especially given that Abrams uses the category of the Romantic to exclude Byron, a threatening figure for Victorian sensibilities (as the second group of chapters in this volume makes clear):

Keats, for example, figures mainly insofar as he represented in some of his poems a central Romantic subject: the growth and discipline of the poet's mind, conceived as a theodicy of the individual life . . . which begins and ends in our experience in this world. Byron I omit altogether; not because I think him a lesser poet than the others but because in his greatest work he speaks with an ironic counter-voice and deliberately opens a satirical perspective on the vatic stance of his Romantic contemporaries.<sup>6</sup>

This illustrative move reveals how Byron, despite his relatively late entry into the field of Romantic-era satire and radical politics, could be set aside as idiosyncratic.<sup>7</sup> Many of the writers of the era were less concerned with “a theodicy of the individual life” than with the nature of community, whether Edmund Burke's hierarchical social structure in which the low admire the high, post-Enlightenment notions of a collectivity of feeling subjects responding to sociopolitical stimuli, or emergent concepts of nationality as an attachment to the land, language, or polity.

Abrams's exclusion of Byron is also symptomatic of less tractable forms of the Romantic subject's *Bildung*: the dark Prometheism of the earlier Byron in *Manfred* (1817) or *Cain* (1821); the unremitting melancholia of Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* (written 1819–1820); the addictive properties of Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821); or the uncanny duplicity of James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). In these texts the developmental pattern of personal identity does not fit, and leaves the subject unfit for, the social order. Emerging from Enlightenment notions of sensibility, the Romantic subject is a feeling subject. Such feeling exceeds and thus cannot be managed within prevailing economies of social identity and so necessitates a response in the *Bildung* of the social order itself. Hence, when Byron is mentioned undisparagingly, as by Letitia Elizabeth Landon in 1832, it is for the “impassioned” nature of his writing, the power of which exemplifies the civilizing influence of poetry as a “natural language.”<sup>8</sup> Purged of its orientaling effects, its transgression of sexual, political, and moral boundaries, and its deadening correspondence to its author's life, Byron's writing instead demonstrates how the “imagination is to the mind what life is to the body—its vivifying and active part.”<sup>9</sup> Poetry thus transcends generic and disciplinary distinctions because it keeps all genres and disciplines—indeed all modes of thought and being—alive to their own purer potentiality. But it must also be romanticized against the rise of the novel to speak for an increasingly prosaic body politic (not unlike that both satirized and celebrated in Byron's *Don Juan* [1819–1824]). Enervated by its depleted imaginative and spiritual capacities and buried by an accumulation of material facts, this body needs poetry's therapeutic power. The identifi-

cation of the Romantic with the poetic, then, emerges in relation to these historically specific notions of poetry's affective influence on the growing readership of the nation.

It is therefore telling that the period division was never really applied in as concerted a fashion to prose fiction as it was to poetry and critical prose. Nineteenth-century anxiety about the cultural viability or utility of poetry was already being elaborated in the early 1820s in Thomas Love Peacock's "The Four Ages of Poetry" (1820) and P. B. Shelley's response, "A Defence of Poetry" (written in 1821), but critics soon exploited a Romantic/Victorian distinction as a way of managing this nervousness. In an 1831 review of Tennyson's *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830), William Johnson Fox is anxious to allay fears about the poet's too-Romantic temperament by demonstrating how in Tennyson's writing "the real science of mind advances with the progress of society." The "poetry of the last forty years already shews symptoms of life in exact proportion as it is imbued with this science,"<sup>10</sup> but Tennyson's distinctly *post*-Romantic sensibility is more than symptomatic. He is firmly in control of his own Romantic state of mind because not only has he "felt and thought," he has also "learned to analyze thought and feeling."<sup>11</sup> In another 1831 review of Tennyson's volume, Arthur Hallam is equally specific: "We think he has more definiteness, and soundness of general conception, than the late Mr. Keats, and is much more free from blemishes of diction, and hasty capriccios of fancy. He has also this advantage over that poet, and his friend Shelley, that he comes before the public, unconnected with any political party, or peculiar system of opinions." Free from Romantic rhetorical excess, delusions of imagination, and ideological sway, Tennyson is a writer "whose mind conceives nothing isolated, nothing abrupt, but every part with reference to some other part, and in subservience to the idea of the whole."<sup>12</sup> Here Romantic organicism informs the building of a healthy, productive, and coherent body politic, and animating this body is poetry as the moving power of a kind of burgeoning metaphysics of Empire. As Fox suggests, poetry "act[s] with a force, the extent of which it is difficult to estimate, upon national feelings and character, and consequently upon national happiness"—indeed, it is "as widely diffused as the electric fluid."<sup>13</sup> Thus the future Poet Laureate deploys as social action an inwardness and self-centeredness cautioned against in the 1830s, a melancholic indeterminacy that, as Arnold will later argue, the Victorians caught from the earlier nineteenth century. Unriddled by the disease of too much thought, Tennyson's Romanticism is therapeutic and robust, fit for future Victorian writers and, more importantly, one with a salutary effect on Victorian readers, despite their class: "The most ignorant talk poetry when they are in a state of excitement, the firmly-organized think and feel poetry with every breeze of sensation that sweeps over their well-tuned nerves."<sup>14</sup>

