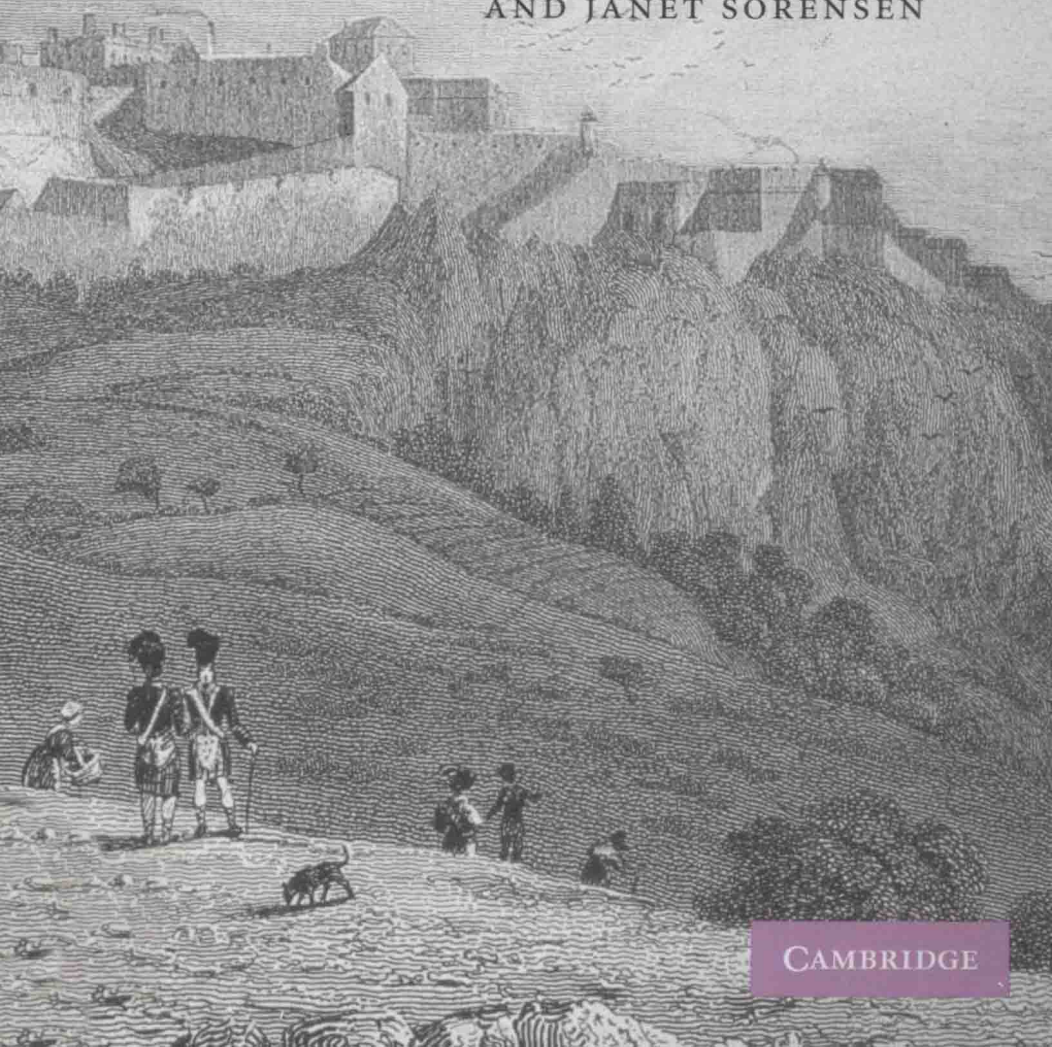


Scotland

and the Borders of Romanticism

EDITED BY

LEITH DAVIS, IAN DUNCAN,
AND JANET SORENSEN



CAMBRIDGE

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Introduction

Ian Duncan, with Leith Davis and Janet Sorensen

SCOTLAND IN ROMANTICISM

"What a hobbling pace the Scottish Pegasus seems to have adopted in these days," grumbled William Wordsworth in a letter to R. P. Gillies (February 14, 1815). Wordsworth condemns the "insupportable slovenliness and neglect of syntax and grammar, by which James Hogg's writings are disfigured"; such solecisms may be "excusable in [Hogg] from his education, but Walter Scott knows, and ought to do, better." Both poets can be summarily dismissed: "They neither of them write a language which has any pretension to be called English."¹ Wordsworth's complaint cuts across distinct if overlapping conceptions of the institutional framework of British Romantic literature: as a *market*, in which Scottish writing enjoys a notable success, and as a *canon*, from which it must be purged – on the grounds of a national deficiency, a linguistic unfitness "to be called English."²

