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reads
*British Romanticism and Continental Influences:
Writing in an Age of Europhobia*
(Palgrave, 2004)
by Peter Mortensen

At least thirty English translations of works by the German dramatist August von Kotzebue appeared in 1799 alone, and were consumed by an eager public.¹ That was admittedly a bumper year, but throughout the 1790s and early 1800s copious novels, plays and ballads from Germany, France and even Scandinavia were translated and adapted by more or less successful British writers. The paradox was that this occurred in, to use Peter Mortensen's anachronistic but apt phrase, an 'age of europhobia'. As readers devoured the 'foreign literature of terror and titillation' (9), so reviewers asserted its immorality and exhorted the nation to defend its island purity; and not only reviewers, but also the influenced writers themselves. The 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* famously complains that 'The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse' (quoted 10). 'Frantic' is also a key word in Coleridge's critique of French comedy, which he deliberately portrays as indistinguishable from Kotzebue-style German tragedy (BL II 184-5). Yet the *Lyrical Ballads* themselves, despite foregrounding the influence of the English ballad-tradition, are clearly indebted to contemporary continental authors, among them the stereotypically extravagant Bürger.

So Mortensen, Associate Professor of English at the University of Aarhus, Denmark, who describes himself as 'an American-educated Dane specializing in British literature' (vii), explains that his

... main ambition in the present work is to account for the glaring paradox that Romantics borrowed—and continued to borrow, even beyond their 'juvenile' years—paraphernalia from those un-British writers whom they most vigorously disowned: that Wordsworth drew on Rousseau's *Confessions* in *The Prelude*; that Coleridge continued to exploit the resources of the 'modern jacobinical drama' throughout his theatrical career, and especially in his greatest success *Remorse* (1813); that the arch-nationalist De Quincey kept up a steady supply of foreign-indebted texts with titillating titles like *Klosterheim; or the Masque* (1832); and that Southey and Scott despite frequent claims to the contrary never wholly emancipated themselves from the siren charms of German and Gothic romance. (13)

¹ As listed in F. W. Stokoe, *German Influence in the English Romantic Period 1788-1818* (Cambridge: CUP, 1926).

While those may be the most prominent examples of his theme, Mortensen actually concentrates more on unfamiliar non-canonical texts. That it recuperates and introduces various neglected works is one of the most attractive features of this compelling and vigorously argued book. Indeed Mortensen attacks the traditional critical distinction between the High Romantics (Wordsworth, Coleridge) who imaginatively transform and improve their sources, and less aesthetically accomplished writers (Lewis, Inchbald and others) who merely reproduce them (45). Such a distinction, after all, is a value-judgement which echoes Coleridge's own distinction between 'copy' and 'imitation'; and Mortensen's polemic, in the tradition of Jerome McGann's *The Romantic Ideology*, is partly directed against critics' 'uncritical absorption in Romanticism's own self-representations' (McGann, quoted 74). Mortensen's view is that 'Romantic writers (and I use this category in a deliberately inclusive sense) responded strategically, and sometimes duplicitously, to the schizophrenic separation between contemporary popular and critical attitudes towards Continental writing' (14).

Those negative critical attitudes are masterfully dissected in chapter one ('The Rhetoric of Romantic Europhobia'), beginning with Burke's construction of England as simultaneously triumphant and vulnerable to continental incursions. This is the first example of the 'blatant logical contradictions' riddling 'Europhobic discourse'; further instances include the 'Illuminati controversy', when Barruel and Robison advanced a conspiracy theory of the origin of the French Revolution; and the heavy-handed satirical verse of T. J. Mathias, who called on the authorities to prosecute Matthew Lewis for the blasphemy and obscenity of *The Monk* (1796). Mortensen finds hyperbole and contradiction at its most extreme in William Preston's essay 'Reflections on the Peculiarities of Style and Manner in the later German Writers...': Preston swerves inconsistently between metaphors of poison and epidemic as he rages against the effect of Continental emotionalism on robust yet somehow susceptible British minds.

