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**Aims and Scope:** Formerly *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text* (1997–2005), *Romantic Textualities: Literature and Print Culture, 1780–1840* is an online journal that is committed to foregrounding innovative Romantic-studies research into bibliography, book history, intertextuality and textual studies. To this end, we publish material in a number of formats: among them, peer-reviewed articles, reports on individual/group research projects, bibliographical checklists and biographical profiles of overlooked Romantic writers. *Romantic Textualities* also carries reviews of books that reflect the growing academic interest in the fields of book history, print culture, intertextuality and cultural materialism, as they relate to Romantic studies.

**Fiona Price, *Reinventing Liberty: Nation, Commerce and the Historical Novel from Walpole to Scott* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 241pp. ISBN 978-1-4744-0296-5; £70.00 (hb).**

I BEGAN READING *REINVENTING LIBERTY* in the weeks leading up to Britain's Brexit vote in June 2016: the timing was uncanny. Price's impressive monograph focuses on the concept of national identity as it relates to commerce and liberty within the late eighteenth-century historical novel. The anxieties surrounding twenty-first-century Britain and the referendum shaped my reading in a way that brought forward Price's discussion of the early historical novel and its roots in the politics of national identity with an increased clarity and modern relevance.

The thrust of Price's argument at first seems unsurprising: she adopts a now-common stand against Georg Lukács's influential *The Historical Novel* (1937) and asserts that there is a wealth of British early historical novels, both well and lesser known, written prior to Walter Scott's monopoly on the form. Such novels bear reading, Price suggests, because they represent an important moment in the development of modern British national identity (p. 3), and because they provide readers and writers alike with a narrative space to reimagine the past as a way of reshaping the present (p. 11). But then, after laying out a thorough introduction of eighteenth-century discourses in political development, models of historiography and the resonances of these in an array of novels, Price takes a much more nuanced and original approach: 'the historical novel emerged [...] as a form which at once employed and interrogated the dominant political narrative', which 'allowed proposals for reform or for limits on monarchical power to be seen as attempts to ensure stability or, at most [...] to return to political origin' (p. 17).

Bolstering this new approach to the early historical novel, the work's five chapters are organised thematically and roughly chronologically, placing novels in conversation with each other and alongside contemporary works in order to theorise the novels' political perspectives. Chapter 1 focuses primarily on Thomas Leland's *Longsword* (1762), Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764), Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1778), Anne Fuller's *Son of Ethelwolf* (1789) and Ann Radcliffe's *Gaston de Blondville* (1826) alongside the writings of Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft. Price teases out the common threads of these works' interrogation of ancient constitutionalism and the rhetoric of leadership and transition, showing how each addresses these anxieties through narratives of historical continuity with the present rather than rupture as 'the best chance of preserving freedom' (p. 24), particularly 'in relation to the political present' (p. 53).

Price's second chapter probes how historical novelists engage with stadial history and the questions/problems of sympathy and sentiment, especially in relation to questions of government's purpose. She again juxtaposes an array of novels—including Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1783–85), Charlotte Smith's *Ethelinde* (1789), *Desmond* (1792) and *The Old Manor House* (1793) and William Godwin's *St Leon* (1799)—with the philosophical treatises of William Robertson and David

Hume, among others. Reading the ways that writers explore concepts of work, the worker and historical hardships, Price argues that in questioning the trappings of chivalry and acceptable forms of nostalgia versus eighteenth-century sensibility, these historical novels 'probe whether economic and sympathetic circulation can bind the classes together' (p. 62); as such, this genre 'becomes a key mechanism in the construction of social rationality' (p. 84) through depictions of the labouring classes.

In Chapter 3, Price inverts the common argument that the national tale anticipates the historical novel, reading instead the historical novel—which she here classifies as 'a cautious and sometimes imperial form' (p. 102)—as foreshadowing the national tale. Through readings of Anna Maria Mackenzie's *Monmouth* (1790), Henry Siddons's *William Wallace: or, The Highland Hero* (1791), Sydney Owen's *O'Donnel* (1814), James White's *Earl Strongbow* (1789), Anna Millikin's *Eva, an Old Irish Story* (1795), Ellis Cornelia Knight's *Marcus Flaminius* (1792), the anonymous *Arville Castle* (1795) and Jane Porter's *Thaddeus of Warsaw* (1803), Price distinguishes the historical novel from national romance through its use of stadial history to open up a space for 'the novelistic consideration of nationalism' (126) and for questioning the balance of governmental power between the nation and the individual.


