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Series Editor’s Preface

Perhaps the most favorable omen for the flourishing of Speculative Realist philosophy is its ongoing impact in other disciplines. Such impact for a philosopher is far from automatic. Though analytic philosophy dominates the most prestigious universities in the Anglophone world, it is notably rare that analytic philosophers – with their profusion of dry, often aggressive technical arguments – are read by anyone but philosophy professors. The same holds for mainstream Continental philosophy: while this group has grown impressively large in recent years, its voice has too seldom reached the outside world in any transformative way. Moreover, it often shows contempt even for those of our members who do achieve some sort of impact outside the walls of their home departments. This is somewhat surprising, given that most of the recent heroes of Continental thought first gained prominence in fields outside philosophy proper: Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Slavoj Žižek all come readily to mind. By contrast, Speculative Realism has had a large interdisciplinary impact from the start: in architecture, where Object-Oriented Ontology is already a prominent orientation debated in the pages of the professional journal *Log*; in the visual arts, where Speculative Realism and its most visible figures have ranked among the 100 most important influences according to *ArtReview* since 2013; and even in archaeology, where a group of theorists including Bjørnar Olsen and Christopher Witmore has used Speculative Realism to challenge the “postprocessual” trends in archaeology that roughly paralleled postmodernism in the humanities.

In literary studies, we have already seen a certain amount of Speculative Realist criticism, whether in Greg Ellermann’s work on Speculative Romanticism, debates in *New Literary History* featuring the likes of Jane Bennett and Timothy Morton, or my own
Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy. But the present book, authored by the energetic young Canadian-born scholar Evan Gottlieb, is the first known to me to interpret an entire literary school (British Romanticism) with the intellectual tools provided by Speculative Realism. Gottlieb is Professor of English at Oregon State University, where he has taught since shortly after attaining his doctorate in the widely admired department of English in the University of Buffalo. He is a prolific writer, having already published three books before this one: Feeling British (2007), Walter Scott and Contemporary Theory (2013), and Romantic Globalism (2014). Another book, set to appear soon, is entitled Engagements with Literary and Critical Theory. As the reader will soon discover, Gottlieb’s erudition in literary theory is matched by a more surprising familiarity with key philosophical works: not just those of the Speculative Realists and their contemporaries, but also such earlier figures as Kant and the British empiricists. He engages with all of these schools confidently and accurately. I should add that Gottlieb writes with a wonderful lucidity that makes this book a pleasure to read. Though Gottlieb summarizes his own chapters clearly in the Introduction below, allow me to state what I take to be the key elements of these chapters.

Chapter 1 offers a powerful reading of Wordsworth, including an account of the difference between the early and late phases of the great English poet. While defending Wordsworth’s often belittled philosophical acumen, Gottlieb engages with my own work, but also and more importantly with that of Timothy Morton. More than all of the authors of OOP, it is Morton who is at home in literature: a field in which he holds an endowed chair at Rice University, and in which he has developed a full-blown ecological theory with roots in British Romanticism. Working from the aesthetic theory of causation that Morton develops in his book Realist Magic, Gottlieb gives a new interpretation of Wordsworth’s famous “Lucy poems,” which cannot be understood in terms of the old causal model that Morton terms “clunk causality.” Nonetheless, the later Wordsworth anticipates and rejects the later Speculative Realist effort to remove humans from the center of the cosmos.

Chapter 2 turns from Wordsworth to the more explicitly philosophical Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who openly expresses his debt to the writings of Immanuel Kant and F. W. J. Schelling. Whereas some ascribe the ambiguities of Coleridge’s poetic oeuvre to his
own intellectual limitations, and others make a rather formulaic postmodernist appeal to the “undecideability of language,” Gottlieb addresses the issue differently. In the highly imaginative new materialism of the Speculative Realist Iain Hamilton Grant and our prominent fellow traveler Manuel DeLanda, Gottlieb finds a conceptual language that should fit quite well with Coleridge’s poetic vision. Yet despite the vivid sense of things depicted in Coleridge’s great poem “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” Gottlieb ultimately concludes that Coleridge was insufficiently bold in embracing the autonomy of matter from human designs.