Fault-lines appear in Mortensen's own rhetoric, though, when he turns to English adaptations of Bürger's ballads (chapter two: 'Dethroning German Sublimity'). He shows convincingly that J. T. Stanley's *Leonora, A Tale, Translated Freely from the German of Gottfried Augustus Bürger*, while capitalising on the ballad's success, replaces Bürger's social radicalism and theological scepticism with an incongruously conservative Christian message. But the 'Ancient Mariner' and its relationship to Bürger's *Lenore* proves a less straightforward case. Glossing Southey's judgment 'It is a Dutch attempt at German sublimity', Mortensen writes: 'Coleridge, according to Southey, has abandoned the authentic and successful German ballad-style to substitute his own "Dutch attempt", whose narrative is unfathomable and whose characters are grotesque. It is worth noticing that [Southey] was far from alone among the early critics in finding something disconcertingly un-English about the "Rime" ' (57). On the contrary, as Mortensen's own previous sentence

intimates, the point of Southey's 'Dutch' jibe was that he found something disconcertingly un-*German* about the 'Ancient Mariner'. David Chandler has finely argued that Southey's ballad 'The Old Woman of Berkeley' was conceived as a response to Coleridge's poem, 'an attempt to undo what Coleridge had done, to restore the pure stream of "German sublimity"'.² It is true that reviewers used the epithet 'German' to damn the 'Ancient Mariner'; but for Southey 'German' probably implied positive qualities of narrative energy and pace, which he thought impaired by Coleridge's psychological approach. Mortensen's all-encompassing 'europhobic' paradigm obscures the complexity of Coleridge's project and Southey's response.

I would also question Mortensen's disapproval of Wordsworth's 'Hart-Leap Well'. The poem's narrative is based on Bürger's 'Der Wilde Jäger', translated by Walter Scott as 'The Chase' (1796). In Bürger's ballad a brash aristocratic hunter tyrannises his servants, but the hunter turns hunted and gets his come-uppance when a supernatural rider pursues him. Wordsworth omits the spectral rider, characteristically highlighting his difference from the German writer in a stanza that disclaims any narrative ambition ('The moving accident is not my trade...'). In Mortensen's view the key difference between the poets is that Bürger's version 'delivers an impassioned indictment of the nobility's privilege and behaviour' (73) especially towards the poor; whereas Wordsworth's hunter is merely shown to treat animals badly. Critics have praised Wordsworth for achieving 'better' poetry than the German sensation-ballad, yet he thereby weakens Bürger's social critique. Wordsworth's 'psychological sophistication, aesthetic finish and trans-historical validity are purchased only at the cost of a political domestication' (74). Wordsworth subtly analyses the hunter's motives, and leaves the 'moral' open-ended, but obscures the original ballad's radicalism. This is a typical judgement of New Historicism, which is now 'the dominant procedure for studying British Romantic literature in the Anglo-American academy';³ with the authority of McGann, Alan Liu and Marjorie Levinson behind it, Mortensen's interpretation comes almost as a reflex. Yet it seems worth observing that no lesser Marxist historian than E. P. Thompson used to praise Wordsworth precisely because the psychological interiority of his poems embodies his conviction that men who do not wear fine clothes can feel deeply: a propos of a comparison with a different German work, Thompson said 'There is a suspicion that Werther is a *voyeur* into the life of the poor for kicks, whereas we cannot doubt that with Wordsworth the experience is real and central.' (Thompson calls *The Prelude* 'an affirmation of the worth of the common man'.)⁴ Even on an interpretation which privileges the 'historical' over the 'aesthetic', then, a binary opposition between sincere German social critique

² David Chandler, 'Southey's "German Sublimity" and Coleridge's "Dutch Attempt"', *Romanticism on the Net* 32-33 (November 2003-February 2004), <http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2003/v/n32-33/009257ar.html>.

³ Kenneth R. Johnston, 'New Historicism', in *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide*, ed. Nicholas Roe (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 165.

⁴ *The Romantics: England in a Revolutionary Age*, ed. Dorothy Thompson (Suffolk: Merlin Press, 1997), 11.

and obfuscating Wordsworthian conservatism is far from inescapable.

Much the same pattern emerges in chapter three, which discusses English appropriations of Jacques Henri Bernadin de Saint-Pierre's novel *Paul et Virginie* (1788), a pastoral set on Mauritius in the early eighteenth-century. Indebted to Rousseau, this much-translated work 'most effectively assaults aristocratic ideology by disaffiliating inherited social status from innate moral merit, and by insisting on the ethical superiority of basely born characters' (99). Equally radically it is an 'ecological' novel, scrutinising the way human beings interact with other organisms. Mortensen's theme here is the resistance to pastoral in British Romanticism: various conservative-minded writers seized on the French work's popularity while reversing its purpose, converting it into a tool in 'the establishment war against dissent' (97). Cynicism about the natural man was expressed in versions by James Cobb, Maria Edgeworth (in *Belinda*) and Gilbert Imlay; the latter is not obviously an 'establishment' figure, but as Mortensen notes, *The Emigrants* (1793) promotes a view of a nature as an 'other' to be controlled, opposed to Saint-Pierre's ecocentrism.