Wordsworth's verdict has proven remarkably durable. Modern literary criticism in Great Britain and North America adopted the view of Romanticism as a unitary phenomenon, the *agon* of a mighty handful of lyric poets with a Kantian (later Heideggerian) problematic of the transcendental imagination.³ Some Romanticisms are more Romantic than others: some are the real thing, while others are premature or belated, or simply false – anachronistic or fraudulent simulacra. British Romanticism is English, from Blake and *Lyrical Ballads* in the 1790s to Keats, Shelley, and Byron (cut off from his own Scottish roots), prematurely dead in the early 1820s. Scotland, neither English nor foreign, stands for an *inauthentic* Romanticism, defined by a mystified – purely ideological – commitment to history and folklore. Rather than being a site of Romantic production, Scotland's fate is to have become a Romantic object or commodity: glamorous scenery visited by the Wordsworths, Turner, Queen Victoria, steam-train parties of tourists; a series of kitsch, fake, more or less reactionary "inventions of tradition," from Ossian and Scott to Fiona MacLeod and

Brigadoon.⁴ Nor is this simply an English story, since Scottish nationalist critics have devised a compelling variant, denouncing their modern tradition as inorganic, self-divided, alienated from its vital sources – the proof of that alienation (as we shall see) being Scotland's lack of a genuine Romantic movement.

The term "Romanticism" has come under intense scrutiny and debate in literary studies in Great Britain and North America in the last couple of decades.⁵ Only very recently has that debate begun to address the term's anglocentric underpinnings. While post-structuralist, feminist, and New Historicist critiques have opened some of the aesthetic boundaries that defined Romantic-era writing, the likeliest instruments for rethinking its geopolitical borders would seem to be provided by post-colonial theory. As critical projects within Scottish studies itself have made clear, though, Scotland occupies an anomalous position in the topology of post-colonialism – shifting between the coordinates of colonized and colonizer, the producer as much as recipient of a "global English."⁶ Although England was unquestionably the dominant partner, politically and economically, at the Treaty of Union (1707), Scotland enjoyed far more opportunity to capitalize on the new arrangement than the other ancient nations (Ireland, Wales) absorbed into the British state. The articles of Union allowed Scots to participate in the new imperial economy, and preserved the key national institutions – the Presbyterian church, banking and legal systems, schools and universities – that supported a dynamic entrepreneurial and professional middle class. The Lowland burghs – especially the four university cities, above all Edinburgh – accommodated one of the most advanced civil societies in Europe. At the same time, Scotland held within its borders a culturally alien, increasingly "backward" "Celtic fringe," the Highlands, in which something like colonial conditions prevailed: military and legal repression, economic underdevelopment. Scotland itself reproduced the split condition both of an imperial Great Britain and of the nascent world-system of which Britain was the political-economic core.

Far from being peripheral, then, Lowland Scotland became one of the generative centers of European and North Atlantic literary culture in the century between David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40) and Thomas Carlyle's *The French Revolution* (1837). In the balance of an emerging imperial world order, Scottish innovations in moral philosophy, the social sciences, history, rhetoric, poetry, periodical journalism, and the novel matched or outweighed their English counterparts. The intellectuals of the so-called Scottish Enlightenment – David Hume, Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, John Millar, William Robertson, Thomas Reid, Dugald Stewart,

Lord Kames, and others – developed a new, synthetic account of human nature, historical process, and the dynamics of social formation, in a cosmopolitan or universal order of modernity. At the same time, poets and scholars began to invoke the national past, ancestral origins, and regional popular traditions in a series of attempts to reimagine Scottish identity in the conditions of imperial Union. In the early 1760s James Macpherson's collections of "Poems of Ossian" founded European Romanticism on a scandalous invention of lost cultural origins. In the 1780s Robert Burns crafted the first modern vernacular style in British poetry. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Scott's historical novels combined those distinctively Scottish inventions, a universal modernity and a national past, to define the governing form of Western narrative for the next hundred years. At the same time, a succession of Edinburgh periodicals – *The Edinburgh Review* (1802), *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1817), *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* (1832) – established the main medium of nineteenth-century public discussion. And to list these epoch-making achievements is to overlook such strikingly original experiments as Joanna Baillie's theatre of the passions and the anti-novelistic fictions of James Hogg and John Galt.