Such remarks recall Wordsworth's Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), particularly its claim that poetry can save the English reading public from the deadening effects of overstimulating foreign literature by offering a carefully balanced stimulation in metrical verse.<sup>15</sup> Such poetry also stands for the ability of citizens, sensitive and receptive to the poetic nature of all things, to coalesce under the influence of this power—and, more importantly, to be educated by it. The payoff is clear: By socializing culture's baser instincts, a feeling internalization of these higher properties will form sounder, healthier minds and bodies, specifically bodies ready to labor more productively in the Empire's factories and institutions. Poetry creates a sympathetic "community of interest" that conserves rather than squanders its own internal energies, a "magnetic force"<sup>16</sup> that galvanizes or amalgamates differences within a corporate identity, thus setting aside anxieties about this incorporation's imperial power. Key to this process, then, is that it emphasizes feeling rather than thought. Hallam divides Tennysonian "sensation" from Wordsworthian "reflection," the therapeutic effects of the former conquering the excessive analysis of the latter so as to restore balance between them and thus to create an "extensive empire over the feelings of men."<sup>17</sup> Sensation grounds the reader in the practical pulses of "daily life and experience," for even if a knowledge of poetry might be "*morally* impossible . . . it is never *physically* impossible, because nature has placed in every man the simple elements of which art is the sublimation."<sup>18</sup> Hallam answers Keats's plea for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts wherein the nature of feeling is preferable to the culture of knowing, if only because it is more deterministically framed. But Hallam is also exploiting Wordsworth's "language of common men" by using sensation to temper their "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." Enlightened feeling is better than impassioned thought, especially when the working class threatens to think for itself and thus to reconstitute the body politic.

Despite Hallam's attempt to balance sensation and reflection, and thus to create an Arnoldian disinterestedness that acted upon rather than merely thought about life, Romantic sensual anarchy threatened to prevail over Victorian intellectual culture. In 1856 John Ruskin decried a lack of faithfulness to nature in the form of the "pathetic fallacy," "always the sign of a morbid state of mind, and comparatively of a weak one" unlike that of a great poet, who exhibits "two faculties, acuteness of feeling, and command of it."<sup>19</sup> Such pathos created a grotesquely separate feeling body with a mind of its own, unlike the grotesque complexity of the gothic that is elsewhere in Ruskin's aesthetics the sign of culture's fidelity to nature's vitality. In "The Natural History of German Life" (1856), even George Eliot argues for pictorial realism as a check against excessive "fancy" or "romanticism," albeit ironically to bring art closer

to social reality so as to fulfill an early Romantic political imperative of “linking the higher classes with the lower” and “obliterating the vulgarity of exclusiveness” by “the awakening of social sympathies.”<sup>20</sup> But the threat of the sensible body recurs most vehemently in Robert Buchanan’s 1871 attack on the pre-Raphaelite “fleshly school of poetry.” Tennyson’s *Maud* (1855) having set the “hysterical tone” of a narrator emasculated by an unsound mind, now “the fleshly feeling is everywhere,” its proponents “spreading the seeds of disease broadcast wherever they are read and understood.”<sup>21</sup> Theirs is a “morbid deviation from healthy forms of life, the same sense of weary, wasting, yet exquisite sensuality; nothing virile, nothing tender, nothing completely sane; a superfluity of extreme sensibility.”<sup>22</sup> Here “tenderness” denotes the enlightened Victorian subject’s proper sympathy for human nature. But it is also, ironically, symptomatic of the inability to distinguish—and dissociate—the feminine fleshly body from the masculine cogito. As the too-masculine New Woman and the too-feminine Decadent threaten to pervert gender distinctions, society devolves toward the Darwinian baseness of sheer “animalism,” a culture that bears the “fatal marks of literary consumption in every pale and delicate visage.”<sup>23</sup> For Walter Bagehot this degeneration toward a sickly (Keatsian) Romanticism leads to the “grotesque” body of Browning’s corpus from the early “pure” or “classical” visage of Wordsworth’s reflectiveness. This hermaphroditic body then becomes the synecdoche for a truncated body politic: “We live in the realm of the *half* educated. The number of readers grows daily, but the quality of readers does not improve rapidly. The middle class is scattered, headless; it is well-meaning, but aimless; wishing to be wise, but ignorant how to be wise.”<sup>24</sup> The growing classed body of the Empire threatens to become Ozymandias staring blankly into the Egyptian waste without the guidance of poetry’s Romanticized past, a headless mass tantamount to cultural collapse.