Chapter four, on drama, reflects on the paradox that plays like Sheridan's production of Kotzebue's *Pizarro* were tremendously popular, yet reviewers 'fashioning themselves as protectors of the reading public' attacked their 'puerile extravagance' and immorality (138). So Coleridge's task of translating Schiller's *Wallenstein* held out 'both the promise of success and the threat of infamy' (140): a delicate balance. Mortensen finds Coleridge's later protestation that the translation was mere 'fagging' (menial work) unconvincing, a conclusion incidentally borne out by John Michael Kooy's recent study of *Coleridge, Schiller and Aesthetic Education* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002). Mortensen applies the same scepticism to Scott, whose early works were almost entirely translations from German. Scott later downplayed this stage of his career, and promoted what became the orthodox view of his development, that his youthful flirtation with Teutonic excess soon gave way to authentic British-based writing. Mortensen's close scrutiny of Scott's translation of Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen* is therefore a valuable corrective. His rather predictable conclusion, though, is harsh on Scott. Goethe's play is set in sixteenth-century Europe, but seemed to many a rallying cry against the vested interests of the contemporary church and court. Scott preserves the plot, but dismantles its contemporary relevance by employing archaic language throughout. He praises Goethe for painting 'the ancient manners of the country' so forcibly; Mortensen therefore regards Scott as trying to 'bury' Goethe's controversial work somewhere safely remote in time and place (149). That this exaggerates Scott's disingenuousness, however, is suggested by the fact that 'the vast majority of books in [Scott's] German collection, numbering over 300 volumes, are of antiquarian and folk-lore interest.'⁵ In other words Scott's antiquarian interest was genuine, and need not be construed as an example of europhobia.

⁵ Stokoe, 64; p. 174 gives details of Scott's German books.

Having discussed versions of Schiller's *The Robbers* by Keppel Craven and J. G. Holman, finding that a glimmer of the play's transgressiveness still survived the most thorough attempts at domestication (172), Mortensen comes in the final chapter to Scandinavian literature. Again his project of recovery is admirable: the British Romantic poets' fascination with northern antiquities has largely escaped scholarly attention, as he notes (174), but hopefully this book will change that. He focuses on Wordsworth's lyric 'The Danish Boy', William Herbert's scholarly collection, *Select Icelandic Poetry*, and Scott's metrical romance *Harold the Dauntless*. Eighteenth century social critics glorified the Norse citizen-soldier as a fighter for freedom and independence; whereas Wordsworth depoliticises him into a transcendental symbol of the one 'life of things' (180-184)—another example of Romantic ideology. Herbert's work was acclaimed at the time, though some reviewers accused him of promoting revolutionary ideas through his translations. Mortensen, however, summarises the weighty academic paraphernalia of Herbert's book, and shrewdly picks out Scott's approving remark that Herbert's politics actually seem 'the very opposite' of 'revolutionary and levelling' (195). Scott's *Harold* is concomitantly shown to oppose Nordic ambition and freedom fighting. Finally, though, Mortensen finds a text to his taste. Southey's 'The Race of Odin' (1795) is not an aesthetic success (already perhaps a point in its favour, from Mortensen's New Historicist perspective), but it 'refuses to domesticate' and even 'radicalizes' 'the cult of the northern sublime' (205). The final sentence of the book has a heavy and a weary weight about it, as though Mortensen has, like an epic warrior, finally fought his way through the gory spectacle of Romantic obfuscations to a reproachful glimmer of better and sincerer things:

Despite its uncertain status and limited imaginative scope, 'The Race of Odin' still draws attention to something that one would not have suspected from reading Wordsworth or Scott: during the Romantic period it was still possible, apparently, to write poetry which did not repress, occult or occlude, but which in fact underlined and amplified, the politically progressive beliefs enshrined in traditional notions of northern freedom. (207)

Mortensen tells a clear and powerful story about an oddly neglected aspect of Romanticism. The 'study of Continental influences on British Romanticism was a thriving activity before World War II but it has...rather gone out of fashion', as J. H. Alexander observes (quoted 3);⁶ it is high time for a revival. A work such as Stokoe's in 1926 can now be seen to assent too easily to Romantic self-fashioning: defining influence, Stokoe says 'The foreign example serves to justify and encourage the expression of the native aptitude'⁷—setting

⁶ Exceptions being too often discussions of Coleridge's plagiarisms. Kooy's book (cited above, reviewed by Janet Land in the Spring 2003 Coleridge Bulletin, 107-9) is a welcome new departure.