This Scottish literary history describes rhythms of continuity, change, and disjunction quite different from the English model to which it has been subordinated. Against that English model, Scotland could only loom as an intermittent, shadowy anachronism, a temporal as well as spatial border of Romanticism. In Scotland, "Classical" and "Romantic" cultural forms occupy the same historical moment and institutional base, rather than defining successive stages or periods. Macpherson's *Fingal*, founding document of a global Romanticism, is not just contemporary with the scientific projects of the Scottish Enlightenment but one of its typical inventions, in a contemporaneity that defies the English schema of a teleological development of Romanticism proper from Augustan Neoclassicism through a liminal "Pre-romanticism."⁷ The French Revolution provides the epochal fulcrum, or rather fracture, in the English story: a metaphysical rather than historical event, an apocalyptic or traumatic break in the flow of history, through which other states of being gleam into visibility, however fugitive. In the time of disillusion that succeeds it, with the stifling resumption of history as usual, the revolutionary rift generates the compensatory Romantic investment in a poetic language which is the trace of a force alien to the normative ordering of social life – some of its names are desire, the imagination, difference.⁸

Scottish cultural history, according to this model, does not just fail to produce an authentic Romanticism: it manufactures false substitutes, it

oppresses the real thing. On the one hand, the theme-park Highland heritage of Macpherson and Scott, simulations of past lost worlds; on the other, the punitive campaigns waged against the Lake and Cockney schools by *The Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood's*. The Scottish Enlightenment legacy of political economy, propagated in *The Edinburgh Review* and its utilitarian offshoots, becomes the formidable disciplinary antagonist of a post-Romantic discourse of "culture," throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. This opposition was itself an artefact of Scottish Romanticism, an ideological projection of the political conflict between *The Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood's*.⁹ In other words, it is as though the differential structure of Scottish cultural history cast a repressive shadow over the English Romantic movement: its signature of developmental blockage, the split between an aridly rational political economy and a lachrymose Ossianism, could only reiterate itself, with an ever heavier ideological and normalizing emphasis. Scotland, in short, produced the Victorians.

As Romanticism acquired its conceptual coherence as a "system of norms," in the retrospect of Victorian cultural criticism, the Scots were closed out of it. Samuel Johnson's denunciation of Ossian became the standard modern verdict. The success of Macpherson's translations in translation, from Berlin to Bogota, furnished further proof of their ontological "vacuity," since poetry is what escapes translation.¹⁰ Burns might have anticipated Wordsworth's commitment to a "language really spoken by men," but the prematurity (and naïveté) of his attempt was marked by its realization in a provincial and rustic dialect, as well as its fixation on the social surfaces of life. Matthew Arnold reinforced the ban with the judgment that Burns lacked "high seriousness," the epic or rather tragic tone of the metropolis.¹¹ If Scott fared better in the nineteenth century it was because he was a novelist, and the novel, with its mimetic investment in manners and history, was a Victorian rather than a Romantic genre. Victorian forefathers did not wear well in the era of Modernism. F. R. Leavis expelled Scott from the Great Tradition on the grounds of his being "an inspired folklorist." Georg Lukács, programmatic anti-Modernist, reclaimed Scott as the founder of the historical novel – but by divorcing him from Romanticism.¹² Other figures who had enjoyed degrees of success or controversy in their time, such as Baillie and Hogg, sank out of sight altogether by the early twentieth century. Hogg led the half-life of a local curiosity, "the Ettrick Shepherd" or clown-sage of *Blackwood's*, until André Gide promoted *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* into a Modernist canon of accursed books. Scholarly interest has returned in very recent years to

Baillie, whose neglect was dictated by gender rather than nationality: it was a fellow Scot, Francis Jeffrey, who argued that women's exclusion from public life disqualified them from the genre of tragedy.¹³