## II

How can a Romanticism sentimentalized or idealized as a force of cultural therapy organizing the properly feeling Victorian subject be the same Romanticism associated with the anarchy of this subject’s too-feeling body? The subsequent distinctions of gender and genre created by this attempt to have it both ways are, as the chapters in this volume suggest, not as straightforward as the Victorians themselves at first appear to have them, so that nervousness cuts in several directions. Neither poetry nor prose can be that good or that bad (indeed, even the generic distinction itself hardly suffices to account for the period), and the legislation of the social order’s nervous body is never as ideologically

seamless nor as apocalyptically chaotic as much of the discourse would suggest. The bodies of literature rediscovered in Romantic studies over the past twenty years, as well as the relatively neglected works of the Big Six, reveal at the turn of the eighteenth century the intense debate over social identity that was to inform a later Victorian nervousness about the place of the individual within the order of things.<sup>25</sup> The late eighteenth-century Della Cruscan poets, a school of writers working within the tradition of sensibility, constructed feeling subjects who not only responded strongly to friends and lovers, but also sympathized with the plight of the poor, the enslaved, and the French Revolutionaries. The novelists who followed Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) contested prevailing gender paradigms, especially on the segregation of the sexes, the suppression of desire, and the education of women. Authors of travelogues and orientalist fictions in prose, verse, and dramatic form addressed anxieties about national identity, empire, and international relations.

This is not to suggest that the literature of the Romantic period was more politically diverse than that of any other. It is to suggest, rather, that the Victorian privileging of an idealistic and largely apolitical Romanticism elided its diversity, political and otherwise. Moreover, this elision is a suggestive one for scholars interested in the transition from one period to the other, not as a change in the Jaussian "horizon of expectations" but as a transition that was constructed to secure that horizon and with it the fiction of sociocultural stability. For a feeling, politicized Romanticism is a revolutionary one and, worse, unpredictable in its social effects, even for those who otherwise read this heterogeneity positively. Romanticism thus becomes, for Victorian writers, "sentimentalism" (frequently the pejorative form of *sensibility* for nineteenth-century writers), Byronic egotism, radicalism, and sensationalism—a Romanticism with addictive properties and thus a pathology within the body politic that demands either curing or excision.

The first usage of the term *romanticism* to denote an artistic approach that is recorded by the *Oxford English Dictionary* reveals the origins of the term in literary and political struggle. In 1823, a reviewer for the liberal *New Monthly Magazine* wrote:

In England, where your dramatic faith is modelled upon nature and Shakespeare, you can have but a faint idea of the fierce struggle that is at present pending between the followers of the romantic and classical schools of tragedy in France and Italy. . . . The French Academy, which may be called the Sorbonne of literature, has adhered to the old order of things, and has pronounced an anathema upon all the followers of the great schismatic Shake-



spare, and has determined never to receive within its bosom any one polluted by the dramatic heresy of romanticism. But this bigoted [*sic*] resolution has been of advantage to the adverse cause; for such is the distrust felt by the public for any doctrines openly patronized by the government, or any body of men under their influence, that the mere spirit of opposition urges them to follow, with greater alacrity, a contrary course.<sup>26</sup>

The only positives here loosely associated with Romanticism are “nature and Shakespeare.” The term is primarily defined negatively, as a refusal of “the old order of things,” the antithesis of classicism, and the rallying point for opposition to government policy. So, too, later in the Victorian period, Romanticism was constituted as the Other of Victorian orthodoxy: as emotional excess, revolutionary violence, psychological and physiological instability, literary experimentation, and threat to prevailing norms of gender and class. Just as Romantic orientalism evinces signs of both fear and desire, so too does the orientalized Romanticism of the Victorian period: like Byron’s Venice and P. B. Shelley’s “Asia,” Romantic texts offer a space in which to escape the pressure of social conservatism; like Southey’s and De Quincey’s “East,” Romantic texts also threaten to bring violence and disorder to the metropole. Unlike the distant East of Romantic orientalism, however, this feeling Romanticism hovered on the edge of the Victorian present through temporal proximity and surviving textual traces—in prose fiction, essays, drama, and poetry.

Both the threat and the promise of this contiguous but Othered culture emerge, as we have seen, from the identification of the Romantic with excessive feeling and excess in general. As we have also intimated, however, this identification also has a complex history before the Victorians. The relationship between Romanticism and the literature of sensibility, along with that literature’s informing philosophical and medical models of the feeling subject, lends weight and depth to these varied alignments. As Jerome McGann has recently shown, the canonical Romantic poets emerged from the literature of sensibility while modifying it in key ways.<sup>27</sup> Renewed scholarly interest in the literature of sensibility, a significant force in English literature throughout the Romantic period, is reminding us of the concomitant assumption of readerly affect, of sensibility’s claim that literature changes readers by inciting emotional responses.<sup>28</sup> Late-eighteenth-century medical theory corporealized this Enlightenment model, and Steven Bruhm, Paul Youngquist, and Peter Melville Logan are among those now considering the wide-ranging impact of William Cullen’s neurophysiological model on conceptualizations of sensibility in relation to sensation and bodily health in nineteenth-century British culture.<sup>29</sup> While neurophysiology imagines a medical subject

stimulated into life, a network of bodily and mental feelings which must be brought into proper balance for health to prevail, the literature of sensibility follows eighteenth-century philosophers such as David Hume, Adam Smith, and Henry Home in imagining a subject that feels for others, imaginatively reproducing the pain of another as a prelude to moral action. Literature directs the reader's feeling to moral action in the traditional Enlightenment model, and potentially threatens the balance of stimulation in the later neurophysiological model.<sup>30</sup> As P. B. Shelley puts it, "A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause."<sup>31</sup>