⁷ Stokoe, vi; also noteworthy is Violet Stockley, *German Literature as Known in England, 1750-1830* (London: Routledge, 1929).

up a quasi-Romantic dichotomy between ‘foreign’ and ‘native’ which is precisely one of Mortensen’s objects of attack. Yet Mortensen is really writing more about ‘appropriation’ than ‘influence’, specifically forms of appropriation to which he objects politically. There remains room for re-reading the pre-war scholars too, whose aesthetic pleasure in Romantic texts is not necessarily deplorable.

Alex Hampton
reads
*Romanticism and Transcendence:
Wordsworth, Coleridge and the Religious Imagination*
(University of Missouri Press, 2003)

by J. Robert Barth, S.J.

Though this review may come somewhat late after its subject’s publication, it would be unfortunate to leave the work of Robert Barth, ‘a confessed and unabashed follower of Coleridge,’ unreviewed, especially in this journal. Barth is a Professor of English at Boston College, and the author of other Coleridgean works such as *Coleridge and Christian Doctrine* (1969 & 1987), *The Symbolic Imagination: Coleridge and the Romantic Tradition* (1977 & 2000), and *Coleridge and the Power of Love* (1988). For those students of Romanticism who wish to look with greater depth into the spiritual dimension of Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s poetry, Barth’s book is an excellent introduction.

In this work, Professor Barth builds on a theme familiar to his readers, Coleridge’s theory of the imagination. Coleridge’s theory is summed up in that most famous of passages, which describes the imaginative faculty as ‘a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM’ (BL I XIII). In Coleridge’s eyes, an act of the imagination is an act of faith, an act wherein the human mind approximates the highest truth by divine empowerment. Barth develops his consideration of Romanticism and transcendence with Coleridge cast in the rôle of the great theorist of the imagination, while Wordsworth plays its supreme practitioner. In the poetry of both the imagination can be observed in action.

Reading Barth on English Romantic poetry is always refreshing. Whereas the academic critic usually acknowledges Romantic scepticism, political radicalism and the associated rebellious lifestyle, the religious and philosophical dimensions of the period’s thought are given far less attention. Much scholarship often seems more interested in legitimising the opinions espoused by the critic’s own generation, than in doing justice to a contemplatively

complex and spiritually sensitive period. Barth's approach is, in his own words, 'rather conventional', and refreshingly so. His work does not carry the lassitude that distrust of language seems to entail. He accepts that words are stable enough to allow us to communicate, and that poetry not only aspires, but at times even attains, transcendence.

Coleridge's concept of the religious imagination is set out with the assistance of another thinker who has figured prominently in Barth's own Jesuit training. Employing Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* as a heuristic model, Barth uses the more systematic writer to provide structure for the organic thinker. Both saw the imagination as the faculty which gave meaning to life beyond mere appearance. Furthermore, the two saw art, in its widest definition, as having a Logos-like function, allowing the infinite to enter into the finite, timelessness into history. For both, art—the imagination's product—is transcendent in nature.

Important for Coleridge was art's function in overcoming the dichotomies that were increasingly part of his age's *Weltanschauung*: those cleavages between the spiritual and the scientific, the natural and the supernatural, reason and revelation that followed the Enlightenment. Coleridge's concept of imagination has the ability to find a unity between these two poles. For Coleridge, Barth writes, it is 'only the symbolic language of the imagination that can resist the human drive for simple clarity and determinateness' (7). Barth describes the symbolic language of the imagination not as something that points towards another reality, but rather as something that takes part in reality's highest form. The creative human act of symbol making participates in a finite way in God's eternal act of creation.

Barth provides a lucid and succinct outline of these complex Romantic topics, and lays the foundation for the main argument of the book, which is to illustrate how both Coleridge and Wordsworth understood the power of the imagination both to put man in touch with the divine and to sustain his relationship with it. As the book progresses and Barth considers the poetry in depth, one only wishes that he had elaborated even further the concepts of symbol and polarity that he touches on in the first chapter.