Romanticism was instituted as a critical object, the site of a critical practice, in the university after World War II, especially in the United States, which generated an ideologically potent account of lyric poetry as the authentic utterance or (later) trace of an ontological difference which escaped or resisted the collective pressures of society and history.¹⁴ The visionary company of five English poets constituted the bright origins of a Romanticism that (paradoxically) became world-historical by becoming American. Wordsworth remained a touchstone, both for the post-structuralist turn of the 1970s¹⁵ and for the New Historicism of the 1980s.¹⁶ Meanwhile English criticism, historically and socially attuned much earlier, and anyway less interested in an ideologically substantive category of "Romanticism," observed nationalist boundaries: its chief subaltern counter-example to mainstream Romanticism is John Clare.¹⁷ The most productive rethinking of the Romantic canon over the last decade or so has taken place through feminist projects of reclamation and critique;¹⁸ if these too have so far tended to reproduce rather than unsettle a normative anglocentricism, as a glance at recent classroom anthologies will show, they also encourage further attention to what has been left out. Still, "Scotland" as often as not continues to play the role of an oppressive anti-Romanticism in some of these new accounts: a force of mere worldliness, or of imperial ideology, for example, in the person of Scott.¹⁹

The strength of the tradition is shown by its persistence even in so scrupulously reflective a study as Jerome Christensen's recent *Romanticism at the End of History*. Christensen, the author of notable books on Hume and Byron, reclaims a coherent, indeed authentic "Romantic movement," if as a continually deferred project rather than a "system of norms," in the teeth of New Historicist and ideological critiques. Wordsworth and Coleridge remain standard-bearers, thanks to the capable imagination with which both poets continued to reflect upon their predicament, through and after their revolutionary disappointment and accommodation to Pittite reaction. *The Edinburgh Review* and Scott feature prominently in Christensen's story, but as figureheads of an official, hegemonic apparatus – even if Scott, technically more resourceful and self-conscious, plays the part of a literary Metternich, chancellor of the new legitimacy, while *The Edinburgh Review* is more like the police, a relatively unwitting, corporate agency. As representatives of "the novel" and "the Scottish Enlightenment," respectively, they form the dark wall of "normal history," or of ideology itself, against

which an ethical and anti-ideological "Romantic hope" may be flickeringly visible.²⁰

ROMANTICISM IN SCOTLAND

Scotland as the lack, or simulation, or repression of Romanticism: the theme pervades the cultural histories produced by Scottish critics. Indeed, it provides the historiographic crux of the modern nationalist analysis of Scottish literature, the "Caledonian Antiszygy" or diagnostic figure of a self-divided, internally contradictory national character.²¹ The schizoid figure of Romanticism's negation is itself, of course, quintessentially "Romantic" – and typical of "semi-peripheral" national representations, from Hoffmann and Hogg to Poe and Dostoevsky. What differentiates the Scottish from the English analysis is the insistent Scots identification of the *nation* as the excluded category that bears Romantic value – that numinous condition exiled from "normal history," authentic because of exile.

Thus Edwin Muir, writing at the height of the modern nationalist "Renaissance" in the 1930s, identifies a fatal "dissociation of sensibility" in Scottish culture, its primary symptom a linguistic split between thought (English, the language of Enlightenment philosophy) and feeling (Scots, the language of the folk and Burns's lyrics).²² A generation later David Craig deplores Scotland's lack of a "Great Tradition," the representation of an organic national society, so that its literature can only chart the widening gulf between literati and populace.²³ As Cairns Craig has argued, such narratives create their image of a divided Scottish culture by projecting it against an idealized English model: Muir adapts T. S. Eliot's account of English poetry, with Scott in the place of Milton, while David Craig draws on Leavis.²⁴ These models of a split tradition may yield different appraisals of particular figures. David Craig, for example, joins in the mission to salvage an attractively bawdy, rough, insurgent Burns from the Victorian cult of sentimentality that had so exasperated Hugh MacDiarmid.²⁵ This new-modelled Burns (drawn by a woman novelist and critic, Catherine Carswell, in her 1930 biography of the poet) personified the masculine values of muscular assertiveness, virile heterosexuality, and "horizontal brotherhood" that typify emergent nationalisms.²⁶ More recently, in work that is beginning to transform our understanding of the period, scholars have recovered the contexts of a "Radical Burns" in eighteenth-century popular democratic politics.²⁷