That Fox's or Hallam's reviews echo Shelley's "Defence" (interestingly, a text not published until 1840 in the wake of these accounts) suggests how Romanticism, anxious about its own sensibility, offers itself as both disease and cure for Victorian paradigms of writing. The Victorian emphasis on morality (duty, propriety, work) as the restraint of emotional and bodily feeling functions in part as a direct reaction against the too-feeling Romantic body and morally transformable reader of sensibility. In his 1837 history of the French Revolution, Thomas Carlyle suggests a correlation between revolution, feeling, and literature, declaring during the year of Victoria's accession, on the subject of 1780s France:

Behold the mouldering mass of Sensuality and Falsehood; round which plays foolishly, itself a corrupt phosphorescence, some glimmer of Sentimentalism. . . . [T]he French Nation distinguishes itself among Nations by the characteristic of Excitability; with the good, but also with the perilous evil, which belongs to that. Rebellion, explosion, of unknown extent is to be calculated on. There are, as Chesterfield wrote, "all the symptoms I have ever met with in History!" . . . But if any one would know summarily what a Pandora's Box lies there for the opening, he may see it in what by its nature is the symptom of all symptoms, the surviving Literature of the Period.<sup>32</sup>

In the phrase, "with the good, but also the perilous evil, which belongs to that [excitability]," Carlyle recognizes sensibility's history in Enlightenment moral theory but insists on representing it as a slippery slope that leads straight to revolution or, more precisely, the dangerous mob.<sup>33</sup> From the French Revolution (1789), the panics that followed the Vellore Mutiny (1806), mass street protests in the decades leading up to the First Reform Bill (1832), and the "Indian Mutiny" (1857–1858), crowds were every-

where turning into mobs during the period covered by this volume. As Charles MacKay wrote in the 1852 preface to his *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, first published in 1841:

In reading the history of nations, we find that, like individuals, they have their whims and their peculiarities; their seasons of excitement and recklessness, when they care not what they do. We find that whole communities suddenly fix their minds upon one object, and go mad in its pursuit; that millions of people become simultaneously impressed with one delusion, and run after it.<sup>34</sup>

If literature is “the symptom of all symptoms,” as Carlyle puts it, echoing Fox’s “symptomatic” reading of poetry of the “last forty years,” literature’s control or elimination offers the hope of containing the disease. The hostility with which the sensationalist literature of Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon was received is an obvious inflection of this reaction, but this volume’s emphasis is specifically on the ways in which it mediated the reception and representation of Romantic writers whose literature, despite their complicity in the Age of Revolution and its taint of “excitability,” still survived into the Victorian period.

### III

The focus of the contributors to this project is thus on a select group of Romantic-era writers whose work was canonized, in some measure, by the Victorians, but problematically associated with the kinds of feeling that the dominant Victorian ideology sought to contain. While Wordsworth was, in Gill’s phrase, “constructed as a marketable commodity,”<sup>35</sup> as were writers such as Felicia Hemans and Walter Scott, the Romantic writers considered here were associated with less marketable strains of Romanticism. The Romanticism that emerges from the Victorian texts discussed in this volume is one that focuses on the feeling flesh and on an embodied subject who registers pain and pleasure on terms that tacitly or explicitly critique conservative hegemony. The Romantic authors we consider thus include Wollstonecraft, whose feminist sensibility inspired a generation of novels on the ways in which patriarchal oppression worked against “natural” feeling; Byron, who became a byword for the “dark Romanticism” that Victorian psychologists blamed for melancholic, dysfunctionally feeling subjects; Keats, an early poet of sensation whose class and putative femininity encapsulated the classed and gendered construction of feeling in the nineteenth century; the philosophizing opium addicts, S. T. Coleridge and De Quincey; and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, whose life

with P. B. Shelley was so much at odds with the Victorian codification of domesticity and female sexuality, an example that plays out how the Victorians went through a great number of ideological acrobatics to contain the radical past established by her mother's own life.