The book successfully challenges what seems to be the conventional assumption in English Literature—that Wordsworth substantially altered the religious content of *The Prelude* between the 1805 and 1850 versions. The theorised motivation for this is that the older, more conservative Wordsworth sought to make his poetic project more orthodox in nature. Barth, however, disagrees; indeed, he notes how he created his own 'index of pieties' to *The Prelude* in order to counter this assumption. He concludes that few orthodoxies have been added, and that those changes that have been made reflect a growth in the poet's own understanding of his past experiences. Here Barth offers a position far more reasonable than the rather embarrassing argument put forward by some critics, that the aged poet sought to placate his Redeemer as he approached death.

The centre of Wordsworth's poetic project is to understand the growth of his own mind. That his understanding of the significance of each recounted moment alters with time is not surprising, as he draws on an ever greater pool of experience for comparison. Barth offers a number of examples, including the following, to support his well argued position. In the 1805 version Wordsworth writes:

Wonder not
If such my transports were, for in all things
I saw one life, and felt that it was joy. (2.428-30; 1805)

This changes in the 1850 version to:

Wonder not
If the high transport, great the joy I felt,
Communing in this sort through earth and Heaven
With every form of Creature, as it looked
Towards the Uncreated with a countenance
Of adoration, with an eye of love. (2.410-15; 1850)

Barth defends this position with a number of other examples from *The Prelude* and other poetic works. He illustrates that Wordsworth was a poet deeply influenced by Christianity and its concepts. At the same time he writes: 'I doubt that Wordsworth the *poet* was ever fully Christian' (27). What Barth writes against are those who seek to secularise *The Prelude*. Wordsworth, Barth writes, perhaps never integrated Christ into his sacramental view of the world, yet nevertheless experienced a world with a living, divine presence. Barth's willingness to tackle the apparent dismissiveness that many have concerning the theological content of the poem can only be applauded.

Barth's defence of a theologically sensitive reading of *The Prelude* takes on more weight with his consideration of the transcendent meaning of the 'spots of time' that make up the work. 'Are they not attempts to escape from time?' he asks (44). Barth comments that many readers have tended to lift these spots of time out of their larger context, seeing them as fragments of experience, polished into pure states of being. But *The Prelude* does not deal with fragments of time, but rather has as its subject the passage of an individual's life through it. These spots of time 'are discernable memorable moments in the continuum of time—not outside it but demonstratively part of it' (44). Barth continues:

Without their context, however, without the often plodding hundreds of lines between, the sense of journey is lost; there is no sense of growth, but only a disconnected series of disparate moments of illumination. If we have lost patience with the (in several senses) pedestrian poetry between the spots of time, than we have lost patience with the journey itself—and perhaps indeed with life (45).

It is Barth's argument that it is only through an individual's sense of his own passage through time that these spots of time illustrate what chronology cannot, namely a sense of recurrence that relates back to a locus of stable values. This relation offers a sense of continuity against the randomness of chronological experience. They 'reflect for the poet a dimly perceived transcendent world of stable values. ...These experiences are, in the deepest Coleridgean sense, truly symbolic of an eternal reality' (53). In this sense what Wordsworth conveys is that through the experience of time we come to transcend it. Here the weight of Barth's indictment against the lack of patience displayed by some towards the theological alterations of the 1850 version becomes obvious since, by failing to take them seriously, the whole poetic project loses its meaning. Furthermore, Barth's insightful examination serves as a warning against the myriad of English textbooks that lift parts of the poem out of the work as a whole.

Following these considerations, Barth could have lent greater weight to his argument by placing it in its historical context, for in Wordsworth's search for the transcendent can be observed the very seeds of Romanticism. The Enlightenment individual, in the attempt to emerge 'from his self-incurred immaturity'⁸, had done away with what was perceived as dead dogma and blind faith. However, it was these beliefs that had the function of grounding the self, acting as 'the one principle of permanence and identity', Coleridge wrote. 'The rock of strength and refuge, to which the soul may cling amid the fleeting surge-like objects of the senses' (F I 508-9). These words of Coleridge refer directly to the empirical-mechanical thinking that had been used to supplant much religious belief. Couching *The Prelude*, and the Romantic project in general, in this historic frame would make it seem more germane to the present age, as it continues the post-Enlightenment search, albeit more clumsily, for the same locus of stable values.

