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**Review of: Balladearing, minstrelsy, and the making of British romantic
poetry, by Maureen M. McLane**

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of geography and history' and 'introduces discontinuities into the national contours of Britain' (p. 186). Fielding's insistence that the ideological projects or tendencies of 'Enlightenment' and 'Romanticism' are dialectically linked in Scottish writing makes for a suggestive contrast with another striking recent account of the field, Murray Pittock's in *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (2008); by defining Romanticism in terms of a nationalist cultural politics, Pittock casts the Scottish Enlightenment as its antithesis.

The strength of Fielding's argument lies in the success with which it comes to bear on her case studies. These are as impressive for the diversity of literary strategies they elucidate as for the range of intellectual contexts invoked around them; *Scotland and the Fictions of Geography* is very far from being the sort of study that, having established its theoretical problematic, puts all its cases through the same set of moves. The intellectual contexts include (besides climate theory) cartography and road-building, the origins and history of poetry and languages, antiquarian discourse on medals and currency, and arctic exploration. The case studies range from canonical authors (Burns and Scott) to figures that are unfamiliar even to specialists in the field (the early nineteenth-century Shetland poet Margaret Chalmers), as well as philosophers and antiquarians (John Pinkerton, George Chalmers). The discussion of Scott illuminates major novels (*The Antiquary* and *Rob Roy*) as well as less visited byways (*Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, Scott's journal of his 1814 lighthouse tour).

While the chapters are consistently strong, I found the last two – on Margaret Chalmers and James Hogg—especially compelling. 'Chalmers's sense of spatiality is perhaps the most complex and radical of any in this study', Fielding writes (p. 160): the precision and subtlety of her close readings justify the claim, and indeed this chapter is a model of criticism in the 'recovery' mode. Hogg plays the part of wild man of Scottish Romanticism, closing the book with his over-the-top performance of a 'radical dissolution of the premises of Enlightenment spatiality altogether' (p. 129). If this is the part in which recent studies in the field tend to cast him, never has it been rendered more vividly, or its logic traced more cunningly, than in Fielding's account of the late tale 'The Surpassing Adventures of Allan Gordon', with its bizarre idyll among polar bears.

Scotland and the Fictions of Geography succeeds brilliantly in reimagining a (North) British Romanticism with Scottish writing at its centre. Scholars and students of the period, not just of Scottish literature, will learn a great deal from it, as will anyone interested in the conjunctions of geography and literary representation.

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MAUREEN N. MCLANE. **Balladeering, Minstrelsy, and the Making of British Romantic Poetry.** Pp. xiv + 296 (Cambridge Studies in Romanticism, 76). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Cloth, £55.

Of the trio of topics named in the title of this book—balladeering, minstrelsy, and the making of poetry—the third quickly assumes pride of place. For Maureen N. McLane, the 'making of poetry' becomes a far-reaching and multivalent concept. It describes her literary-historical investigation into the background and development of Romantic poetics, but also references the Romantic era's own obsession with origins and its self-conscious activity of 'making' literature. Cleverly echoing the genre of the 'making-of' documentary, the phrase signals another of the book's major concerns: the obsession with documentation and authorisation amongst those who work with ballads and minstrelsy. Above all, the 'making'

referred to in the title designates a process of *poiesis* that quickly emerges as a central concern of McLane's study.

By contrast, 'balladeering' and 'minstrelsy' often seem to function as means to an end. Early in McLane's Introduction, a telling thesis statement re-orders the nouns of the title: 'This study takes the broader (or perhaps looser) rubric of *poiesis* to be its remit, though I will often have occasion to discuss balladry and ballad scholarship, as well as the phenomenon of minstrelsy' (p. 5). Balladeering and minstrelsy increasingly become subsumed into the variously inflected processes circumscribed by the phrase '(the) making (of).' Halfway through the book, we read that 'minstrelsy' can be regarded as 'another name for *poiesis* in [the Romantic] period' (p. 141) and that 'Romantic minstrelsy' is '*poiesis* itself' (p. 144).

The word oddly absent from the book's title is 'media.' McLane's theoretical framework draws on literary history, ethnography and ethnomusicology, folklore, Romanticist scholarship, and cultural theory, but above all on various international inflections of media studies: Friedrich Kittler's 'mediality,' Jay David Bolter's and Richard Grusin's 'remediation,' and the more general contexts for media studies provided by (among others) Foucault, de Certeau, and Habermas. 'This book,' writes McLane, 'argues that the situation of British poetry, 1760–1830, offers us a window onto the transhistorical condition of poetic "mediality"—the condition of existing in media, whether oral, manuscript, print, or digital' (p. 6). The metaphor of the window is indicative—as is McLane's claim that her study pursues an 'archaeology of the humanities' '*via* balladeering' (p. 11, italics added): throughout the book, McLane works through balladry and minstrelsy in order to pursue conclusions about mediality.