The Victorians discussed here are primarily those of the early and mid-Victorian period, the immediate heirs—in the case of Sara Coleridge Coleridge, quite literally—of this uncomfortably sensitive Romanticism. Sara Coleridge, a little-studied Victorian figure who reworks her famous father's writing and contributed to periodicals, emerges as emblematic of the various trends that this volume seeks to chart. In the unique position of being a female heir to the complex legacy of a controversial Romantic poet, Coleridge negotiates with her father's varied ideological interests, his opium addiction, and the (en)gendering of a larger Romantic tradition. Eliot also found in Romantic precursors the means by which to open out the construction of female subjectivity and agency. These authors serve not only to remind us of the variety of ways in which Victorians could reconfigure Romanticism but also to suggest the importance of doing so for writers who either could not escape their connection to Romanticism (like Sara Coleridge) or who saw in it a potential for resisting the constraints of the Victorian era (like Eliot). Yet this was not only the case for women writers. Canadian post-Confederation poets turned to the marginalized Keats to claim some connection to the metropole beyond their status as subjects to the British crown. De Quincey's later Victorian revisions of his own work reveal his ongoing attachment to the vigor of his Romantic writing, and Marshall's otherwise doctrinal representation of Mary Shelley becomes complicated by a Wollstonecraftian attention to the letter rather than to narrative domination. It is this Romantic return that other writers considered here resisted, if not demonized. Elizabeth Gaskell pathologizes Romantic feeling, framing it as a cultural mutation that must be excised from the national body politic, while J. S. Mill privileges Wordsworth over Byron in an attempt to direct readers away from the kind of feeling engagement with the poetic text that threatens to produce a public rather than a private response. Carlyle, similarly, aligns his own physiological and emotional disorders with Romantic excess, and seeks a cure in Victorian duty and labor.

This volume's interest in Victorian negotiations with this ambivalent Romanticism divides itself into three sections that focus on different sites of nervousness and on genre as a key vehicle of the Victorian construction of Romantic identity. Genre experimentation toward varying ideological ends is an important aspect of Romantic discourse that informs Victorian writing as it renegotiates with Romantic precedents.<sup>36</sup> Generic continuities among the papers included here thus tacitly register the ways in which genre was aligned with modes of rhetorical address that intersect

with categories of gender, class, and politics. The first section, "Nervous Containments," considers the ways in which recollection and influence are refracted by concerns about the potential for Romantic remains to challenge Victorian orthodoxy, especially on the sensitive subjects of gender, the sage's authority, and national identity.

The first two chapters specifically focus on the use of editions and biographies as mechanisms of canonization in the Victorian period, recalling Elfenbein's point that there are a "range of discourses through which earlier writers become accessible to later ones."<sup>37</sup> These memorializations reinvent Romantic writers for Victorian audiences through a special attenuation of feeling that complies with newly hegemonic protocols, but in ways that also trouble conservative notions, especially of gender. The volume thus begins with a piece on De Quincey, an appropriately ambivalent figure whose writings, by resisting both Romantic and Victorian prescriptions, betrays the instability of the cultural categories of "Romantic" and "Victorian" this volume seeks to collapse. As Joel Faflak argues, "De Quincey's corpus is defined by an early and ongoing ambivalence between a (Romantic) analysis of the subject's interior life and a (Victorian) buttressing of this life's external authority through the idea/ideal of the public man put forward in the collected edition's Autobiography." In the Autobiography, the confessing opium addict nostalgically rendering his pitcher of laudanum struggles to perform the Victorian Sage through the overdetermined organization of his diverse textual corpus. But this corpus is addicted to orthodoxy as well as disorder, compelled repeatedly to articulate a reality that both resists naming and demands classification. As Lisa Vargo demonstrates in the second contribution in this section, Mary Shelley troubled the Shelleys' attempts to memorialize P. B. Shelley as poet in such volumes as *Shelley Memorials* (1859) and *Relics of Shelley* (1862). The wife was an awkward reminder of the husband's apostasy: as an admirer of Mary's father, William Godwin, especially his controversial espousal of reform, *Political Justice* (1793); as a husband who abandoned his first wife and children to run away with the teenaged Mary; and as a supporter of Mary's writing and further education. As the author of numerous volumes, an essayist, and an editor, Shelley had to be transformed in her Victorian biographer's hands. If De Quincey must be a Victorian Sage, Mary Shelley must be a dutiful spouse whose most important work, *Frankenstein*, was written before she was a wife and mother. But, as Vargo notes, this Victorian redaction of a Romantic life is further complicated by the biographer's own position as wife and artist.

The remaining chapters in this section, then, extend the exploration of gender to consider the ways in which gender and nationality complicate the contours of influence: Romantic drama provides a means for imagining

female agency for Eliot, while Keats, the Cockney poet, serves as a precursor for Archibald Lampman through which the Canadian poet could establish a filial connection to the metropole. Grace Kehler echoes Vargo's chapter on the constraints on the Victorian female artist by considering Eliot's turn to the Romantic verse drama in *Armgarth* (1871) and engagement with the emotive dynamics of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century opera. In Eliot's work, questions of performance, gender roles, and female agency are posed through an engagement with the traditions of opera and the specifics of nineteenth-century opera history. As Kehler argues, the title character, a prima donna who plays "trouser" roles, emerges from the context of women singers' replacement of the castrati and the corresponding growth of transvestite roles. The shift creates a complex genealogy of troubled gender performances that reverberates through nineteenth-century opera. Through the conventions of the Romantic verse drama, Kehler suggests, *Armgarth* foregrounds these incommensurabilities by "repeatedly stag[ing] textual colloquies about acting well, onstage or offstage," and, like the post-Wollstonecraft feminist fiction of the 1790s, ends with an unsatisfied agent still caught up in struggle. Expanding on the otherwise purely English focus of this volume, D. M. R. Bentley's contribution offers an equally positive nervous response to Romantic precedents from the periphery of the British Empire. In the post-Confederation Canadian verse of Archibald Lampman (1861–1899) and other related writers, and in light of post-Civil War American mind-cure theories, Bentley examines how a Victorianized Romantic poetry that focuses on nature's restorative power exerts a constitutive therapeutic effect in "placing" Canadian nationhood, both to define Canada's postcolonial identity and to locate this identity vitally in a distinctly Canadian landscape. These writers reincarnate in Canada the feeling of Romanticism as a way of embodying their own "feeling for" the Mother Country, so that the textual soul of Keats's poetry is used to awaken the soul of the Canadian body politic in Canadian poetry. This new colonization marks a rich and, until recently, unchronicled chapter in construction of other national literatures in English and in the ongoing reanonization of nineteenth-century literatures.

