

colleagues observed, he was always a man who “looks and behaves like someone important. He is ‘news’ and looks news” (3).

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ANDREW BURKETT. *Romantic Mediations: Media Theory and British Romanticism*. Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016. Pp. 212. \$85.00 (cloth).
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Andrew Burkett's *Romantic Mediations: Media Theory and British Romanticism* is a difficult book to summarize. Burkett says that the book's main objective is to explore why “media innovators” so frequently find inspiration in romantic-era art and literature. Why, for instance, in the 1830s did the English gentleman William Henry Fox Talbot use Byron's “Ode to Napoleon” (1814) to test his new negative-positive photography? Why, in 1939 in Santa Monica, California, did F. Scott Fitzgerald choose to “remediate” Keats's “Ode to a Nightingale” (1819) when he made his only phonograph recording? What ties William Blake's late illuminated manuscripts to Jim Jarmusch's 1995 film *Dead Man*? Or, finally, why would Eric Sontroem and Ron Broglio choose Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as the base text for their 2001 *FrankenMOO*? The media archeology Burkett offers in such case histories has intrinsic interest, and Burkett's book is in turns insightful, penetrating, speculative, and engaging as a media history that unearths conceptual linkage between the old and new, in particular between romantic art and literature and contemporary media technologies of storage and processing. As its subtitle suggests, it is a book about romantic studies and the intersection of that field with the concepts, aims, and methodologies of media theory and history. The nature and outcomes of this pairing stand at the conceptual center of Burkett's book and are perhaps the work's most challenging and provocative aspect.

Romantic Mediations fits squarely at the intersection of Burkett's larger research agenda on romantic authors and his work on pedagogy and digital humanities initiatives at Romantic Circles. His introduction lays critical groundwork for locating this book in the emerging field of romantic media studies alongside the work of such scholars as Miranda Burgess, Kevis Goodman, Celeste Langan, Maureen McLane, Tom Mole, Andrew Piper, Yohei Igaraishi, and Lauren Neefe. Burkett marshals an impressive array of media theorists and technical language to “underscore the significance of questions concerning media and mediation to romantic-era literary and cultural production” (10). This redirect toward media and mediation results in the book's “focus on not only the hermeneutic status of Romantic texts but also their material dimensions and qualities as dynamic conceptual objects” (10). In each of his case studies that follow, Burkett probes the shared conceptual ground between romantic imaginative art and literature and emerging media devices, emphasizing along the way that it is a history not of technical media devices, per se, but of processes of mediation.

Burkett divides his four case studies into two unofficial parts: the first two chapters on intersections between poetry and technical storage devices (photography and phonography) and the final two on Blake and Mary Shelley and the work of mediation in processing, networking, and digital media. Chapter 1, “Photographing Byron's Hand,” aligns William Henry Fox Talbot's negative-positive photography and the complicated publication history of Byron's “Ode to Napoleon.” As it turns out, Burkett argues, both Byronism and photography “empty and ultimately subvert what have been traditionally characterized as the hallmarks

of Romantic identity (e.g., boundless autonomy, self-consciousness, authenticity, and personality; self-sufficient interiority)" (36). In noting this linkage, Burkett suggests that Talbot's early photography and Byron's "Ode to Napoleon" expose a shared medial condition that negotiates a volatile concept of identity that seems to perpetually phase between fixed and elusive, private and public.

Chapter 2, "Keats and the Phonograph," begins by asking why early developers of the phonograph turned to romantic verse to explore the possibilities of technologically mediated sound. To answer this question, Burkett speculates that Keats's medical training provided expertise in two forms of listening that loosely connect him to the early nineteenth-century development of the stethoscope. For Burkett, this training in listening crucially unlocks Keats's poetic soundscapes because "by better understanding Keats's background in emerging Romantic medical practices, we may both comprehend more thoroughly his intricate poetic depictions of sound, voice, and listening and account more completely for why sound reproduction technologies like the phonograph gravitate to selections of his verse that draw attention to and amplify the experimental qualities of sound" (48). That is, the phonograph "reproduce[s] a type of expressive Romantic voice that is both highly mediated—Keats's complex verse—and also deeply aware of that mediated condition" (73).

The final two chapters are case studies of Blake and Shelley in terms of cinema theory and information processing. In chapter 3, "Blake's Moving Images," Burkett uses concepts from network analysis, phenomenology, and media theory to analyze Blake's illuminated books in the light of nineteenth-century vitalism. He reveals a nonlinear epistemology underwriting the "moving images" of the plate, an insight that complicates "traditional approaches to Blake's conception and representation of human imagination and vision" (77). Importantly, this nonlinearity encourages a reconceptualization of Blakean aesthetics as a "networked constellation of plates" with multiple pathways and alternative tracks for character development and story.