The book's seven chapters constitute interwoven studies of transhistorical mediality, focusing on the period 1770–1830 but including earlier materials incorporated and imitated by the Romantics and frequently proposing parallels between the medial conditions of Romantic poetry around 1800 and contemporary poetry around 2000. The major figures and issues of the late-eighteenth-century ballad revival—Macpherson and Ossian, Beattie, Percy, Scott, antiquarians, ballad-collectors and performers—come in for discussion, often in unusual conjunctions and from interesting new angles. In studying these texts and the controversies that often surrounded them, McLane focuses on the *process* by which antiquarians and ballad-collectors went about their work, highlighting their self-conscious concern with authority, authenticity, and protocol. This perspective contributes to an argument that, during the long Romantic period, poetry began to emerge as 'an object of medial and cultural theory' (p. 6)—or, more polemically, that late-eighteenth-century balladeers were 'media theorists in their own right' (p. 45). McLane's pervasive self-awareness about her own participation in protocols of authentication and authorisation extends to an apparatus of chapter epigraphs, appendices, facsimiles, illustrations, charts and heavy annotation (mercifully printed at the foot of the page and not as endnotes).

In chapter 3, McLane adopts a transmedial focus by considering the musical dimension of ballads. She approaches the relation of music and text from revealing angles, for instance by considering how the technology used for printing sheet music changed during the Romantic period. Like most of the chapters in the book, this one ends by opening a window onto contemporary parallels, in this case via the popularity of 'world music' and the possibility of following Kittler's lead toward a more generalised critical history of 'world media.' Chapter 4 approaches questions of transmediality and remediation by way of a focus on minstrel figures (who 'may be seen as the first performance poets' [p. 132]) from mid-eighteenth-century British discourses to nineteenth-century American publications on 'Negro Minstrelsy.' The provocatively totalising title of chapter 5—'Minstrelsy, or Romantic poetry'—introduces a productive inquiry into the Romantic topos of the 'last

minstrel.' McLane ends this chapter with an especially good excursus on the modern critique of Romantic minstrelsy by Wallace Stevens.

The second half of the book often illustrates its arguments by way of extended contrasts between Scott and Wordsworth, counterpointed by examples from the poetic practice of Byron, Clare and other contemporaries. McLane asks what these Romantic poets are doing with ballads and minstrels on the border between orality and print. Chapter 6 announces a more heuristic survey of the 'zone of *poiesis*' (p. 181) created by practices of balladeering and minstrelsy around 1800. After listing the 'seven types of poetic authority' that emerge from the 'mediated orality' (p. 183) of Romantic *poiesis*, McLane applies these terms to a cogent reading of Wordsworth's *Prelude* as a hybrid of lyric-subjective and sociological-ethnological types of authority. Chapter 7 develops a number of close readings of Blake's *Songs*, Byron's *Childe Harold*, several more lyrics by Wordsworth, and the contemporary performance poet David Antin from perspectives that highlight mediality and remediation.

In a Conclusion sub-titled 'Thirteen (or more) ways of looking at a black bird: or, *Poiesis* unbound', McLane performs a medley on crows in ballads and blackbirds in poetry that illustrates in delightful fashion what the book has been seeking to explore: the diversity of transmedial and transhistorical crossings. This extended illustration is particularly welcome since the first half of the book, in its eagerness to expose Romantic balladeers as media theorists and minstrels as agents of identity politics, sometimes seems (at least rhetorically) to bypass its central phenomena as means to an end. But with their increasing attention to important differences in the ways Romantic poets use ballad materials and minstrel figures, later chapters reveal some of the original interpretations and insightful conclusions that can emerge from these medial and historicist perspectives. From beginning to end, *Balladeering, Minstrelsy, and the Making of British Romantic Poetry* offers pithy, witty, and productively thought-provoking formulations, along with novel perspectives and unexpected conjunctions of material. 'The vitality of poetry will surely continue to depend on this ongoing negotiation between a history of linguistically based traditions—whether "oral" or not—and an embrace of new media' McLane concludes (p. 252). Similarly, her study illustrates the stimulating effect that an embrace of media studies can have on the vitality of Romantic scholarship.

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MARY JEAN CORBETT. **Family Likeness: Sex, Marriage, and Incest from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf.** Pp. xiv + 264. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008. Cloth, \$39.95/£20.50.

In historically inflected studies of British literature published over the last decade or so a current has developed whose drift carries us into yet another re-examination of the emergence and formulation of bourgeois kinship relations. This current's wellspring is a close examination of incest taboos and their significance to modern structures of family, marriage and lineage. Key among these recent studies is Ellen Pollak's *Incest and the English Novel* (2003), which covers the period 1684–1814 and could thus fit neatly as a companion volume to Corbett's. Pollak notes that structuralist and post-structuralist theory has placed incest prohibition at the center of some crucial accounts of origins, particularly Claude Lévi-Strauss' postulate that an incest taboo is the universal condition for the constitution of culture and Freud's Oedipal framing of the development of subjectivity (p. 6). More recently, feminist critics have argued that such accounts necessarily presuppose gender