the legacy of his poetics as it was taken up and transformed by women. In Chapter 12, ‘Romantic Times (2): Later Romantics and Women Poets’, Priestman considers women writing poetry influenced by Darwin’s didacticism but with an eye to the domestic aspect of flowers and life. Such poetry takes on a less sexual but equally intriguing re-interpretation of ‘vegetable love’. Priestman is alert to the problematic category of ‘Romantic women writers’ and sensitively applies an historicised understanding of the stages of life of the women discussed and their contextual experiences, particularly Anna Laetitia Barbauld (as a poet born in the 1740s).

Overall, the work is clearly and cogently written and fills a gap in the existing literature on the literary aspects of the polymath that was Erasmus Darwin, while simultaneously pointing the way towards further enquiry into his more often obscured role as a ‘man of letters’. Priestman succeeds in salvaging the reputation of Erasmus Darwin as the writer of *The Loves of the Plants* from the dismissive satire, *The Loves of the Triangles*, which rendered him a poetic absurdity and buried his poetry as the object of serious study for so long. Re-reading *The Loves of the Plants*, in particular, is a heightened experience as a result of Priestman’s effectiveness in opening up fresh ways of discussing the poetry of Erasmus Darwin. Ultimately, Coleridge’s observation that Darwin displayed the ‘most original mind in Europe’ informs Priestman’s analysis of Darwin’s self-conscious textuality and ‘magpie intertextuality’ (p. 67). *The Poetry of Erasmus Darwin: Enlightened Spaces, Romantic Times* is a provocative study of a poetic thinker worthy of recovery in light of our current theoretical concerns and abiding appreciation of English poetry.

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Mark Sandy’s latest monograph, *Romanticism, Memory, and Mourning*, builds upon his previous work on Romantic subjectivities, legacies and constructions of place. This study unites these previous interests in an exploration of how the language of grief in Romantic poetry is used to articulate the connection between a personal sense of loss and the subject’s position within social and literary communities. At the same time, Sandy challenges definitions of ‘Romanticism’, and demonstrates how writers throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth
centuries used similar expressions of grief to maintain imaginative conversations with their Romantic precursors.

Sandy identifies ways in which Romantic poetry about grief ‘acts as a defence against, and encounter with, the final silence of death’ (p. 1). This ‘silence of death’ is one discovered in losses of various kinds; it is located in personal grief and sites of mourning for lost ideals. What unites these diverse experiences of grief and mourning is a focus on ‘irreplaceable loss’ (p. 2). Sandy reveals a unity in the mourning experiences of Romantic writers across nine chapters: each of the ‘Big Six’ is the focus of a chapter, as is John Clare. Charlotte Smith and Felicia Hemans are explored in a joint chapter, and the study concludes with a brief survey of the lasting effects of Romantic memory and mourning on Victorian poetry. Sandy’s attention to detail is impressively in evidence throughout the work; through sustained close reading, he seeks to demonstrate how multiple poetic forms were utilised by the Romantics and their successors to articulate their speculations on grief and loss. Indeed, he suggests that ‘individual and communal consolation depend upon the successful communication of suffering’ (p. 46), and his analyses indicate the multifarious ways in which these poets might be said to have offered such ‘consolation’.

Sandy’s careful reading of textual detail is echoed in the themes he discovers in the poems. He reveals how the Romantics’ experiences of grief provided a means through which to articulate their concerns with the personal and quotidian. Sandy identifies in Blake’s works an exploration of the subject’s ability to ‘envisage our experience of life in the tragic and miraculous modes of perception’ (p. 17). The way in which the poet or speaker sees the world is made manifest through the form of the poem; in Blake’s poetry, as in Wordsworth’s, Sandy suggests that the individual’s perception of the world is dependent upon ‘shifting relational dynamics governed by [...] contingent factors’ (p. 22). Sandy finds these dynamics in diverse relations: they operate between life and death, gain and loss, memory and forgetting, love and mourning, as well as between the poet and poem, poem and reader. These interactions are, furthermore, governed by social, economic and geographical factors. Sandy expands upon these ‘interplay[s]’ in his reading of Wordsworth who, he suggests, is ‘always alert to the forces that shape and disrupt’ such interactions (p. 35). Nevertheless, the Wordsworthian quest is one which ‘aspire[s] towards the reassurance of a shared compensatory vision and communal memory’ (p. 46). As Sandy writes of Clare, these poetics of memory and mourning are ‘achieved by compressing together simplicity with sublimity’ (p. 139); that is, the interspaces between these types of contrasting ideas are where such poetics might be found.

Sandy shapes a particularly intriguing argument around ideas of enclosure. Of Blake’s ‘Garden of Love’, he suggests that ‘ever-tightening and suffocating “binding” rules prescribe an ever-diminishing arena of human action, energy, and desire’ (p. 30). This constricted creative area nevertheless leads to an imaginative expansion revealed by several of these authors’ outputs; in a productive development of M. H. Abrams’s definition of the Greater Romantic Lyric, Sandy suggests that in
Coleridge’s conversation poems, a ‘poetical inward turn, as well as the speaker’s invocation of an absent or absented addressee [...] constitutes Coleridge’s preoccupation with poetic memory’ (p. 47). For Coleridge, as well as Byron, Shelley, Smith and Clare, memory is reflected in the poet’s perception of the landscapes around them: in particular, Coleridge’s and Clare’s English countrysides and Byron’s and Shelley’s Italian cities prove to be creatively productive public sites for the poet’s consideration of his private woes. The affinities between the sea and sky, indicated by their mutual reflections and drawn out in several of Sandy’s chapters, act as a metaphor for the kinds of continuous discontinuities which make up the Romantic experience of mourning. The poems themselves are the means of ‘(re-) inscribing’ the poets’ ‘deceased, once living, authorial presences into the future historical present of reading’ (p. 94). In other words, the poet’s memories become the stuff of their readers’ experience, which in turn become their memories, too.

This cycle of remembrances bestowed and lost is, Sandy argues, continued in the works of such Victorian poets as Tennyson, Hardy and Yeats. This study suggests that a poetry of mourning—which is also one of community and continuity—reveals a ‘genuine dialogue’ between Victorian and Romantic poetry (p. 154). As Sandy implicitly recognises, this study suggests tantalising pathways for further research, particularly on the effect of mourning and memory in the works of those whom Michael Bradshaw has termed ‘third-generation Romantics’ (a phrase which proves especially useful in Sandy’s final two chapters). In particular, the careers of Letitia Elizabeth Landon and Thomas Beddoes might allow for a fascinating extension of Sandy’s study, as would more detailed readings of Smith’s and Hemans’s poetry. Further work might include a more in-depth interrogation of the poetess figure’s interpretation of a masculine Romantic poetics of mourning.

Nevertheless, Sandy provides a sustained and well-constructed argument for the importance of grief, loss and remembrance in Romantic poetry. Furthermore, his recognition that the boundaries between Romantic and Victorian poetry might be ‘porous’ (p. 149) indicates the potential to expand this study beyond the disciplinary boundaries indicated by his title. In this case, too, a constricted intellectual space suggests the possibilities for expansion which exist beyond it.

Notes

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