With remarkable unanimity, nationalist cultural histories identify the nineteenth century as the era when the Scottish tradition became

extinct – or at the very least, went into hibernation. They converge, in particular, on Scott, anathematized for replacing a living heritage with a reactionary effigy. Muir's evocation of Scott in post-Enlightenment Edinburgh – elaborate invention screening “a very curious emptiness” – recalls the Johnsonian verdict on Macpherson (“let us not fill the vacuity with Ossian”).²⁸ Scott combines both tendencies already described, Enlightenment anti-Romanticism and a sentimental pseudo-Romanticism, in a lethal synthesis. Even Tom Nairn, who mounts a scathing critique of “Antiszyzygy” historiography in order to rescue the Scottish Enlightenment from nationalist proscription, reiterates its discovery of a disappearance of national tradition, “a very curious emptiness,” at the opening of the nineteenth century. Adapting Lukács's thesis, Nairn finds Scott to be a “valedictory realist” whose works invoke the national past not to revive it, as a source of alternative possibility for the present, but to pronounce it dead. Here, though, the historiographic principle is made explicit: Scott personifies a larger emptiness, the lack of a Scottish Romantic movement, which in Nairn's analysis must be defined by an oppositional nationalist politics.²⁹

Not only Scott, then, but the resplendent literary production of Scott's Edinburgh – Constable, Blackwood and their reviews, the fictions of Hogg, Galt, Mary Brunton, Susan Ferrier, Christian Johnstone, John Lockhart – all this fails to constitute a “Romanticism,” or rather, it amplifies an anti-Romanticism born of the socioeconomic prematurity of post-Union civil society and its cultural expression, the Scottish Enlightenment. In other words, the very vitality of Enlightenment mortified the successive developmental stage, by rendering it superfluous – a mortification already evident in the contemporaneous excrescence of “Ossian.” Dissident voices, even Burns's, were censored, ignored, or patronized by an increasingly conservative Edinburgh establishment. After 1794, and a more bitter repression of Jacobin sympathizers even than occurred in England, the Scots intelligentsia could only choose from among different counter-revolutionary postures: the post-Enlightenment liberal positivism of *The Edinburgh Review* or the reactionary pseudo-Romanticism of *Blackwood's*.

Nairn has been perhaps the most influential figure in a notable “return to Scotland” in British cultural studies of the last decade or so. *The Break-Up of Britain*, provoked by the 1970s devolution controversy, framed Scotland's status in the Union as exemplary of modern nationalist development through its very contradictions. Nairn's analysis helped instigate a re-thinking of the categories of nation, nationality, and nationalism, at first by historians and political scientists and then by literary critics, given massive

impetus by the end of the Cold War. Nairn's more recent work revisits the question in the wake of the 1999 referendum and its defiance of long-standing assumptions about Scotland's destiny in the United Kingdom.³⁰ The political and historiographic debates around devolution have nourished accounts of a Scottish cultural history in which the Union need no longer represent a "metaphysical disaster" (Nairn's term) or even an "end of history." Some of these accounts, while making better sense of "subaltern" figures such as Burns and Hogg, have continued to produce Macpherson and Scott as touchstones for an inauthentic nationalism, a negative Romanticism. In a series of powerful, often revelatory recastings of a variegatedly British rather than monolithically English cultural history, Murray Pittock finds Scott completing Macpherson's task by ringing down the "tartan curtain" upon a populist and revolutionary Jacobitism – an authentic national tradition – and replacing it with a nostalgic facsimile. Colin Kidd stresses the Enlightenment rather than Romantic genealogy of a Whig historiographic repudiation of Scotland's pre-modern past, to which Scott gives popular legitimacy.³¹

Other commentators construct their versions of Scottish literary history on principles of heterogeneous inclusiveness and continuity. Cairns Craig's probing critique of an Anglo-British, centrist, and organicist model of culture studies the Scottish contribution to a mixed, hybrid, imperial nineteenth-century "English literature."³² In an analogous project, Robert Crawford reconstitutes a long-duration modern Scottish literary history in which gaps and contradictions, far from being fatal, are generative; its continuities flow across territorial borders to other sites of the imperial anglophone periphery, as "devolution" becomes a global principle.³³ The approach was anticipated by Susan Manning's study (following the pioneering work of Andrew Hook) of the ideological and formal relations between Scottish and North American writing (and between Calvinism and Enlightenment) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Manning's more recent work specifies the cultural condition she analyzes – an open-ended dialectic between principles of organic wholeness and centrifugal fragmentation – as a "Romantic" one (with philosophical roots in Hume).³⁴ Penny Fielding has excavated the ideological foundation of a Romantic national culture in the binary opposition between orality and literacy.³⁵ Meanwhile, recent Burns scholarship is bringing to light a larger tradition of Scottish dissenting literature, with (as Liam McIlvanney shows) indigenous cultural roots as well as links to contemporary English and Irish radicalism.³⁶ Together with Pittock's work on Jacobitism, this sets Scottish writing in the context of an alternative pan-British Romanticism

that has been effectively submerged by literary history's preoccupation with metropolitan models of tradition.