In Chapter 3, we move from the Speculative Realists proper to a pair of older French mentors to the movement: Alain Badiou and Bruno Latour. Their designated parallel in British Romanticism is said to be George Gordon, Lord Byron, the most dashing of the Romantics. While Latour is assigned the early Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage and the later Don Juan, Badiou is paired with a number of Byron’s middle-period works, such as Manfred. Gottlieb convincingly reads this latter poem in terms of Badiouian truth-events, and with frequent appeals to Badiou’s often-ignored but important Theory of the Subject. Latour’s first contribution to the chapter is in helping to account for the work of non-human actors in Byron, such as the bull in the famous bullfight scene of Don Juan. The prince of networks returns to the stage at chapter’s end, through a broader reading of Don Juan that draws on Latour’s recent masterpiece An Inquiry Into Modes of Existence. Gottlieb’s reading of key characters in the poem in terms of such Latourian modes as [REL] (Don Juan’s mother) may be the first concrete use of Latour’s modes in literary criticism. Here as in other chapters, Gottlieb shows himself disarmingly well versed in contemporary philosophy.

In Chapter 4 Gottlieb turns to that young poetic martyr, Percy Bysshe Shelley. While much recent Shelley commentary has been shaped by Paul de Man’s interpretation of the poet, Gottlieb reads Shelley through the Speculative Realist positions of Ray Brassier and Quentin Meillassoux. For all the differences between these two authors, Gottlieb is correct to note that both are animated by a spirit of rationalism and materialism, with Brassier partial to the work of the natural sciences, and Meillassoux (like his teacher Badiou) preferring to emphasize mathematics as a privileged form of cognition. Gottlieb reads Shelley as coming down on the French side of this divide, claiming “that Shelley courts but ultimately
rejects nihilism in favor of a radically contingent ontology that is strikingly similar to Meillassoux’s.”

Chapter 5, possibly the most beautiful in the book, considers another poet who died tragically young: John Keats. Gottlieb begins with a fascinating account of how Keats was both utterly emblematic of British Romantic poetry and a great source of aesthetic discomfort to the other members of the movement. This lays the table for Gottlieb’s link between Keats and the two “New Materialists” most closely linked with Speculative Realism: Jane Bennett, and the recent convert Levi R. Bryant. Gottlieb defends the oft-criticized aestheticism of Keats’s verse by appeal to the positive philosophical arguments of Bennett, who asks us to de-emphasize critical thinking in favor of a heightened passionate and ethical engagement with the world. Later in the chapter, Gottlieb extensively deploys the writings of Bryant as a way of understanding Keat’s so-called Spring Odes, especially the crucial “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” that springboard for the New Criticism of Cleanth Brooks.

Though I have always had a preference for French poetry, Gottlieb’s book makes me want to spend months reading nothing but Wordsworth and Coleridge and Keats and the others. His use of Speculative Realism to shed light on British Romanticism has an equally strong counter-effect, since it also teaches the Speculative Realists to view these poets as colleagues and possibly cognitive rivals. Through his productive work of comparison and contrast, Gottlieb has made the Speculative Realist universe much vaster than before. We are fortunate to add this book to the series.

Graham Harman
Ankara
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This book argues that Speculative Realism and British Romantic poetry make a mutually informing pair. In a series of author-centered chapters, I explore how some of the major Romantic poets were interested in themes and questions – including the nature of reality, the status of the “natural” world, and the relationship between humans and the world as a whole – that also animate much Speculative Realist work. Moreover, since British Romanticism developed at a time (the decades around the turn of the nineteenth century) when Kantian philosophy was not yet normative, the Romantics’ perspectives on these issues show remarkable affinities with those of many Speculative Realists, who despite their differences are broadly united by their desire to move philosophical thought beyond the limits imposed by Kant and his inheritors.

Accordingly, this book tries to address two different, albeit overlapping, readerships simultaneously. From one angle, the chapters that follow are designed to introduce my colleagues in literary studies (my own academic discipline) to a purposefully wide array of Speculative Realist thinkers, their theories, and their methodologies. At the same time, I hope to show those trained in philosophy and theory, some of whom may already be familiar with Speculative Realism (SR), that British Romantic poetry is an important resource and even a source of new ideas for their work.¹