Burkett opens the closing chapter, "Media, Information, and *Frankenstein*," by asking why Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* so frequently features in contemporary scholarship on remediation and in digital humanities initiatives. His answer is that the work articulates two notions of information and embodiment. The first, connected to Victor, is abstract and virtual, representing "matter as a medium" (118). The second, that of the monster, is "bound up and reliant on materiality" (118). From this conceptual dialectic, Burkett argues that Shelley's novel displays a formal and conceptual "drive toward virtuality" similar to what N. Katherine Hayles has called the "condition of virtuality," where information is "more mobile, more important, more *essential* than material forms" (129). Reading against the grain of scholarship that sees Shelley's work as "a cautionary tale about the rejection of materialist cause in search of the virtual," Burkett suggests that *Frankenstein* ultimately rejects materialist philosophy and in doing so "become[s] a richly complicated media/information system serving as an apparently inexhaustible source not only for literary criticism and theory but also for new media and contemporary digital humanities initiatives" (134).

Romantic Mediations is a strong contribution to romantic studies and especially romantic media studies. Given the complexity and range of the material explored in *Romantic Mediations*, the book could have fallen victim to the obscurity of disciplinary specificity and become intelligible only to those invested in the methodologies of media archeology. However, Burkett's clear structure and deft handling of difficult concepts make for a thoroughly engaging read for romanticists and historians of various disciplinary stripes. As is often the case with the case history approach, *Romantic Mediations* seems to lack an overarching thesis except in the most general of terms: it aims to explore "the connections between Romantic writers and their texts and the history of media technologies from roughly the turn of the nineteenth century to the present" (3). While this might seem a shortcoming to some literary historians and those seeking "close readings," media archeologists and historians of media will likely find Burkett's approach fresh and compelling. Moreover, those who teach

and research British romanticism will find new insights into canonical authors and texts and the contexts in which they were produced.

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CARL CHINN and MALCOLM DICK, eds. *Birmingham: The Workshop of the World*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016. Pp. 334. \$60.00 (cloth).
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In *Birmingham: The Workshop of the World*, editors Carl Chinn and Malcolm Dick have brought together twelve essays by thirteen scholars to yield what they hope is “the most substantial, scholarly, illuminating and visually attractive one-volume history of Birmingham to date” (viii). They certainly have succeeded in the latter respect, producing a stunningly beautiful work of urban history. The book’s more than two-hundred full-color illustrations reproducing maps, paintings, era documents, photographs, and material artifacts make it worth the price of admission alone. The intellectual contents of the volume’s chapters are likewise impressive, covering a great deal of historical ground, including not only the city’s geography, built environment, economy, population, and politics, but also the histories of religion, the arts, medical and educational institutions, and Birmingham’s relationship to the wider history of print and communications media. In their introduction, Chinn and Dick emphasize that the word “workshop” in the book’s subtitle was selected, not in order to reference the city’s well-known history as an industrial center alone, but in order to capture Birmingham’s broader history as a place of experiment and opportunity—as a “workshop for initiating, testing and implementing political, educational, medical and cultural ideas and practices” (6). Thus, this is a collection of essays brimming with valuable insights into the entire history of the “midland metropolis” and its place in the history of Britain and the wider world. One suspects that if the city’s first historian, William Hutton (1723–1815), could view this work, he would be most impressed by the editors’ achievement.

Indeed, readers will perceive striking parallels between these authors’ collective history of Birmingham and Hutton’s 1783 history of the city. First, there is the book’s chronological inclusivity, inspired by the 850th anniversary of King Henry II’s granting a market charter to Peter de Birmingham in 1166. This act, the editors contend, “marked the birth of modern Birmingham as a commercial and manufacturing centre” (1). Their claim is particularly striking given that in the same year (2016) Liverpool University Press published a similar multiauthor history of another of Britain’s well-known industrial cities (Alan Kidd and Terry Wyke, eds., *Manchester: Making the Modern City* [2016]), whose chapters, in contrast, almost exclusively address that city’s history post-1750, and whose introduction (like its subtitle) emphasizes parallels between Manchester’s history and the history of “modernity.” In contrast, the concept of “modernity” is most notable in Chinn and Dick’s volume for its absence.

Instead, like Hutton, the editors have chosen to narrate the history of Birmingham from its earliest historical traces up to the present day, rather than merely from the era of the industrial revolution. Unlike Hutton and other early historians of the city, however, who frequently resorted to “local legend and myth” to fill in gaps in the archival record (101), the histories of ancient, medieval, and early modern Birmingham featured here draw upon a wealth of archaeological and historical data, including artifacts newly unearthed in the process of twenty-first-century construction projects. It is nevertheless striking how often these authors’ conclusions parallel those of their forbearers. Richard Cust and Ann Hughes, for example, ultimately conclude