Price returns to the notion of chivalry in Chapter 4, addressing how historical novelists of the 1790s and 1800s redefined chivalry alongside the emerging scientific discourses of Joseph Priestley. Illustrating the associations of chivalry with humanitarian and medicinal pursuits, Price reads Anna Maria Porter's *The Hungarian Brothers* (1807) and *Don Sebastian* (1809), Jane Porter's *The Scottish Chiefs* (1810), Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801), Elizabeth Hamilton's *Memoirs of the Life of Agrippina* (1804) and Jane West's *The Loyalists* (1812) and *Letters Addressed to a Young Man* (1801). These novels, Price argues, purge chivalry 'of its warlike excess' (p. 136), thereby offering readers ways of seeing a relationship between 'Christianity, science, and the interpretation of the past' (p. 165)—to adapt the chivalric through stadial narratives of national healing. Rather than viewing life through gallantry and romance, such novels brought political actors and processes and the materialities of nationalism into sharper focus.

Lastly, Chapter 5 underscores Price's overarching argument that Scott was working 'in dialogue with other historical fictions', now largely 'forgotten': 'the role of earlier historical fiction in shaping Scott's fiction remains obscure' (pp. 170–71). In response, Price attends to the literary conversations between Scott and his precursors (particularly Jane West, Charlotte Smith and the Porter sisters, Jane and Anna Maria), and identifies various resonances, as well as disparities, of plot and theme across texts: tensions between epistemological values of and approaches to history, the romance of restoration versus revolution, the progress of chivalry and debates of individual liberties. Price focuses her discussion on Scott's *The Antiquary* (1816), *Ivanhoe* (1819) and *St Roman's Well* (1824) to stage the conflict between 'the novel of ancient liberties and that of chivalry and nation, combining



the radical trope of the alternative community on one hand and the recuperated and adjusted conservative narrative of history as science on the other' (p. 183).

Price convincingly concludes that 'chivalry allowed for the relationship between property, wealth and political power to be re-examined' (p. 208). By calling into question 'the association between property and power' (p. 209), the early British historical novel recasts the stages of chivalry from their aristocratic associations to consider commercial ones: sentiment and the materialities of history alike must be redistributed and redirected from the nation to the individual as a means of attaining and preserving liberty.

*Reinventing Liberty* engages with so many primary texts that Price's discussion cannot delve deeply into each work; the textual analyses she provides are relatively cursory, remaining, for the most part, at the level of the novels' plots and general themes. But, since Price's aim is to provide a panorama of and justification for the late-eighteenth-century historical novel genre and its emergence from the economic and political environment of this period in Britain, this cursory approach is effective and useful. By wading through a wide range of works—rather than diving into a select few—Price is able to establish a broader foundation for future studies in the early British historical novel. I finished reading this work energised and with scores of ideas dancing through my mind for approaches to future research on the primary works with which Price engages—and ready to debate the Brexit vote through the lens of cultural history. In sum, the work's merit lies less in literary criticism and more in the cogent contextualisation of eighteenth-century philosophies on display in the stories told about Britain's national identity. 

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Martin Priestman, *The Poetry of Erasmus Darwin: Enlightened Spaces, Romantic Times* (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 324pp. ISBN 978-1-4724-1954-5; £70 (hb).

*THE POETRY OF ERASMUS DARWIN: ENLIGHTENED SPACES, ROMANTIC TIMES* aims to recover the poetry and poetics of Erasmus Darwin from behind the rock of Wordsworthian Romanticism by challenging anew its assumptions about poetic diction and the role of metaphor or analogy. Priestman is working against the grain of 'the Romantic Movement, with Erasmus Darwin's absurd efforts the prime specimen of the artificial lumber of "poetic diction" mercifully cleared away

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS



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*Century*, funded by the Research Foundation, Flanders (FWO). Before that, he was a Leverhulme Postdoctoral Research Associate on the project *The Lady's Magazine: Understanding the Emergence of a Genre*, led by Prof. Jennie Batchelor at the University of Kent. His first monograph, a history of the late-Victorian little magazine, is under contract with Edinburgh University Press. He is the managing editor of the open-access journal *Authorship* <[www.authorship.ugent.be](http://www.authorship.ugent.be)>.

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