The inherently interdisciplinary nature of my enterprise, however, means that this book doesn’t do everything expected of a more strictly theoretical or more traditional literary study. To the extent that it provides an introductory survey of SR, it is neither comprehensive nor especially critical; I make no claims to exhaust the field of SR-related approaches, and I focus on exploring rather than critiquing the foundational methods and concepts of those I discuss.
(Readers looking for more exclusively theoretical introductions to SR already have a number of valuable texts to consult.) This book also differs in several ways from more traditional literary historical studies. For reasons of strategy as well as economy, I do not try to account for the existing bodies of criticism on the Romantic poets whose works I discuss; instead, I generally restrict the critical backgrounds to representative examples of twentieth-century approaches – especially those of New Criticism, deconstruction, and New Historicism – in order to establish the more-or-less traditional readings against which the differences of SR-inflected approaches can best be seen. Furthermore, unlike many literary historical studies, I do not track a developmental narrative (for example, “the rise of the novel”) that stretches between chapters; instead, in a kind of historical short circuit, I seek to locate and explore a series of conceptual continuities and mutual illuminations between SR and British Romantic poetry. The results may strike some as quixotic, but I hope readers from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds will find my efforts valuable.

What is Speculative Realism? It is the umbrella term for a loosely affiliated group of philosophers, theorists, and critics who are interested in developing models and methods for thinking about reality – that is, what really exists, regardless of whether we are there to think about it – while attempting to avoid the pitfalls of any naïve realism that believes humans enjoy unmediated access to this reality. The common enemy of SR is what Quentin Meillassoux has influentially termed “correlationism”: the belief – enshrined in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, 1787) – that we can only ever talk or think about reality in relation to our human subjectivity. The correlationist circle in which most philosophy and critical theory has operated for roughly the past 200 years holds that we cannot access reality itself, only the correlation between ourselves and the world. It confines us to the realm of epistemology, in other words, whereas practitioners of SR want to return to the realm of ontology, the traditional domain of philosophy as such. In the rest of this introduction, I will lay out some of the basics of SR before outlining what I take to be the main connections, historical as well as theoretical, between it and British Romantic poetry.

As a movement, “Speculative Realism” began as the name chosen for a one-day workshop held in April 2007 at Goldsmiths College, University of London. This event brought together four philosophers who were working, more-or-less independently,
on different theoretical frameworks for overcoming, bypassing, or formulating alternatives to correlationism. Graham Harman, the most outspoken and prolific of the participants, had already published several texts setting out what he calls “object-oriented philosophy”: an approach to describing reality, initially developed from Heidegger’s tool-analysis in *Being and Time* (1927), which focuses on objects as the primary components of mind-independent reality. Ray Brassier, who in fact originated the name “Speculative Realism,” had recently written a book defending nihilism as the proper endpoint of the Enlightenment, that is, as the only authentic perspective on a universe that cares nothing for humans, was perfectly operational for billions of years without us, and will presumably go on existing long after we and everything we know have disappeared. In a somewhat similar vein, Iain Hamilton Grant brought to the workshop his particular interest in recovering Friedrich Schelling’s vein of German idealism in order to re-establish the bases on which mind-independent reality can be thought. The fourth participant was Meillassoux (already mentioned), whose first book, *Après la Finitude*, was published in French in 2006 and (at the time of the Goldsmith’s workshop) was being translated by Brassier for English publication. *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* is notable both for defining correlationism as such, and for exploring it with rigorous logic in order to demonstrate that absolute knowledge of reality can be wrung from its self-involutions.

On a personal note, I first heard about SR in late 2009 from a graduate student at a conference – often a good sign that a new intellectual movement is genuinely exciting, innovative, and far from being a top-down affair. Indeed, one of the most interesting aspects of the genesis and relatively rapid diffusion of SR is that it is not a product of elite academics imposing their methodological will on others. The four original expositors of SR mostly hailed from relatively marginal institutions, at least from a North American perspective: the American University of Cairo, Middlesex University, the University of the West of England, and (the most prestigious) the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. In other words, the success experienced by SR has been very much of the grassroots, bottom-up variety. Likewise, while SR has become increasingly well-represented in traditional academic formats, much of its initial impetus, for better and occasionally for worse, has come from non-traditional forums: blog posts
and online discussion threads, start-up journals, and open-source publications. At the same time, SR has certainly benefitted from some associations with high-profile thinkers, several of whom will be discussed in the chapters that follow, including Alain Badiou (Meillassoux’s mentor), Bruno Latour (about whom Harman has written extensively), and Slavoj Žižek (an occasional although not fully sympathetic interlocutor).