In the second section, "A Matter of Balance," the specific concern is the Victorian expectation that when literature circulates in the public domain, as through the Victorian period's two most canonical prose forms of the sage's essay and the realist novel, it works both to disrupt and to order that space. This section addresses how the effort to control what literature circulated in the public body was fed by a desire to control the nature of the public; the goal for the authors considered here is, in broad terms, a literary program that would create a self-disciplining public. Specifically, it was imperative not to excite the crowd, for excited crowds are unpredictable, violent, and, above all, revolutionary, as Carlyle's writ-

ing on the French Revolution makes clear. The masses must remain placid, disconnected by their inward contemplation of Wordsworthian reflection rather than roused and rallied by Byronic ire or sentimental affect. Thus Timothy J. Wandling addresses the conjunction of attacks on Byron and attacks on the new “mass” reading audience, a conjunction facilitated by Byron’s eloquence and awareness of the audience’s reception of his work. Building on Jon Klancher’s groundbreaking work on the significance of writers’ appeals to emergent reading audiences, Wandling relates these paired attacks to the development of a notion of literature that speaks “about” rather than “to” its readers, one that survives in both the privileging of expressive poetry and the reduction of Romantic literature to such poetry. An aristocrat-radical who satirized contemporary politicians and the monarch, Byron makes the Victorians nervous because he speaks directly to their “nervous” body politic rather than to their “purer” Arnoldian intellect. To speak rhetorically, occasionally, and eloquently violates literary decorum and the social agenda with which it was intimately connected.

Kristen Guest traces in Carlyle’s corpus the identification of illness and a Romantic failure to manage the body, and the Sage’s attempts to contain his own Romantic suffering (which occasionally spills over into his private prose) through the Victorian controls of duty and labor. Moreover, she argues, Carlyle carefully distinguishes between a bodily weakness that strengthens the will and a weakness of will that wallows in bodily disorders, making illness a potentially transformational experience as well as a litmus test of character. Thus, in *Sartor Resartus* (1833–1834), digestive metaphors for the public consumption of literature stretch indigestion to divide laboring readers from self-indulgent readers in terms of their willingness to work through a text. In Gaskell’s *Wives and Daughters* (1866), Julia M. Wright argues, the excitability and sensibility identified with Romantic literature—condemned by Mill and Carlyle—is further pathologized, excised, and thrust into the nation’s dangerously juvenile past, which the Victorians can then be seen to have outgrown in their progress toward a fitting adulthood. This adulthood is secured through an educational program supported by the sages, one that particularly emphasizes “serious” reading in the sciences to produce a particular kind of national community. Romanticism thus emerges as an adolescent obsession with “self-feeling,” in direct contrast to the more mature willingness to sacrifice personal interest for the sake of others. Victorian appropriations of the Romantic poets most strongly identified with a juvenile status (Keats, P. B. Shelley) thus might suggest more than literary and philosophical debt; they might also suggest attempts to contest certain Victorian notions of maturity, so often expressed through the realist novels, and thus the ideological claims that they enabled.

The final section, "Hesitation and Inheritance," focuses on Sara Coleridge as a case study of the various Victorian anxieties and nervous reactions considered in this volume. As a figure until now thoroughly set aside within the canon, and as a daughter who barely knew her father, in the domestic sense, Coleridge stands as one of the most potent—and poignant—symptoms of the very process of excision, exclusion, and marginalization on which Victorian ideologies depend as they reinvent their Romantic past. Coleridge was a more than capable editor, translator, poet, and contributor to the periodicals of her day, so that to reduce her to her famous patronym would be to make the mistake of Mary Shelley's heirs. Coleridge herself encountered this process of Victorianization in her 1848 review of Tennyson's *The Princess* for the *Quarterly Review*, from which John Gibson Lockhart, the journal's editor, excised most of her references to Keats. As Joanne Wilkes argues, this excision brought Coleridge's essays in line with Lockhart's own on the "Cockney School," which notoriously exploited a characterization of Keats as a figure of unfulfilled potential. By thus standardizing *Quarterly Review* statements on Romantic literature, Lockhart was also subordinating Sara Coleridge's voice to that of the journal, through anonymity in publication and pruning shears in editing. But anonymity allowed some role-playing, which for women contributors meant assuming a male voice, although Coleridge uses her own womanhood in turn to authorize her opinion of gender matters. Her periodical publications thus reprivilage the body, the poetry of "sensation," and the expertise of women on the feminine at the same time that they are editorially absorbed into the performed identity of the *Quarterly Review*.