North American scholars, meanwhile, have not hesitated to mobilize the insights of post-colonial studies in their more recent (late-1990s) turn to Scotland, with special reliance on the analysis of "internal colonialism."³⁷ At their most fruitful, such studies have attended to the reciprocal if uneven dynamics of Scotland's relation to England in the Union. Leith Davis traces the ineluctable, vexed dialectic between English and Scottish constructions of literature and tradition in the century after 1707. Janet Sorensen reads the primary role played by Scottish intellectuals, and by English intellectuals addressing the Scottish case, in the eighteenth-century standardization of English as a national (i.e., imperial) language. In an analogous move, Clifford Siskin discusses the role of Scottish philosophy and the figure of Jacobitism in the modern (i.e., Romantic) formation of a national, literature-based culture.³⁸ These North American projects have tended to absorb the traditional period category of Romanticism into the "long eighteenth century," a chronological artefact of the New Historicism. The phenomena of periodization already remarked – the contemporaneity of Smith and Ossian, the continuities between the Enlightenment and *The Edinburgh Review* – suit Scotland especially well to the new diachrony: witness the recent boom in Macpherson studies, or the salience of Scottish cases in recent projects on historicism and the emotions.³⁹ Does this development – the return to intelligibility of Scottish cultural history in the framework of the "long eighteenth century" – signal, then, a definitive abandonment of "Romanticism" as a historical category? – one which, bound to the ideology of cultural nationalism, could only distort the Scottish case, and has outlived its usefulness elsewhere?

Recent studies of the novel as national form show that a wholesale abandonment would be premature. Katie Trumpener's *Bardic Nationalism* re-situates the novel at the center of Romanticism by turning a pervasive assumption – the identification between Romanticism and nationalism – into the object of analysis. Trumpener attends to the geographically dispersed production of "the nation" across the modern British imperium, and the primacy of semi-peripheral sites, notably Ireland and Scotland, in generating the new cultural nationalisms.⁴⁰ And as nationalism, so historicism: both are Romantic inventions as much as they may be limiting conditions. James Chandler's *England in 1819* reads Scott and the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers as productive rather than blocking forces in the cultural field of British Romanticism. By explicitly framing chronology and periodization as its critical questions, Chandler's analysis is able to specify

anachronism as one of the constitutive tropes of a distinctive practice of Romantic historicism, theorized by Scottish Enlightenment philosophical historians and amplified by Scott – whose writings highlight the “anachronistic” relation between England and Scotland as the discourse’s own historical condition.⁴¹

Such projects help us to view Scotland as a critical site for the invention or production of “Romanticism”: not in itself but always as part of a larger political, economic, and cultural geography, encompassing not only “Britain” – London, Northern England, Ireland – but Europe, North America, and an expanding world-horizon of colonized and dominated territories, constituting, in Trumpener’s phrase, “the transcolonial consciousness and transperipheral circuits of influence to which empire gives rise.”⁴² The case of Scotland may thus provoke a salutary defamiliarization of some of the fundamental categories that structure literary history, including the temporal borders of periodization and the topological borders of nationality. This critical rethinking – rather than an objective survey – is the project of the present volume of essays.

SCOTLAND AND THE BORDERS OF ROMANTICISM

In the opening chapter of *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism* Cairns Craig reopens a famous crux in the early formation of Romanticism as a theoretical project: Coleridge’s dismissal of associationist psychology for a Kantian poetics of the transcendental imagination. Craig shows how Coleridge secured his idealist turn by substituting David Hartley for the more formidable philosophical authority of David Hume. While Coleridge could easily refute Hartley’s reductive, mechanistic account of associationism, Hume’s shadow – in a classic pattern of repression – continued to vex Coleridge’s thought. The Humean model of the imagination as a cognitive and socializing faculty, meanwhile, would pose a “novelistic” alternative, exemplified in Scott’s historical fiction, to the “lyric” model of English Romantic poetry.

The double repudiation of Scotland and Enlightenment, condensed in the spectre of Hume, marks a periodic as well as a national border of English Romanticism. Romanticism’s spatial and temporal limits have been drawn, of course, in a set of antinomies familiar to literary scholars: between epistemological categories of theoretical abstraction and material particularity, and their geopolitical and historiographic equivalents – global versus local knowledges, universal versus culturally specific histories; between social exchange and alienated individualism as the matrix of experience and