Even after accounting for the material factors facilitating the relatively rapid uptake of SR by a variety of humanistic and other fields, we may still productively ask why a return to realism – albeit a modified, self-consciously speculative realism – should prove so attractive and relevant now. One answer lies in the perceived exhaustion of several key trends that informed modern philosophy and literary theory alike, especially the linguistic or semiotic turn. Whether one traces it back to Wittgenstein, Saussure, or Nietzsche, the linguistic turn meant that, for the mainstream of twentieth-century philosophy and theory, epistemology effectively replaced ontology. The roots of this substitution, however, go back at least to Kant’s so-called “Copernican revolution,” which set strict limits on what humans can and cannot productively think about. Kant was not the first modern thinker to bar intellectual access to “things in themselves” – that distinction may belong to Berkeley, whom Meillassoux has recently denominated the founder of the “era of Correlation.” Nevertheless, it wasn’t Berkeley’s radical “subjectalism” (Meillassoux’s term) but David Hume’s skepticism to which Kant was directly responding when he deduced his transcendental categories. Henceforth, according to Kant, reason must content itself with interrogating the limits of its own knowledge – limits strictly correlated with human access to what Meillassoux only half-jokingly calls “the great outdoors”: “the absolute outside of pre-critical thinkers.”

Kant’s insistence that we must restrict ourselves to epistemology suggests a second answer to the question, “Why Speculative Realism now?” If the critical approaches facilitated by Kant and the linguistic turn seem to have “run out of steam,” to use Latour’s phrase, this is in large part because many of the problems we face today – especially the increasingly likely prospect of worldwide ecological catastrophe due to anthropogenic global warming – have material dimensions that simply exceed the purview of the linguistic, critical, and epistemologically oriented approaches that have directed the humanities for some time now. Put another way,
the problem is that, as Levi Bryant points out, “Radical eman-
cipatory political theory has been correlationist and anti-realist
through and through.”11 Ontological claims have been critical
theory’s enemy of choice – with good reason, given their dubious
history of being used to naturalize racism, sexism, speciesism, and
other discourses of marginalization and oppression – and this has
led some critics to worry that SR threatens to undo the progress
made on these fronts. An extended examination of these concerns
is beyond this book’s scope, but it is worth noting that most SR
thinkers reject these accusations, and many (as we will see in sub-
sequent chapters) are clear that although they want philosophy to
return to its ontological roots, this need not be at the expense of
continued critical work in epistemological domains. Harman and
Timothy Morton, for example, have each put forward propos-
als for an “object-oriented literary criticism”; however, whereas
Harman calls for texts to be treated like ontological objects on
which one can perform thought experiments, my approach in
Romantic Realities is closer to Morton’s when he reads Percy
Shelley’s extraordinary A Defence of Poetry (1821) for the ways
it shares the object-oriented tenet that “causality is aesthetics” (a
concept I discuss in Chapter 1).12

In a simple but important sense, it is the Speculative Realists’ desire
to explore reality itself that links them most closely in theme and
tone with the British Romantics, who frequently display a similar
desire to “see into the life of things,” in William Wordsworth’s
famous phrase. Greg Ellermann has recently summed this up
nicely with his description of the “romantic coordinates” of SR;
especially in Meillassoux’s work, says Ellermann, SR “defines
itself in relation to the philosophical problems of greatest moment
for romanticism . . . the same thematics of mind and world that
delineate speculative realism’s post-phenomenological and post-
deconstructive horizons.”13 I take slight issue with Ellermann’s
characterization of British Romanticism as both “post-Humean”
and “post-Kantian,” however, because what makes the British
Romantics so interesting from a speculative perspective is their his-
torical positioning at a moment that is neither post-Humean, since
the force of Humean skepticism was very much alive and well for
the Romantics, nor post-Kantian, since the latter’s ideas were just
beginning to be widely disseminated in Britain in the 1790s.14 But
Ellermann is absolutely correct that the relation between SR and
Romanticism goes both ways: not only do the Romantics anticipate
some of SR’s methods and concerns, but SR is also programmatic-
cally Romantic in significant ways. To speak broadly, both move-
ments are shaped by their responses to contemporary conditions:
the British Romantics to the French Revolution and its aftermath –
“the master theme of the epoch in which we live,” as Percy Shelley
put it\textsuperscript{15} – and SR to the abovementioned limitations of critical
theory to respond to the ecological crises of the early twenty-first
century. In both cases, too, there is a manifesto-like quality to their
ey early work, especially as they set out their ideas against those of
their predecessors. Wordsworth’s preface to the second edition
of \textit{Lyrical Ballads} (1800), for example, uses a sonnet by Thomas
Gray to exemplify what is wrong with the poetry of the previous
generation. In similar fashion, Harman’s first book, \textit{Tool-being:
Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects} (2002), builds its case
for adapting and expanding Heidegger’s tool-analysis in large part
by critiquing previous interpretations of Heidegger; Brassier’s
\textit{Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction} (2007) also pro-
cceeds via critiques of previous thinkers who have misunderstood
or misrepresented what, for Brassier, is the basic lesson of the
Enlightenment: “Thinking has interests which do not coincide
with those of living.”\textsuperscript{16} Most strident of all may be Meillassoux’s
\textit{After Finitude}, which – in tones that would not be out of place in
the impassioned declarations of William Blake or Percy Shelley
– announces its intentions to “wak[e] us from our correlationist slumber, by enjoining us to reconcile thought and absolute.”\textsuperscript{17}

