

Romantic Circles A refereed scholarly Website devoted to the study of Romantic-period literature and culture.

Taking her cue from the work of John Barrell, Labbe begins her treatment of Romantic landscape with the prospect view. She argues that the commanding and panoramic prospect served, on the ground and as a figure in aesthetic and political debate, to confer authority upon men. The view from the top, possessed in practice only by gentlemen landowners, became exclusively theirs in theory too. The capacity to take disinterested general views became, by virtue of this socially-rooted metaphor, the exclusive preserve of men. If Barrell and others have traced the progress of the prospect view, nobody has investigated its consequences for women, and its influence on gender stereotypes, as thoughtfully as Labbe. Eschewing over-general formulations, Labbe makes illuminating distinctions between the different men who used the prospect view in their poetry, as well as between men and women writers. She uncovers the unease and instability within the versions of the sublime produced by Wordsworth and Coleridge. It was, I would argue, an anxiety that opened a space within which the gender stereotypes could be questioned. Wordsworth himself—although Labbe does not pursue this point—questioned them in poems which by the standards of their day were remarkably feminist. In these poems women spoke in ways that did not conform to cultural stereotypes. They were admired as well as pitied for doing so, and they challenged the assumptions of the men who viewed them including male readers. She argues that, as a hybrid aesthetic, the picturesque mixed masculine and feminine, sublime and beautiful, in a way which made it attractive to male poets who wished to escape from the image of authority produced by the prospect view. For both it contained dangers: Wordsworth solved the problem only by an uneasy sleight of hand: It serves to remind us how influential an aesthetic it was, precisely because it was loosely enough formulated to accommodate tensions and contradictions. In two very subtle and astute readings she shows how Hannah More and Dorothy Wordsworth configured gardens as sites for femininity, showing that they discovered behind the flower beds a certain power but also accepted many restrictions. But while these readings are persuasive, the larger thesis is not. But this is to ignore the fact that for many men too, gardens were attractive precisely because they offered an alternative to the commanding masculinity which they were supposed, but unwilling, to assume. Shenstone, Cowper and Repton all designed, tended and represented domestic gardens in this way. A deeper analysis of garden history and garden literature would reveal a more complex inscription of gender upon the lawn and shrubbery than is allowed for here—or would, at least, allow the paradoxes and disablements that gardens posed for men to be focused more sharply. Lacking such an analysis, Labbe offers instead a brief discussion of the bower as a masculine invention to contrast with the garden. While the individual readings are well-taken, they are too slight to bear the argumentative weight that is placed on them. If the bower is a feminine space created by men to stimulate their desire, it is also a religious one in which the relationship of good and evil, flesh and spirit, humanity and God takes dramatic form. The male Romantics were engaging with Chaucer, Spenser, Milton and the Bible when they wrote about bowers. Their relationship with Christian tradition needs to be factored in to the account of the way they gendered landscape. Despite these limitations, *Romantic Visualities* is a significant addition to the current effort to rehistoricise Romanticism by considering the political implications of aesthetic discourse. One of its virtues is its recontextualisation of canonical texts. Here Labbe succeeds in restoring to our attention two particularly feminine forms of aesthetic activity, popular at the time but neglected since. She reminds us, that is to say, that male Romanticism was but one element of a culture marked by a massive expansion in the consumption of literature and art. Other Articles From This Issue.

2: Romantic Visualities : J. Labbe :

Romantic Visualities offers a culturally informed understanding of the literary significance of landscape in the Romantic period. Labbe argues that the Romantic period associated the prospect view with the masculine ideal, simultaneously fashioning the detailed point of view as feminised.

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3: Jacqueline M. Labbe, Romantic Visualities: Landscape! â€“ Romanticism on the Net â€“ Ã‰ruditi

Romantic Visualities offers a culturally informed understanding of the literary significance of landscape in the Romantic period. Labbe argues that the Romantic period associated the prospect view with the masculine ideal, simultaneously fashioning the detailed point of view as feminised. An.