Barth outlines Wordsworth's description of the poetic mind, whose power finds its source beyond the individual, yet is at the same time not separate from him:

Such minds are truly from the Deity,
 For they are powers; and hence the highest bliss
 That flesh can know is theirs, —the consciousness
 Of whom they are, habitually infused
 Through every image, and through every thought,
 And all affections by communion raised
 From earth to heaven, from human to divine. (14.112-18; 1850)

In this description, the finite poetic mind shares in the power and source of the

⁸ Kant, Immanuel. *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, 29 vols., ed. der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1912), viii, p. 35.

infinite. It is not so much enthralled as quickened, and thereby able to hold a transcendent discourse with the world. It is in this moment that the transcendent is mediated through the senses.

With this position outlined, Barth is able to launch into a comparison between the rôle that humanity plays in the Romantic imagination of Wordsworth and Coleridge, juxtaposing *Tintern Abbey* and the Conversation Poems. Whereas for Wordsworth nature alone suffices, for Coleridge, each poem begins in a relationship, turns to nature, and returns revived to the beloved. In the examination of *The Ancient Mariner*, Barth suggests that the Mariner's movement from community, to solitude, and back to community illustrates how this dialectic prepares the individual to meet the other more deeply and lovingly. Reflecting Wordsworth's description of the poetic mind, the blessing of the water snakes, the moment when the Mariner is finally able to pray, 'is a supernatural act, prompted and enabled by God' (91). Here the quickened poetic mind that Wordsworth describes is illustrated in *The Ancient Mariner*, where the Mariner's prayer is not a form of address, but a conversation between two unequal, yet active partners.

Barth offers a fruitful consideration of Coleridge's concept of prayer and the Self-God-Other relationship. However, he again employs Ignatius of Loyola to illustrate Coleridge's position, when more relevant thinkers, such as Shelling or Böhme, could have been used. Indeed, the concept could be further elaborated by employing some of the poet's other works, particularly the *Opus Maximum*. In this philosophical and theological work the tripartite relationship is a central theme, abstracted and expounded in the novel formula:

Thus: the third pronoun 'he', 'it', etc. could never have been contradistinguished from the first ~~but~~, 'I', 'me', etc. but by means of the second. There could be no 'He' without a previous 'Thou', and I scarcely need add that without a 'Thou' there could be no opposite, and of course no distinct or conscious sense of the term 'I', as far as the consciousness is concerned, without a 'Thou' (OM 75; cf. SW&F II 833-44).

Despite this, Barth lucidly sums up the meaning of prayer and its function in transcendent symbology: The act of love for the neighbour is the finite symbolic repetition of the infinite love of God.

Among the other Coleridge poems that Barth gives attention to is *Christabel*. He argues that despite its portrayal of a world of death, it has an underlying theme of love and movement toward transcendent union. While the examination makes some interesting and worthwhile points, overall it struggles under its own weight and is less convincing than the analysis of the *Ancient Mariner*. There are a great many poems, especially in the second half of the oeuvre, that have greater theological merit, and that are the object of far less critical attention. The reader is left with the desire that Barth would have turned his critical talent to these before his conclusions.

Barth concludes with a case for the continued validity of the religious imagination and its symbolic language as outlined in the works of Wordsworth and Coleridge. To do this he brings it into discourse with two twentieth century thinkers who also espouse the same transcendent conception of the imagination, Karl Rahner and George Steiner, in whose respective theological and literary considerations 'Romantic thought and Romantic spirit are still alive' (120).

For Rahner, this means that the grace of God is present not only in Scripture, but in all the works of mankind. Implicit in Rahner's considerations is the belief that there is not a literary imagination and religious imagination, but one, uniting the secular and sacred, bringing the finite into the infinite. In this manner Rahner illustrates how the artistic creation has a rôle to play in theological considerations, whereas Steiner illustrates that theological concepts have an important rôle to play in contemporary literary discourse. With success, Barth compares *The Statesmen's Manual* and *Real Presences*, the former writing against the mechanical understanding, the latter against deconstructionism. The most important point that Barth makes is that both Rahner and Steiner fight for the capacity of language to carry transcendent meaning. One only wishes that Barth would have given us much more of his interesting and productive comparison. However, what his concluding considerations do, is illustrate the way in which the Romantic imagination may usefully be understood to engage with contemporary scholarly concerns.

At a time when theology and philosophy increasingly seek to emulate the sciences in a misguided attempt to claim legitimacy, and when the study of literature is so bound up in its own theory and practice that it fails wholly to take seriously into account the issues that a text is engaging, Barth's book lucidly reiterates the very different, and far more germane, project of Romanticism. Furthermore, as 'an unabashed follower of Coleridge, he provides signposts for a number of paths which the serious student of either great Romantic poet will hopefully be inspired to travel.