Above all, it is this yearning for knowledge of the absolute
that indicates the Romantic dynamic of the Speculative Realists.
For a long time in literary criticism this topic has been largely
closed for debate. After the canonizing efforts of influential critics
like Northrop Frye, M. H. Abrams, Earl Wasserman, and Harold
Bloom, who took the Romantic fascination with the absolute quite
seriously, there was an almost inevitable turn away from such ques-
tions; the introduction of so-called “French theory,” the historicist
identification of what Jerome J. McGann called “the Romantic
ideology,” and the feminist work of critics like Anne K. Mellor
and Elizabeth Fay together helped inaugurate a hermeneutics of
suspicion toward all Romantic claims to apprehend or articulate
anything that lies beyond language, consciousness, embodiment,
or the vagaries of history.\textsuperscript{18} Furthermore, as Marc Redfield has
recently shown, no twentieth-century theoretical movement was
more associated with Romanticism – and more skeptical of all
metaphysical claims – than deconstruction. On the one hand, then, my pairing of Romantic poets with SR thinkers throughout this book represents a break with deconstruction’s previous near-monopoly on Romantic criticism; far from being a purely or even largely rhetorical project, as it frequently appears in deconstructive commentaries, Romantic poetry viewed through the lens of SR reveals itself to be sincerely engaged with ontological questions of the first order. On the other hand, my method of reading literary and philosophical texts as mutually informing rather than as oppositional is itself indebted to deconstruction’s repeated destabilization of this supposed opposition. Consequently, although I regularly contrast deconstructive and SR-style readings in the following chapters, I don’t want to be misunderstood as advocating for literary critics and theorists to abandon deconstruction or critical theory more generally; likewise, although I sometimes use SR to develop readings of Romantic poetry that diverge significantly from the New Historical accounts that emerged in the last decades of the twentieth century, my obvious commitment to placing the Romantics’ ideas in their socio-political contexts is clearly indebted to historicisms both “old” and “new.” Ultimately, along the lines of my endorsement of Bryant’s position that critical theory and SR need not be oppositional, I strongly believe we need epistemological and ideological critiques as well as ontological descriptions to understand the work of any literary movement or moment, especially British Romanticism.

Of course, as Abrams warned some time ago, “Romanticism is no one thing” – and neither is SR. Indeed, as both its supporters and detractors point out, even the four original participants in the 2007 Goldsmith’s workshop agreed on little beyond their shared desire to move thought beyond the correlationist circle and back into some more sustained dialogue with “reality itself.” For Brassier, this shared objective is not enough to constitute a viable philosophical movement; for Harman and most of SR’s other participants, its variety of approaches is a sign of intellectual vibrancy. In a similar vein, critics and scholars have been arguing about the usefulness of the category “Romantic” to describe the variety of literary productions grouped within it since at least the publication of A.O. Lovejoy’s seminal 1924 article on the subject. In both cases, such discussions are most useful when they involve substantive debates over content or methodology, least useful when they devolve into nominalist hair-splitting (to say nothing of name-calling).
There is at least one more thematic area of significant overlap between Romanticism and SR that deserves to be remarked upon: their shared investment in taking things – whether “natural” or artificial – seriously. It is a classroom commonplace that the Romantic poets were uniquely interested in the powers of the human imagination. Even to the extent that this is true, however, such interest was frequently directed toward seeing how far the powers of human imagination could carry the mind out of itself – a phenomenon whose legitimacy and even normativity both neuroscience and contemporary philosophies of mind increasingly recognize. Yet it is the Romantic interest in attempting to transcend the mind altogether – thus effectively overcoming the subject/object dualism that SR also seeks to think beyond – that is most noteworthy for my purposes. As one among many exemplary passages, consider the last stanza of Book Eight of Wordsworth’s *Prelude* (1850 edition):

