REVIEW

David Duff and Catherine Jones (eds.), *Scotland, Ireland, and the Romantic Aesthetic*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2008. Pp. 294. \$60.00 (Hbk). ISBN-13: 9780838756188.

From a time in the 1990s when the only aspect of Romanticism seemingly left uncontested was its relationship to the constituent elements of the British Isles, the last few years have seen something of a boom in the ‘four nations’ or ‘archipelagic’ study of Romanticism. Since the turn of the century, for example, Alan Rawes and Gerrard Carruthers’ *English Romanticism and the Celtic World* (2003), Leith Davis, Ian Duncan and Janet Sorrenson’s *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism* (2004) and Clare Lamont and Michael Rossington’s *Romanticism’s Debateable Lands* (2007) have in their different ways transformed our understanding of the period. This year the appearance of Murray Pittock’s *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (2008) marks the arrival of a first monograph on the subject. David Duff and Catherine Jones’s *Scotland, Ireland and the Romantic Aesthetic* is a timely and in many ways worthy addition to the field. The 12 essays in the collection explore in careful and convincing ways different aspects of what Ireland and Irishness, and Scotland and Scottishness meant during the period in Scotland, Ireland and England in order to effect what its editors call ‘a comprehensive remapping of the cultural geography of British and Irish, or “archipelagic” Romanticism’ (p. 11).

A number of things stand out about the volume. Firstly, the fruitful connection of Ireland and Scotland breaks decisively the central interest in English Romantic culture within accounts of the period (which can be perpetuated in

inverted form even in revisionist accounts) and erodes further the 'Three Nations' approach popularised by Linda Colley's *Britons*. Secondly, the range of writers, subject matter and literary genres covered is impressive: from the role of Scottish economists in the defence of paper money in Kevin Barry's discussion of the impact of paper currency on Romantic writings to Nancy Goslee Moore's case study of an anonymous poem on Wallace, to Claire Connolly's analysis of the miracles performed by Prince Hohenlohe in Ireland in the mid 1820s. At the same time the more familiar figures of Scott, Burns, Wordsworth, Byron and Moore are also given a run out. The national tale and the national song are the subject of interesting outings, such as in Hamish Mathison's discussion of the 'complex and polyphonic moral communities' (p. 89) revealed by an analysis of Burns' work on the *Scots Musical Museum* or Cliona Ó Gallchoir's consideration of the way Ossianism functions in relation to competing images of Scotland in Morgan's *The Wild Irish Girl*. But the collection also has significant ambitions in broadening the subject matter of 'four nations' or 'archipelagic' criticism beyond the genres most usually considered in such work: for example in Thomas Moore's satires (discussed here by Jane Moore), in travelogue or in Romantic national art (discussed by Kenneth McNeil and Catherine Jones respectively). Equally the more abstract, theoretical dimension to the field is represented in Ian Duncan's engagement with theories of Scottish identity and Ó Gallchoir's framing of her discussion of Ossianism.

Also impressive about the volume is the appropriate modesty (and therefore the convincing nature) of many of the claims and arguments. I suspect that few readers of this journal will need convincing of the value of the approach and the importance of the insights on display. However an important audience for such work lies beyond the immediate field, and nothing tends to turn the non-'Scots Lit' Romanticist off more quickly than what they perceive as over-inflated claims for, or special pleading in the interest of asserting, the importance of the Scottish dimension. This book succeeds by

avoiding hectoring or undermining its own purpose through hyperbole. A good example is Fiona Stafford's account of the significance of Scotland to Wordsworth's poetic purpose: her essay thoroughly convinces not only in its close attention to the materials at hand but also in its sense both that Wordsworth's Scottish experience must be seen in the context of other important interests and preoccupations, and that the poems that arose from his Scottish trip, while significant and interesting, are not in themselves necessarily amongst his greatest works. As she puts it with characteristic poise, they 'may not be his most substantial or studied works, but they shine with an elusive brightness that is at once startling and memorable' and 'recollect the tentative dawning of the mature poet' (pp. 111-12).

In other words the collection represents something of a new stage. Building on the work of earlier collections that established the need to rethink 'English' Romanticism's engagement with the other nations of the British Isles, it goes about its business without the need to fight those battles all over again. The freedom this confers allows for a collection of interest not only to the Scottish literature specialist, but the generalist interested in the ways that 'the Romantic literary scene in Britain remained stubbornly factional, a literary system constituted and energized by its internal differences' (p. 27).

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