Street of Tombs, Pompeii Exhibit Description: Displaying picturesque conventions from English as well as Italian painting, this watercolor sketch by an informed tourist, Hannah Palmer, reveals the large extent of the famous excavations at Pompeii. Palmer painted the scene while honeymooning in Naples in , exactly years after the Kingdom of Naples under Charles III began sponsoring systematic excavations at Herculaneum and Pompeii, the ancient Roman towns buried in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. The geometrical city plan still clearly visible among the ruins serves to harmonize nature and culture while accentuating the vista that terminates dramatically with Vesuvius. Street of Tombs, Pompeii Main Description: During the latter part of their honeymoon in , Hannah Palmer and her husband Samuel, also a painter and a follower of William Blake, spent much time sketching at Pompeii. For this view, she chose a recently uncovered portion of the city. A Capriccio Landscape Exhibit Description: Sandby thus gives us a double dose of the sublime. Sandby capitalizes on this romantic situation to give us a glowing, smoking crater that is larger and more threatening when perspective is taken into account than those of Vesuvius or Etna. The fore- and middle ground portray a wide spectrum of human activity, from husbandry to both leisure travel and more economically-driven travel. Unlike the human figures, which could be either Welsh or Italian, the architecture is decidedly Italianate. The apparent age of the large castle and several other buildings suggests that this picturesque valley has been living on borrowed time for many centuries; the mist rolling down along the valley, from the volcano toward the town, suggests that the mountain stream could be converted to molten lava at any moment. It is not based on a particular place. Column of Smoke is a scientific illustration of an erupting volcano, drawn for the purpose of studying Mount Vesuvius. However, because scientific studies of volcanoes were still not taken seriously, this image went unappreciated for decades. In the early Romantic period, still during the late s, the drawing was seen by many to be just another depiction of Mount Vesuvius as awe-inspiring and sublime. The image does feature characteristics that invoke the sublimeâ€”intimidating smoke, a tall volcano, and darting lightning. When the image was republished in , however, it took on a new significance for Romantic culture. The Atlas of Nature valued the smoke for its visually-descriptive commentary on the atmosphere, and the image soon became popular in the scientific community. Consequently, the image is significant for two reasons: Two dark figures stand near a canoe in the front right foreground. Far behind them is an empty town at the base of Mount Vesuvius. The volcano emits swirling grey smoke which covers the top three quarters of the engraving. Lightning bolts dart in various directions from the top layers of smoke. Banks speaks of what materials form the crater; however, unlike modern scientific accounts, the excerpt contains little measurements or precise data. They stand in a green patch of vegetation to pitch their tentsâ€”one of the few areas of vegetation in the crater. All around them is ash, cinder, and lava in various states, the This image of Mount Helena marks a turning point for volcanic depictions in Romantic culture. The fear and awe once evoked by images of rampant volcanoes is little more; instead, Mount Helena is seen as powerless and at rest. The volcano is distant and appears as an afterthought in the image. Because scientists knew that the volcano had become extinct, the image does not give any sense of anxiety that it will erupt. Instead, the knowledge gained by volcanologists of the time has contributed to a scenicâ€”not fear-inducingâ€”view of Mount Helena. Trees line the foreground of this image and follow a pavement to a house, The Briars, in the distance. The Briars sits at the middle of the image: In the background, a calm Mount Helena looms over the house and is surrounded by more mountains. A Map of Vesuvius Exhibit Description: This suggests that Romantic culture no longer required the sublime in portrayals of volcanoes, and that the public was becoming more invested in a scientific understanding of volcanoes. A Map of Vesuvius Main Description: Palo, the larger cone, is marked with every lava flow colored red, brown, and green. Monte Somma is depicted slightly to the left of Palo, and has only one perhaps The Small Cone, from the S. Summit of the Great Cone Exhibit Description: As demonstrated by the human

figureâ€”who appears to be performing a hands-on investigation of sputtering lavaâ€”the image shows that one can successfully study volcanoes in action. Before this image, Romantic culture was primarily concerned with the volcano as an emblem of death and destruction. However, as this engraving suggests, a curiosity grounded in science and notions of the picturesque began to emerge regarding volcanoes and their eruptions. Summit of the Great Cone Main Description: John Auldjo, the artist himself, stands on the far right of the image, poking the lava with a cane and holding a cloth over his mouth. This topographical portrayal of the Eifel mountain range suggests that Romantic culture was developing a more scientific interest in volcanism. Depicting roughly 35 miles of the Eifel mountain range, this topographic map is color coded to indicate rock type. Volcanoes are depicted by sets of lines, each which culminates in a circle to indicate the crater. Also depicted are small towns, landmarks, and rivers. In the center of the image, This portrayal of the Eifel mountain range further suggests that Romantic culture was developing an increasingly scientific interest in volcanism. The content of the image is neither sublime nor picturesque, yet the book it illustratesâ€”a scientific work concerning the origins of volcanoesâ€”sells very well and is consumed voraciously by the reading public. These images depict the European landscape in as shaped by a Laacher See eruption. In the upper left corner, a farmer is plowing his field with the help of a mule. The village of Eich is depicted in the same frame. The lower frame depicts the hills created by the supervolcano.

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7: Jill H. Casid | Department of Art History

Despite these limitations, Romantic Visualities is a significant addition to the current effort to rehistoricise Romanticism by considering the political implications of aesthetic discourse. One of its virtues is its recontextualisation of canonical texts.

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