Thus from a very early age, O Friend!
My thoughts by slow gradations had been drawn
To human kind, and to the good and ill
Of human life: Nature had led me on;
And oft amid the “busy hum” I seemed
To travel independent of her help,
As if I had forgotten her; but no,
The world of human-kind outweighed not hers
In our habitual thoughts; the scale of love,
Though filling daily, still was light, compared
With that in which her mighty objects lay.

To be sure, Wordsworth’s personification of Nature would not sit well with any of SR’s proponents, especially Morton, who has decisively argued against the reification of “Nature.” As we will also see in Chapter 1, Wordsworth retains a degree of anthropocentrism in most of his poetry that SR-inflected approaches tend to abjure. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of affinity between most SR positions regarding the importance of including non-human actors when composing ontological accounts of the world, and Wordsworth’s sense that an investigation of nature’s “mighty objects” is the central precept of his life and poetics. Coming into contact with the natural world – literally, the great outdoors – is what initially moved him to care about other people, Wordsworth
tells us, and although as an adult he may now act “as if I had forgotten [Nature],” in fact there is no possibility of such a forgetting, because his love for the world’s objects is what makes possible all other kinds of affection. This passage in turn pairs well with Harman’s object-oriented battle cry near the start of Tool-Being – arguably still the most important single volume in the growing SR canon – that “philosophy must break loose from the textual and linguistic ghetto that it has been constructing for itself, and return to the drama of the things themselves.”27 It is this same drama, I argue throughout this book, that the Romantic poets were engaged in observing and pondering.

In my first chapter, I consider the ways in which Wordsworth’s poetry, especially from the early years of his career, anticipates many of the insights generated by the object-oriented philosophy (OOP) developed by Harman and adapted by Morton. Although Wordsworth stops short of being fully non-anthropocentric, the remarkable affinities between his early works and OOP’s theoretical commitments strongly bespeak their shared dedication to a non-correlationist vision of the world. Chapter 1 also sets out the philosophical milieu of late eighteenth-century Britain, which formed the Romantics’ intellectual inheritance, and the Kantian critical philosophy of which they were just becoming aware. My second chapter turns to Wordsworth’s collaborator on Lyrical Ballads, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who has long been regarded as the more rigorously philosophical of the two poets, and who prided himself on introducing German idealism to the British reading public. I compare Coleridge’s poetic vision first to the work of Grant, whose re-working of Schelling’s nature-philosophy is characterized by an ambivalent relationship to Kantianism, and then to the process ontology of Manuel DeLanda, whose Deleuzian commitment to “the virtual” as what facilitates “the real” finds surprising parallels in Coleridge’s most speculative poetic ventures. Chapter 3 pairs the most popular Romantic poet, Lord Byron, with two SR-associated theorists who also happen to have very high profiles: Bruno Latour and Alain Badiou. Here, I argue that Byron’s early and later epic poems enact versions of Latour’s Actor-Network-Theory and its recent updates, whereas several of Byron’s mid-career works illustrate the main concepts of Badiou’s evental philosophy. I then shift to the most radical, politically and perhaps philosophically as well, of the younger generation of Romantic poets in Chapter 4. Juxtaposing Percy Shelley’s verse first with
Brassier’s exacting nihilism and then with Meillassoux’s “speculative materialism,” I demonstrate how Shelley moves increasingly close to the latter’s positions, especially with regard to the radically contingent nature of reality. Finally, I return to “the drama of things themselves” in my fifth chapter, where I examine how the aesthetic investments of John Keats’s poetry take on new meanings when viewed through the prisms of Jane Bennett’s “vital materialism” and Bryant’s evolving ontological frameworks. Throughout, as mentioned above, I consistently place the Romantic poets’ ontological commitments and concerns in the contexts of their own intellectual milieus, as well as in dialogue with contemporary SR perspectives.