According to Alan Vardy, Coleridge's 1850 collecting of her father's early journalism, *Essays on His Own Times*, produces a similar editorial effect. A Victorian daughter of Romanticism who is revisited by her father's political sins, Coleridge repeats his conflicts by both contesting and reinforcing Victorian paradigms of political conservatism and literary authority. Vardy demonstrates how the daughter's editorship followed the father's work in abstracting a "consistent" or organic intellectual spirit from a political corpus manifesting the material vagaries of history. She thus sanitizes Romantic radicalism for a Victorian audience who had embraced her father as one of their own children: the Tory man of letters and faithful adherent of the Church of England. Yet while her Introduction's pious biography conciliates between politically divergent phases of Coleridge's writings, it remains conflicted between suppressing and vindicating their heterodoxy. For Donelle Ruwe, Sara Coleridge is rather less ambivalent about her father's Romantic past when editing his *Biographia Literaria* in 1847. Just as De Quincey psychoanalyzes his own Victorian superego, Coleridge's editorship suggests a psychic anatomy



of the *Biographia*'s Romantic ideology that was so important to that superego. The elder Coleridge begins to recuperate his Romantic past in the *Biographia*, which establishes his post-Romantic position as literary theorist, philosopher, and Meta-Physician. As Ruwe argues, however, the younger Coleridge continues this recuperation but by resisting its epistemological and ideological authority. Engaging with her father's theory of imagination as a matter of the intellect devoid of any reference to his addiction, Coleridge's commentary on the *Biographia* offers an alternate definition of imagination based on the bodily empiricism of her own addiction. Specifically reversing her father's privileging of imagination over fancy, Coleridge favors a "nervous" fancy as a type of embodied imagination, one rooted in the *sensorium* of the body, to use the term Coleridge borrows from Thomas Trotter's 1807 theory of nervous diseases. Re-attaching the abstracted intellect of a masculine Romantic cogito to the materiality of its body, albeit in a way that might have made Bagehot rather uncomfortable, Coleridge edits her father's remains as the empirical "body" of evidence he chooses to neglect.

Such a gesture is a fitting reminder that, despite attempts to have Romanticism pass only into the purer mind of the Victorian subject, Romantic literature continues to remind Victorian writers—and post-Victorian readers—that what is bred in the bone and felt along the pulses is neither as "natural" nor as "cultural" as one would initially imagine.

## NOTES

1. Andrew Elfenbein, *Byron and the Victorians* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); C. C. Barfoot, ed., *Victorian Keats and Romantic Carlyle: The Fusions and Confusions of Literary Periods* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999). See also, for example, Richard Cronin, *Romantic Victorians: English Literature, 1824–1840* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Anthony H. Harrison, *Victorian Poets and Romantic Poems: Intertextuality and Ideology* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992); Clyde de L. Ryals, *A World of Possibilities: Romantic Irony in Victorian Literature* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990); Donald D. Stone, *The Romantic Impulse in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); George Harry Ford, *Keats and the Victorians: A Study of His Influence and Rise to Fame* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1944); as well as the wealth of criticism on "Victorian Romanticism" by scholars such as Herbert F. Tucker.

2. P. B. Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: Norton, 1977), 508; William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age: Or Contemporary Portraits* (London: Colburn, 1825).

3. For the most recent discussion of this, see Cronin's chapter "Memorializing Romanticism" in *Romantic Victorians*, 15–44.
4. Arthur O. Lovejoy, "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms," *PMLA* 39 (1924): 229–53. For a suggestive analysis of the various attempts to construct, and challenge, a coherent "Romanticism," see Frances Ferguson, "On the Numbers of Romanticisms," *ELH* 58 (1991): 471–98.
5. William C. Spengemann, "Three Blind Men and an Elephant: The Problem of Nineteenth-Century English," *New Literary History* 14 (1982): 161.
6. M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), 13.
7. For an excellent study of Romantic-era satire, see Gary Dyer, *British Satire and the Politics of Style, 1789–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
8. Letitia Elizabeth Landon, "On the Ancient and Modern Influence of Poetry," in *Letitia Elizabeth Landon: Selected Writings*, ed. Jerome McGann and Daniel Riess (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1997), 167.
9. *Ibid.*, 168. Landon condemns the reduction of the poetry to the poet, writing, "The personal is the destroyer of the spiritual; and to the former everything is now referred. We talk of the author's self more than his works, and we know his name rather than his writings" (167–68).
10. William Johnson Fox, review of *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical [1830]*, in *Tennyson: The Critical Heritage*, ed. John D. Jump (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), 24.
11. *Ibid.*, 25.
12. A. H. Hallam, review of *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical [1830]*, in *Tennyson: The Critical Heritage*, ed. John D. Jump (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), 42–43.
13. Fox, Review of *Poems*, 33, 22.
14. *Ibid.*, 22.
15. For an important discussion of Wordsworth in this context, see Paul Youngquist, "Lyrical Bodies: Wordsworth's Physiological Aesthetics," *European Romantic Review* 10 (1999): 152–62.
16. Hallam, Review of *Poems*, 41, 40.
17. *Ibid.*, 41.
18. *Ibid.*, 38, 39.
19. John Ruskin, "The Pathetic Fallacy," in *The Literary Criticism of John Ruskin*, ed. Harold Bloom (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), 74, 72.