Before bringing this introduction to close, a few supplementary comments are in order. Readers may already have noted that the foregoing chapter summaries do not include William Blake, another Romantic poet usually considered canonical. Although it might be possible to argue that his mid-eighteenth-century upbringing prevented him from belonging to the same intellectual moment as the other poets in this book, I will instead plead my relative incapability to account for Blake’s unique oeuvre; his absence, in other words, is due to my scholarly limitations and should not be construed as an obstacle to future studies of his work from an SR perspective. Likewise, my focus on canonical, male Romantic poets should not be taken as much more than a mark of convenience; to a greater degree and for longer than their historical peers, they have benefitted from sustained critical and theoretical consideration, and so lend themselves most readily to the kind of work I do in this book. That being said, there is a plethora of other Romantics whose poetry and prose cry out for SR-inflected attention, including at a minimum the poetry of Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Robert Burns, John Clare, Felicia Hemans, Laetitia Elizabeth Landon, and Charlotte Smith; the prose of Thomas DeQuincey, Olaudah Equiano, William Hazlitt, and Charles Lamb; the novels of Jane Austen, Maria Edgeworth, Ann Radcliffe, Walter Scott, and Mary Shelley; and the philosophical treatises of Edmund Burke, William Godwin, and Mary Wollstonecraft. All of these authors have passages and pages that await illumination via SR (and vice versa). Similarly, my decisions regarding which SR thinkers to include should not be misconstrued as definitive; beyond the four participants in the original Goldsmith’s workshop in 2007, whose inclusion in a book on
SR is a foregone conclusion, the theorists whom I present reflect above all my own predilections and familiarities.\textsuperscript{28}

Will there someday be an anthology, \textit{The Speculative Realists and their Contemporaries}, to match the \textit{Longman Anthology of British Literature: The Romantics and their Contemporaries}? Only time will tell. In the meantime, SR can open up many exciting vistas for those of us in literary studies, especially Romanticism; likewise, Romanticism in particular and literary studies in general have much to contribute to the ongoing explorations that constitute SR. The following chapters, I hope, make productive contributions to both sides of this work.

**Notes**

1. I am aware that “philosophy” and “theory” are not necessarily or always the same thing; unless otherwise noted, however, I will generally use them interchangeably in this book, as my focus here and throughout will be on so-called Continental philosophy, which enjoys a great deal of overlap with “theory” or “critical theory.” See, e.g., David West, \textit{Continental Philosophy: An Introduction} (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 2010), esp. “Introduction: What is Continental Philosophy?,” 1–7.


3. One of the precedents for the type of study I have tried to write is Ira Livingston’s innovative *Arrow of Chaos: Romanticism and Postmodernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), which investigates convergences of such “postmodern” phenomena as information theory, fractal geometry, and chaos theory with Romantic-era poetry and prose.


6. See, e.g., the journals *Collapse* and *Speculations* and blog sites run by various SR proponents, including *Ecology without Nature* (Timothy Morton), *Larval Subjects* (Levi Bryant), *Object-Oriented Philosophy* (Graham Harman); relatively new publishers with strong
associations with SR include Open Humanities Press, Punctum Books, Urbanomic, and Zero Books.


17. Meillassoux, After Finitude, 128.


23. Although she doesn’t engage with SR, a good example of criticism that recognizes this is Mary Jacobus’s *Romantic Things: A Tree, a Rock, a Cloud* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).


28. There are a number of theorists working in areas that abut and sometimes overlap with the interests and concerns of SR, whose texts and ideas equally deserve attention: at a minimum, the New Materialism associated with Karen Barad, Rosi Braidotti, William Connolly, and Elizabeth Grosz; the alternative phenomenologies of Sara Ahmed and Tom Sparrow; the animal studies of Mel Chen and Carey Wolfe. Also beyond the scope of this book is the recent work of other writers explicitly influenced by SR, including, e.g., Ian Bogost, Jon Cogburn, Jeffrey J. Cohen, Claire Colebrook, Maurizio Ferraris, Markus Gabriel, Tristan Garcia, Adrian Johnston, and Eileen Joy.
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