20. George Eliot, "On the Natural History of German Life," in *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 270–71.

21. Robert Buchanan, "The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D. G. Rossetti," in *Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory*, concise ed., ed. Thomas J. Collins and Vivienne Rundle (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2000), 648, 646.

22. *Ibid.*, 647.

23. *Ibid.*, 652, 656. Citing the pictorial qualities of D. G. Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel," Buchanan cautions too against the hybridization of disciplines, in this case between poetry and painting: "[T]he truth is that literature, more particularly poetry, is in a very bad way when one art gets hold of another" (650). Ironically, Buchanan notes that the poem first appeared in *Germ*, "an unwholesome periodical started by the pre-Raphaelites" (649), thus capitalizing on the threat of contagion within the otherwise necessarily "pure" body of poetry.

24. Walter Bagehot, "Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning; or, Pure, Ornate, and Grotesque Art in English Poetry," in *The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot*, ed. Norman St. John-Steuvas, 8 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 2:365.

25. This material was never quite forgotten—one can find references to many such works, for instance, in Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry* (1947)—but it was marginalized because of the overarching rubric of "Romanticism," which dominated, until recently, classroom anthologies, book-length studies, hiring expectations, and the other means by which literary history is institutionalized.

26. Review of *Racine et Shakespeare*, by M. de Stendhal (Paris: Delaunay, Mongie, 1823), *New Monthly Magazine* 9 (1823): 175–76.

27. Jerome J. McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Poetic Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

28. On English engagements with sensibility in the Romantic period, see, for example, Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender, and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility*; Tassie Gwilliam, "'Scenes of Horror,' Scenes of Sensibility: Sentimentality and Slavery in John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*," *ELH* 65 (1998): 653–73; Mary Kelly Persyn, "'No Human Form but Sexual': Sensibility, Chastity, and Sacrifice in Blake's *Jerusalem*," *European Romantic Review* 10 (1999): 53–83; Candace S. Ward, "'Active Sensibility and Positive Virtue': Wollstonecraft's 'Grand Principle of Action,'" *European Romantic Review* 8 (1997): 409–31; Wendy Gunther Canada, "The Politics of Sense and Sensibility: Mary Wollstonecraft and Catharine Macaulay Graham on Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*," in *Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition*, ed. Hilda L. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 126–47. This is, however, a very partial list and excludes the significant body of work emerging from scholarship on eighteenth-century British articulations of

sensibility and the importance of sensibility to American writing of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

29. Steven Bruhm, *Gothic Bodies: The Politics of Pain in Romantic Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994); Peter Melville Logan, *Nerves and Narratives: A Cultural History of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century British Prose* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997); Youngquist, "DeQuincey's Crazy Body."

30. Physician John Brown argued that thinking could be dangerous to the health: "Thinking, which more immediately affects the brain, than any other equal part of the system [i.e., mind and body as a single organism], increases excitement over the whole body. Intense thinking, whether for once in a great degree, or habitual, may alone prove hurtful; but, in conjunction with other powers also hurtful from their excess of stimulus, becomes more so." See *The Elements of Medicine of John Brown, M. D.*, rev. ed., 2 vols., trans. John Brown, ed. Thomas Beddoes (London: J. Johnson, 1795), 1:128–29.

31. P. B. Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," 487–88.

32. Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History* (1837; 3 vols.), in *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, 30 vols. (New York: AMS Press, 1969), 2:58, 59.

33. On the relationship between morality and sensibility, see especially Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976). For an excellent introduction to sensibility, its philosophical debts, and its cultural importance in the eighteenth century, see Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (New York: Methuen, 1986).

34. Charles MacKay, Preface to *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* (1852; reprint, New York: Three Rivers Press, 1980), xvii.

35. Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, 2.

36. See, for instance, Tilottama Rajan and Julia M. Wright, eds., *Romanticism, History, and the Possibilities of Genre: Re-forming Literature, 1789–1837* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

37. Elfenbein, *Byron and the Victorians*, 8. This aspect of our volume, and indeed the inception of the volume itself, emerges from a special session at the annual convention of the Modern Language Association, "'Recollections': Victorian Editions of Romantic Biographies" (Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 27–30 December 1997), organized by the editors. The panel included three contributors to the present volume: Donelle Ruwe, Lisa Vargo, and Alan Vardy.